

SPECIAL EDITION

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**Waymarks readers,
we urge you to pray
first. Then, read
and contemplate
this sensitive and
heartfelt plea to
the Church.**



God's Remnant Church and the Danger of Christian Nationalism – A Call for Unity Around Seventh-day Adventist Prophetic Identity

The year 2020 was one of the most difficult in living memory. It has not, however, been the most difficult year our Adventist Church or our country have ever faced. The pandemic of 1918 was more severe, and the social and political divisions during the American Civil War were more violent than today. Still, our Church faced those earlier crises with greater unity than in the current era. As a northern denomination committed to equality in Christ, we were united in opposition to slavery and in support for the Union cause in defeating it.

During the 1918 pandemic, our sanitariums and health ministries focused on combating the disease and helping our friends and neighbors survive the influenza onslaught. The pandemic did not generate a partisan political divide, and

a review of our Church papers reveals no perceived religious liberty challenges to the church or school closings that lasted for months.

By contrast, today Church membership appears to be nearly as divided as our society in our political and social views. We have never prescribed political orthodoxy for our Church members. Rather, we have invoked wise counsel from the Spirit of Prophecy to warn them from becoming deeply involved in partisan politics.

At the same time, our insistence on silence as to political matters for much of the 20th Century caused us to overlook the fact that our prophetic message has profound political implications. Our reluctance to address political topics as a Church

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has created a leadership vacuum on matters of public policy that relate to public morality. As a result, many of our members have formed political alliances on the right or the left. These political loyalties leave them ill-prepared to proclaim our prophetic message in its fullness.

Our prophetic message is spiritual and personal, but also should impact our actions and views as citizens of our country. When we promote the judgment hour message of the First Angel of Revelation 14, and condemn the confused teachings of a fallen Babylon of the Second Angel, all in light of the call to honor God's commands through the Third Angel, we simply cannot endorse the partisan politics of either the secular left or the religious right.

Revelation 17-18 depicts an immoral whore and a powerful beast who combine to enforce false worship on the inhabitants of the earth. They are immoral powers, combining commercial avarice with sexual excess, itself also a symbol of the promiscuous mixing of church and state. Civil authorities consort with religious leaders, promising them a blasphemous union of civil and spiritual authority to further their interests in worldly power.

This unnatural union of church and state culminates in the enforced false worship of Revelation 13 and 14—where a modern image is made to the beast of medieval Christendom, and religious and civil tyranny is erected on the ruins of American republican democracy. The false religion of the beast and its image is undoubtedly Christian in form, though of course not in character. As Jesus warned, "many will come in my name and deceive many," Matthew 24:5.

These final events lie yet in the future, and just how far

or near we know not. But, we have been seeing clear and troubling trends toward these final, rapid events. As students of history, and as Adventist Church religious liberty leaders, we are especially troubled by the fact that most local church members are cognizant of the dangers and problems of the secular left, but many appear blinded to the problems of Christian nationalism found on the political right. They wrongly imagine that the left poses the greater risk of fulfilling prophecy. Thus, too many have aligned themselves with the religious right wing of American politics, oblivious that the peril of Christian nationalism ultimately poses a greater danger to our civil and religious liberties.

The secular far left and its values are clearly antithetical to biblical Christianity. Drawing on the materialist and humanist philosophies of the French Revolution, the far left promotes a materialist outlook that denies a divine Creator, promotes an evolutionary model of humanity, devalues gender differences and sexual roles as taught in both the Bible and nature, and places a low value on unborn life. The far left seeks to spread these "values" through the media and most public and secular college and university systems. There, an environment of "wokeness," a fixation on micro-aggressions, and an unforgiving cancel culture often intimidates and threatens those who think differently.

Violence against people or property, rioting and theft in the streets, and calls to abolish the police represent a spirit of lawlessness that the Bible warns against. Ironically, of course, such rhetoric and action are not so much likely to result in an outbreak of anarchy, as they are to provide a justification for a right-wing, authoritarian backlash

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and clampdown. (Of course, peaceful protests, as we have seen in the last year — calling for equality, fair treatment under the law, and an end to police brutality — are constitutionally protected, and in the best of the American protestant tradition.)

