

THE THREAT OF VITAL CHRISTIANITY

1 Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, (each one came with his family): 2Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; 3Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; 4Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. 5All the descendants of Jacob were seventy in number—now Joseph was already in Egypt. 6Joseph died, together with all his brothers and that whole generation. 7But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly and multiplied and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.

8Now a new king came to power in Egypt, one who did not know Joseph. 9He said to his people, “Look, the people of Israel have become more numerous and mightier than us! 10Come, we must deal wisely with them or else they will continue to multiply and, if a war breaks out, they will align themselves with our enemies, fight against us, and leave the country.” 11Therefore the Egyptians appointed taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor—they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. 12But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread throughout the land. So the Egyptians came to dread the children of Israel. 13The Egyptians subjected the children of Israel to rigorous labor; 14they made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of field work. In all their hard labor the Egyptians ruthlessly exploited them.

15The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other was named Puah. 16He said to them, “When you are helping the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if they deliver a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” 17But the midwives feared God, so they did not do what the king of Egypt commanded them; they let the boys live. 18Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?” 19The midwives answered Pharaoh, “The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; they are robust and deliver their babies before the midwife arrives. 20God was good to the midwives, and the people of Israel continued to multiply and became even more numerous. 21Because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. 22Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you must throw into the River, but you must let every girl live.”
(Ex. 1:1-22)

A note on the Scripture text that accompanies each individual message: The *American Standard Version* and the *New International Version*, along with the original Greek and Hebrew, have been used in an effort to achieve the greatest degree of accuracy and clarity. Where words or phrases have been added to the original text in an effort to better express its meaning, those words or phrases have usually been indicated by means of [brackets].

Introduction

One afternoon several police cars were observed patrolling your neighborhood. At 6 p.m. that evening two police cruisers with lights flashing pulled over to the curb, the officers got out and went to the front door of one of the houses in your neighborhood. The officers had their guns drawn, they were accompanied by police

dogs. The suspect was removed from his home, he was searched, he was then handcuffed and placed in the back seat of one of the police cruisers, and off they went into the night.

Who did the police apprehend? They apprehended **you!**

Why? Because you exhibited illegal and threatening expressions of vital Christianity. After a thorough search of your home the evidence was found: a Bible, one that showed signs of frequent use! You would have your day in court.

The charges were read at your trial. You were seen in the company of other suspicious characters entering a church for the purpose of worshipping the LORD. You spoke the name of Jesus in a non-blasphemous manner in a public place; that is to say, you prayed before eating your lunch in a public restaurant.

The judge let you off easy this time: a \$10,000 fine and a warning to cease from all further public expressions of vital Christianity.

To prevent the further outbreak of such incidents, the Ministry of Defense and Public Safety decided to take the following preventive measures: 1) Step up the present social campaign, by encouraging all loyal citizens to mock and ridicule any public expression of vital Christianity that they may happen to witness, and encouraging them to exhibit a self-righteous and indignant attitude against any form of Christian conviction; 2) Step up the publicity campaign, by taking every opportunity to slanderously misrepresent Christian history and teaching in the media, by labeling the proponents of Christianity as being close-minded, out-dated, superstitious, puritanical bigots, and by looking into further legal restraints to curb the public expression of Christianity before it gets totally out of hand.

Vital Christianity is a threat to the world; and the world will react by seeking to suppress it or even extinguish it. It was when the king of Egypt felt threatened by the presence of Israel—the vital, growing, thriving presence of Israel—that he began to initiate a policy of opposition against them.

What was true of Old Testament Israel physically, is also true spiritually of Christianity: vital Christianity is a threat to the world (a threat to its peace of mind and a threat to its humanistic program); and we can expect the world to react by seeking to suppress and even extinguish such Christianity.

Because the world is threatened by the vitality of our Christian faith, we can expect it to react by taking measures against us.