Indeed, most of our members, along with most evangelical Christians in America, see the risks and problems associated with this extreme leftist ideology. But, our prophetic message has clearly identified the final and greatest deception as coming from just such a traditionalist, populist, authoritarian backlash — a combination of immoral civil power and national pride, combined with false Christian religious teaching. This prophetic understanding implicates the danger of the religious right grasping for political power and dominance in the name of Christianity. The hostility to biblical faith shown by some on the left does not warrant

ignoring and even embracing the religious right's pursuit of political power and Christian nationalism.

What has brought us to this puzzling and disturbing moment? We think it is in part the well-intentioned, but ultimately misguided, attempt to keep the Church and its leadership from engaging with so-called "political issues." Ellen White advised us to stay out of party politics, but she also urged leaders and members to engage with issues of moral weight that implicate the teaching of the Three Angels' messages and basic human rights.

Ellen White contended that members, when they enter the church, need to have their political views "cleansed" by the gospel from support for slavery and racism (1T 358.1). She counseled members to vote to support "temperance and virtue," both for issues as well as candidates (GW, 387-388). She urged members to vote, even on the Sabbath day if necessary, to keep immoral and intemperate men out of political office (WV, 203.5). She warned us of a three-fold union that would trample upon the conscience of mankind (GC, 588). She especially believed we should oppose any candidate who promised to threaten religious liberty, lest we share in the guilt of the repression of religious freedom (CE, 475).

In short, Ellen White understood that there were "political" questions the Bible and Christian morality did not directly address of which we should steer clear. But, on moral questions, even when they were in the political sphere, we must and should not only vote, but also express our convictions by pen, and voice, and vote (TE, 253.5). In these instances of basic morality and prophetic significance, action and ad-

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vocacy were called for, both in the private as well as political spheres.

Our pioneers understood this to be true, and frequently called our nation to task in the pages of its publications for national sins like slavery, racism, intemperance, and support of alcohol and gambling, even though these things were divisive political questions of the day. Church leaders and authors charged the American government of support for colonial promotion of economic exploitation and western military and political interests at the expense of non-Protestant, non-white, and foreign peoples. They viewed these as the kind of abuses that were prophetically outlined in Revelation 13, where the lamblike beast spoke as a dragon and undermined the principles of Protestantism (religious freedom) and republicanism (a democratic rule of equality under the law).

After Ellen White died, however, church leaders became influenced by the American fundamentalist movement that shied away from social issues, and promoted an American patriotic, Christian-nation exceptionalism. No longer was our prophetic message about the social and political sins of the day. Rather, it looked to the past, to Heaven, and to a future in which Sunday laws were predicted to be an issue.

For much of the 20th Century, the Church kept publicly quiet about issues of race and civil rights, environmental degradation, as well as issues of abortion, pornography, gender, sexuality, and marriage. We taught on some of these things internally, but we lacked a public witness in matters of public and civil morals. It is true, in doing so we avoided the excesses of politicization of some of our evangelical friends, who became obsessed with a very narrow set

of moral issues. This narrow moral focus caused them (encouraged through clever strategic maneuvering by political consultants) to become wedded to the party of the right. But, Adventist neutrality came at the cost of having no real public witness, unlike our pioneers, on many moral matters.

Over time, the evangelical right became increasingly frustrated that their political commitments had failed to produce results. It should come as no surprise, then, that the religious right eagerly signed on to support a deeply morally-flawed presidential

candidate who promised to fulfill their political desires — for a seat at the power table for federal judges who would reverse *Roe v. Wade* and stop the expansion of LGBTQ rights, and for policies that would give Christianity preferential treatment in our national arena.

For Adventists, there were warning signs suggesting the trade-off was fraught with prophetic danger. For example, our religious liberty ministry has always defended the rights of religious minorities, at least in part because we are conscious that the religion of the beast targets a religious minority for persecution. Yet, many persisted in supporting the targeting of a religious minority, embracing promises to exclude all Muslims from the country; to expel those already here; and to target not only alleged Arab terrorists, but also their wives and children, for assassination. These promises of gross violations of constitutional human and religious rights were accompanied with promises for the political influence of Evangelical Christianity. This duality is familiar. It is the speaking of the dragon in the former and a lamblike veneer in the latter.