I. Expect Opposition to Your Living Faith, Especially When the “Christian Connection” is Gone

In the opening verses of Exodus we are told that Joseph died (vs. 6), that representative of Israel whom the LORD raised up to a most high and prominent position in Egypt, second in command over all of Egypt, note Genesis 41:39-41,

Pharaoh said to Joseph, ... ⁴⁰You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you. ⁴¹So Pharaoh said to Joseph, I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt. (Gen. 41:39-41)

A few verses later we read that a new king came to power in Egypt, one who did not know Joseph. (vs. 8.) “A new king” signifies one who follows different principles and policies from those of his predecessors (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentaries on the Old Testament, The Pentateuch*, Vol. 1, p.419.) The statement, “he did not know Joseph,” means that he did not acknowledge Joseph’s contributions to Egypt (Keil and Delitzsch, pp.419-420.) Note: At the time of Joseph, it appears that Egypt was ruled by the Hyksos, (a Semitic race of conquerors akin to the Hebrews.) Under the Hyksos, the Hebrews were favored; but eventually the Hyksos were driven out and the Egyptian rulers once again assumed the throne (*Halley’s Bible Handbook*, p.111.)

This new king views Israel as a foreign element and a threat to the security of Egypt. Israel had become a very large population in the midst of Egypt, and there was the fear that they would ally themselves with an invading enemy and depart from the land (vs. 9-10.) Because he views Israel as a foreign element—a people not assimilated into the Egyptian culture, one holding onto a unique religion and identity—and a threat, this new king institutes official measures against Israel.

As we consider the circumstances described in the opening chapter of Exodus, the first lesson we can derive is this: You may expect opposition to your living Christian faith—especially when the “Christian Connection” is gone. By way of example, consider the religious climate that prevailed in the United States since the time of its founding and at least a remnant of which was still respected up through the 1950’s.

James Madison, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States Constitution, wrote:

We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all of our political institutions upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God. (D.T Moore; *Five Lies of the Century*, p.28)

All students entering the American system of schools from 1690 to very near 1900 began learning to read and write by using *The New England Primer*. The *Primer* taught children the alphabet and how to form and connect syllables into words. Most interesting are the exercises presented to help children apply what they had learned. In the *Primer* each letter of the alphabet introduced a sentence for the child to read, and each of these sentences was a verse of Scripture. For example, C: Come to Christ, all you who labor and have heavy burdens, and He will give you rest. E: Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. *The New England Primer* was probably the most important textbook in the American school system for more than 200 years.

In 1840 the French observer of American society, Alexis de Tocqueville, wrote:

Christianity has retained a strong hold on the public mind in America; its sway is ... *that* of a religion which is believed without discussion. ... In the United States, Christianity itself is an established and irresistible fact, ... (Barna & McKay; *Vital Signs*, pp.84-85)

Nearly 120 years after the birth of the nation, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the fact that America was a Christian nation. In the case of *Holy Trinity v. United States* (1892) the unanimous decision of the court stated: "Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teaching of The Redeemer of mankind. ... and in this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian... this is a Christian nation." Even as late as 1931, the Court continued to affirm America as a Christian nation. In the *U.S. v. Macintosh*, the Court ruled, "We are a Christian people, ... acknowledging with reverence the duty of obedience to the will of God."

Now consider the present anti-Christian climate that has descended upon the nation. In 1947 the U.S. Supreme Court made a 180-degree turn in the case of *Everson v. Board of Education*. Without citing a single precedent, and ignoring 175 years of historically consistent rulings, the Court claimed, "The wall of separation between church and state must be kept high and impregnable. In 1962, the seeds of the *Everson* case burst into full bloom and became the controlling precedent for *Engle v. Vitale*—the case that removed prayer in public education by ruling voluntary and denominationally neutral prayer to be unconstitutional.

Tragically, *Engle v. Vitale* started a domino effect of court rulings that removed our religious heritage from the public arena, especially from education. In the 1963 decision of *Abington v. Schempp*, the Court removed Bible reading from public education. The Court's justification? If portions of the New Testament were read without explanation, they could be and have been psychologically harmful to a child. (*Five Lies of the Century*, p.26) By 1980 an incredibly twisted approach made it unconstitutional to post the Ten Commandments on school walls. According to *Stone v. Graham*, "If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all it will be to induce the school children to read, meditate

upon, perhaps venerate and obey the commandments; this is not a permissible objective” (D.T. Moore, *Five Lies of the Century*, pp. 19-28.)

In present day Western culture (the United States as well as Western Europe), the “religious” outlook of secularism has replaced that of biblical Christianity. The outlook of secularism consists of such features as:

- The Secular Mind: There is no longer a Christian mind. It is a commonplace *fact* that the mind of modern man has been secularized. ... it has been deprived of any orientation towards the supernatural. ... rejected is the view that sets all earthly issues within the context of the eternal, the view that relates all human problems—social, political, cultural—to the doctrinal foundations of the Christian Faith, the view that sees all things here below in terms of God’s supremacy and earth’s transitoriness, in terms of Heaven and Hell. (H. Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, pp.3-4), the author is describing secularism as it manifested itself in English society in the 1960’s.
- The Secular View of Freedom: It is a concept of freedom whose roots are deep in pagan naturalism. The Christian concept of freedom, rooted as it is in the notion of total self-surrender within the family of God, and accompanied as it is by a code of disciplines rigorous in their check upon self-indulgence or self-assertive individualism, is a virtually contradictory concept to that humanist notion of freedom as residing in an unfettered autonomous individualism ... We sense deeply the chasm between the church and the secular world when those secularists who speak idealistically of freedom reveal that they have in mind, not just the renunciation of dictatorships and other repressive agencies, but also the rejection of bonds and obligations such as those constituted by marriage, the family, and all social hierarchies. (H. Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, pp.12-13)
- The Secular View of Truth: Secularism asserts the opinionated self as the only judge of truth. Christianity imposes the given divine revelation as the final touchstone of truth. The marks of truth as Christianly conceived (in distinction from secularly conceived) are: that truth is supernaturally grounded, not developed within nature; that it is objective and not subjective; that it is a revelation and not a construction; that it is discovered by inquiry and not elected by majority vote; that it is authoritative and not a matter of personal choice (H. Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, p.107.)

When the secular outlook prevails in a society, it inevitably expresses its hostility and opposition to biblical Christianity.

II. Expect Opposition to Your Living Faith, Ranging from the Subtle to the Overt

The first policy instituted to contain and control the growing Hebrew nation was to subject it to taskmasters (vs. 11-14.) The Egyptians' purpose was to oppress them with forced labor; i.e., to make them serfs (Keil and Delitzsch, p.422.) The goal was not only to break down their physical strength, but also to convey (and reinforce) the notion that they were subservient aliens living under the dominant Egyptian culture—i.e.; to designate them as “second class citizens” without rights and whose very existence was for the benefit of the State.

A second intensified policy instituted against Israel was that of official government-ordered infanticide (vs. 15-21.) The mid-wives were privately instructed to kill the newborn Hebrew male infants. The goal was that the Hebrew females would eventually have to marry Egyptians and thus the Hebrew nation would lose its identity by becoming assimilated into the Egyptian race and culture.

The third policy instituted against Israel by the Egyptian government was one of all-out persecution (vs.22.) Now every Egyptian citizen was enlisted in the campaign to exterminate the future generation of Hebrew males, who would be potential leaders and propagators of the race. It now became a public responsibility to report the birth of a Hebrew male and a civic duty to kill such infants.

As we consider this opening chapter of Exodus, here is a second lesson to be learned: Expect opposition to your living faith, ranging from the subtle to the overt.

Some subtle means of attacking and confining the influence of vital Christianity are as follows:

1) *Regulate the Christian religion to the realm of the private and the personal.* As Harry Blamire writes, “... *one may* secularize a community, not by officially denying its religion, but by so departmentalizing it that it is deprived of any overt influence upon the community’s conscious purpose and activities. Christianity is emasculated of its intellectual relevance. It remains a vehicle of spirituality and moral guidance at the individual level perhaps; *but* at the communal level it is little more than an expression of sentimentalized togetherness” (*The Christian Mind*, p.16.) The following is an example of silencing the public influence of vital Christianity: In a criminal justice class, the usual debate over heredity versus environment as the cause of evil was interrupted by a young couple who felt the discussion should move forward to explore the solution. When they said the answer was having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, a fellow student exploded, “Why

don't you just shut up and sit down! Save that for your religion class! That's not what this course is all about." The class applauded and the couple sat down. (*POWER*, 6/21/92, p.6.)

2) *Promote the dogma of relativism and label as dangerous those people who claim to possess the absolute truth that has come via divine revelation.* Allan Bloom, speaking from his experience as a university professor, testifies, "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative. If this belief is put to the test, one can count on the students' reaction: they will be uncomprehending. That anyone should regard the proposition *that truth is relative* as not self-evident astonishes them ... These are things you don't think about. The student's backgrounds are as various as America can provide. ... They are unified only in their relativism and in their allegiance to equality. ... They have all been equipped with this framework early on ... The danger they have been taught to fear from absolutism is not error but intolerance. Relativism is necessary to openness; and this is the virtue, the only virtue, which all primary education for more than fifty years has dedicated itself to inculcating. Openness—is the great insight of our times. The true believer is the real danger... The students, of course, cannot defend their opinion. It is something with which they have been indoctrinated" (*The Closing of the American Mind*, pp.25-26.)