Many, including some Adventists, who supported these policies have embraced this spirit of Christian Nationalism — a blending of God and country, church and state, faith and patriotism, that is antithetical to the principles of our nation, but fully consistent with the warnings of our prophetic heritage. Indeed, it was the Christian nationalist policy of the recent administration that many found so appealing. Surprisingly, these red flags generally did not overly concern many conservative Adventists. They appeared to tolerate such rhetoric for the higher goal of saving the country from left-wing excesses. Our political passions appear to have blind-

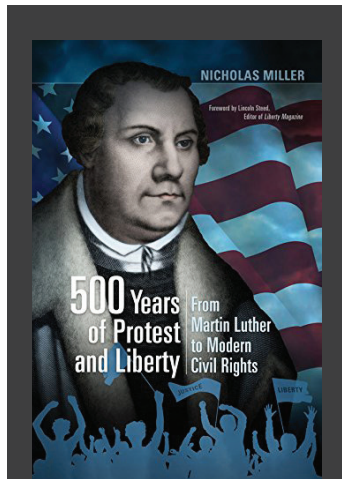
ed some among us to the dangerous and dramatic rise of the counterfeit trinity symbolized by the dragon, beast, and false prophet. We have understood these symbols to represent the unity of a resurgent medieval authoritarian church, popular American Protestantism, and spiritualism.

Indeed, Pentecostal strains of spiritualism in the Religious Right have emerged with peculiar vigor recently. False prophets invoked the Cyrus metaphor with respect to the previous president, and many ministers called upon the authority of the Spirit to sustain allegations of election fraud to overthrow the election results. They did this even though no federal judges, including many appointed by President Trump, found meaningful evidence of such in 61 court decisions.

The forces of Christian nationalism received a setback at the last election, but the underlying spirit of the last term, the blending of nationalism and Christianity into a form of political idolatry, has not. It is still with us, and will re-emerge more powerfully again in the future. We do not perceive the recent election to mark a fundamental shift in the pathway of American politics. Rather, we are presented a temporary reprieve from the prophesied triumph of forces of religious nationalism, bigotry, and eventually persecution in the United States.

This reprieve carries its own challenges in safeguarding our institutions from a left-wing agenda of sexual and gender ideologies, which represent a different kind of idolatry. It is one that tends to keep open casinos, liquor stores, and strip clubs, but close churches during our pandemic. However, we regard these challenges as manageable given a divided government and a conser-

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vative Supreme Court.

We cannot afford to waste this pause in our national political discourse in regards to the rise of Christian Nationalism. We must use this time to educate ourselves about the serious prophetic nature of the right-wing challenges we will continue to face in the months and years ahead. Prophecy predicts a future America with leadership willing to call on the darker angels of our natures, and will again stir up the fires of religious nationalism and xenophobic populism and complete the job that was started. Inspiration assures us of this outcome before the end.

So, what can be done? We invite you to take advantage of a limited time offer to receive the book, *500 Years of Protest and Liberty*. This offer is good for as long as our supply last,

free to you just by asking for it. The book draws not only on biblical materials, but on the predictions of acutely observant men like Plato, James Madison, George Washington, and Martin Luther King, Jr., who all predicted the kind of dangers we are now experiencing.

The chapters detail the history of the dissenting Protestant roots of American constitutional democracy and freedom. They also look at the competing counterfeit version of Protestantism that has sought to coerce and compel belief and religious compliance. In illustrating these competing strands historically, the true nature of our current conflict is more easily seen and appreciated.

We hope you can use these materials, along with those found in Adventist classics like

The Great Controversy, to help re-focus our minds on the true nature of our current conflict.

Ellen White was clear that in some instances a true application of the gospel must result in the change of certain political principles and outlooks. Speaking about church members of her day who sympathized with slavery and racism, she wrote that these members "need a more thorough draft from the cleansing fountain of truth [of] their old political principles, which are not in harmony with the principles of the truth (1T. 358.1).

We pray that our words here and this book can help facilitate the cleansing that our Church and its members need from divisive and witness-destroying loyalty to political parties of all earthly and human ideologies.

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