3) *Piously accuse religion (especially the Christian religion) of being the chief cause of all war and human misery perpetrated upon the world.* But in so doing, conveniently omit the religion of Secular Humanism, which by its "denomination" of Communism alone has accounted for an overwhelming number of deaths and human misery. "Our century is noted for its bloody wars. World War I saw nine million people killed in battle, an incredible record that was surpassed within a few decades by the 15 million battle deaths of World War II. ... both world wars cost 24 million battle deaths. But from 1918 to 1953, the Soviet government executed, slaughtered, starved, beat or tortured to death or otherwise killed some 39.5 million of its own people (estimates vary from between 20 million and 83 million). In China under Mao Tse-tung, the communist government eliminated, as an average figure between estimates, 45 million people. The number killed in just these two nations is about 84.5 million, or a lethality of 252 percent more than both world wars together" (R.J. Rummel, Prof. of Political Science at the University of Hawaii at Manoa; whose two-part article first appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* and is here quoted as it appeared in *The Brookings Register*, Brookings, SD, May 14, 1987)

Some of the more overt forms of attacking and confining the influence of Christianity in American culture can be seen in a number of the U.S. Supreme Court decisions referred to earlier, especially such decisions as:

- *Engle v. Vitale*, 1962; removing prayer from public education
- *Abington v. Schempp*, 1963; removing Bible reading from public education
- *Stone v. Graham*, 1980; ruling it unconstitutional to post the Ten Commandments on school walls.

III. Expect Opposition to Your Living Faith, But Look to Christ and Do Right

When the Hebrew midwives, (i.e., the chief midwives assigned to help deliver Hebrew babies,) were instructed by the king to kill the Hebrew male infants, they did not carry out his order. The reason given for their non-compliance was the fact that they feared God (vs. 17.) Their fear of God caused them to take a moral stand: to refuse to carry out an official command that was contrary to the law of God and would cause them to violate that divine and moral law.

Note that Scripture indicates God blessed the midwives because of their godly fear, *“because the midwives feared God, ... he provided households for them”* (vs. 21.) But Scripture does not condone their deceit. Thus, although they are an example of Christian conduct (in standing in opposition to ungodly demands), they are a less than perfect example (as seen by the fact that they resorted to deceit in an effort to conceal the true reason for their non-compliance with the king’s command.)

As we consider this opening chapter of Exodus, a third lesson we ought to learn is this: Expect opposition to your living Christian faith, but look to Christ for His grace and do what is right—i.e.; do not let the opposition stifle the “living” out of your living Christian faith.

We are expected by Christ and required by Christ to lead a consistent and public Christian life:

*...if you **confess with your mouth**, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* (Rom. 10:9)

Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. (Matt. 10:32-33)

A consistent and public Christian life consists in the refusal to comply with man-made laws that require disobedience to the law of God and the refusal to cease from proclaiming the truth of God:

Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸We gave you strict orders not to teach in this

name, he said. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood. ²⁹*Peter and the other apostles replied, We must obey God rather than men.* (Acts 5:27-29)

A consistent and public Christian life consists in standing up for what is right and godly, especially when it means standing in opposition to ungodly government demands. Note the reply of the three Hebrew youths who refused to acquiesce to King Nebuchadnezzar's demand that they bow down in worship to the image he had erected: "... *let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor will we worship the golden statue that you have erected*" (Dan. 3:18.)

Conclusion

It was when the king of Egypt felt threatened by the presence of Israel—the vital, growing, thriving presence of Israel—that he began to initiate a policy of opposition against them. What was true of Old Testament Israel physically, is also true spiritually of Christianity: vital Christianity is a threat to the world (a threat to its peace of mind and a threat to its humanistic program); and we can expect the world to react by seeking to suppress and even extinguish such Christianity.

Charles Colson's submits the following council to Christians: "The first law of survival for the church under pressure from secular authorities: Do not succumb to either their enticements or their threats. Be faithful to God alone" (*Kingdoms in Conflict*, p.202.)

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