

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

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A parish in the classical Anglican tradition

18 August 2015

FROM THE RECTOR

Christians need to learn to draw a line at apostasy

Christians of all persuasions should be deeply concerned about the increasing intolerance being displayed by federal, state and local governments to some of their most cherished beliefs. Even courts sworn to uphold the U.S. Constitution often seem set against the faith.

Intolerance is not merely confined to requiring Roman Catholic nuns to provide contraception services, including abortion, to their employees, or levying heavy fines on fundamentalist bakers who decline to make wedding cakes for single sex couples.

Veterans' Administration medical facilities, for example, have seen fit to ban the Bible and other Christian literature from their premises, while military chaplains have been ordered to refrain from mentioning Jesus Christ in their prayers.

Indeed, a retired Army general during a recent television interview denounced what he described as the federal government's fully-fledged attack on Christianity in the military.

It is hard to argue that this is not an apt description of what is going on when chaplains are routinely threatened with court martial for openly discussing their beliefs, and senior officers, including generals, are disciplined for talking about the role their faith plays in their lives.

Folks familiar with the Constitution – admittedly a rapidly declining number these days – doubtless wonder why this should be taking place, when among the very first freedoms guaranteed in the Bill of Rights is freedom of religion.

But the fact of the matter is that Christians – even in a society like America that was deliberately founded on Christian principles – tend to find themselves at odds with secular governments that acknowledge few limits to their power.

The reason is that secular governments generally brook no authority that exceeds their own – and that includes the authority of the Creator of Heaven and Earth and All That Therein Is.

This is why observant Jews have found themselves at odds with secular rulers ever since Moses and the children of Israel fled from Egypt to the Sinai Peninsula. It is the reason why Christians were persecuted by the Roman authorities.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, governmental antipathy to Christianity is by no means confined to America. Europe as a whole has been moving in a decidedly anti-Christian direction for three decades or more – as evidenced by its refusal to acknowledge the continent's Christian heritage in its constitution.

Even the traditionally *laissez faire* Brits are adopting an increasingly hard-nosed attitude to Christian conflicts of conscience with secular political policy.

By no means have all aggressively secular governments dealt with the irksome religion sensibilities of their subjects in the 'in your face' and brutal fashion adopted by the Romans.

Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar in the 6th Century BC, for instance, took a rather more low-key and sophisticated approach – a strategy that is outlined in the first Chapter of the Book of Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar presided over an empire that was far more advanced culturally, artistically and technologically than the vanquished Kingdom of Judah. And the Babylonians regarded the Jewish people as obstacles both to imperial civil order and to economic and social progress.

The Jews clung tenaciously to a primitive and intolerant religion that asserted that there was only one God and that they were His Chosen People. This God, moreover, held them to a ludicrously rigid moral code that made it difficult for them to live harmoniously with the notably more broad-minded and enlightened subjects of the Babylonian empire.

Nebuchadnezzar decided that the best way to solve the problem was to win the hearts and minds of Judah's brightest young people.

To accomplish this he instituted a precursor of the Rhodes scholarship program for promising young members of the Jewish elite. They were to be sent to the University of Babylon to undergo an intensive three-year course in Babylonian liberal arts and sciences.

These young men – who included Daniel and his friends Hananiah,

Mishael and Azariah – were to study the Babylonian culture: languages, literature and fine arts. In the scientific field there was to be a particular emphasis on astronomy, for which Babylon was famous.

All this was to be provided free: housing, education and clothes, together with the singular honour of supplies of food and wine from Nebuchadnezzar's own kitchen. Those who graduated with honours would be given the glittering prize of a senior post in the imperial civil service.

It was an offer few ambitious young people would be likely to refuse. And the Book of Daniel shows that Daniel and his companions took full advantage of the educational opportunities Nebuchadnezzar offered them. They became star students.

Daniel, however, seems to have been well aware that the purpose of the exercise was eradicate his Jewish faith by overwhelming it with Babylonian culture. Indeed, this was obvious from the moment of their arrival in Babylon.

The Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List as well as the guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or to the visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, ring the parish office on 410 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Hilarie, Jack, Donald, Evelyn, Cal, Finton, Edie, Cary, Judy, Julie, Phyllis, Steve, Wendy, Matthew, Adele, Starr, Helen, Emily, Marty, Don, Linda, Elizabeth, Cathy, William, Dan, Lindsey, Shelby, Rob, Dick, Melissa, Paula, Sandra, Diane, Hobie, Nathan, Francine, Susan, Holly, Hayley, John, Nancy

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Stephen, Melba, Scott, Charles, Vinnie, Doug, Rusty, Ian, Lisa, Fritz, Carey

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes

The first step in Nebuchadnezzar's campaign to erase their Jewish loyalties was the time-honoured device of giving the young men new Babylonian names. No doubt the excuse was that their Jewish names were too hard to pronounce. But the real goal was to make them think of themselves as Babylonian.

Daniel – whose name means 'My judge is God' – was given the Babylonian name 'Belteshazzar'. Hananiah was renamed 'Shadrach'; Mishael, 'Meshach'; and Azariah, 'Abednego'.

Daniel accepted all this – the free education, free housing, and his job as top Babylonian civil servant, even his new name – without demur. Indeed, it's quite clear that he threw himself enthusiastically into his new career.

From this perspective, Verse 8 of the First Chapter is somewhat jarring: 'But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank.' Instead, he asked to be fed only vegetables.

Many modern commentators attribute Daniel's refusal to accept food and drink from Nebuchadnezzar's kitchen to Jewish dietary laws. Actually, this is a far from satisfactory explanation. There's no reason to think he would have been denied kosher food. The king had been perfectly accommodating in everything else. What's more, there's absolutely no Jewish proscription against wine drinking.

The dietary laws explanation would be rather more credible had Daniel accepted the wine, but turned down all of the food from the king's table, including the vegetables.

It's telling that Daniel and his companions didn't reject the King's food by way of making a demonstration – like a sit-in at Babylon University. They did so by politely asking their Babylonian guardians

[continued] simply to serve them vegetables.

What Daniel and companions were doing was drawing a line beyond which they refused to cross. Defining a point beyond which they would not compromise with the Babylonians.

It's difficult to say why Daniel decided to draw the line at Nebuchadnezzar's gifts of food and wine. It was really a rather arbitrary choice. Perhaps he thought that taking it would somehow signify a pledge of unqualified loyalty – taking 'the king's salt' would be the old fashioned English expression.

In any event, Daniel's purpose in forgoing the king's food – something of trial for a young man with a healthy appetite – was to set himself apart in a significant way from the rest of the Babylonian courtiers. It was intended serve as a constant reminder of his faith.

It's important to remember that Daniel's efforts to maintain his faith did not stop at this external gesture. The Book of Daniel makes it clear that he and his companions maintained their spiritual purity through constant prayer and worship.

Daniel's example provides today's Christian with a blueprint for survival in an increasingly anti-Christian nation. It's vital to draw a line beyond which one will not cross.

It's hard to avoid some elements of compromise with the secular world – at school, in business, in personal relations, in politics. But it's important to define the point beyond which you will not go.

Folks who don't draw that line will soon find themselves on the slippery slope to total apostasy. **GPH**

FROM THE LADIES WHO LUNCH

The Ladies will lunch on 19 August

This month the Ladies Who Lunch will meet at Pappas on Wednesday, 19 August at noon. Pappas is located at 550 Cranbrook Road in Cockeyville. Why not join us for a convivial get-together over a delicious meal? Good food and good fellowship – what more could you want? Please ring Joyce Perlberg on 410.252.2680 to make your reservation; she will need a final count by the 17th.

FROM THE PARISH CHEFS

Silly Summer Suppers are in full swing

Each Wednesday at 6.30pm through September 9th the chefs of St Stephen's are serving the 2015 series of *Silly Summer Suppers*.

It's hard to think of a less appropriate name than 'Silly Summer Suppers' for these remarkable gastronomic events. The food is absolutely scrumptious – and there is plenty of it. Actually, the only thing silly about these suppers is the price – entrée, dessert and salad for just \$10. Soda costs a buck, and wine is \$3 per glass or \$5 for two.

If you are handy in the kitchen (or even if you are not) you are welcome to join our team of volunteer chefs.

St Stephen's Anglican Church

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Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Ven. Canon Guy P. Hawtin, *Rector*

The Ven. Michael Kerouac, *Vicar*

The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. John Novicki, *Associate Rectors*

The Rev. M. Wiley Hawks, *Priest · Adric, Magister Chori*

Mrs Happy Riley, *Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding Coordinator*

SUNDAY SERVICES

8 am: Said Eucharist

9.15 am: Choral Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

11 am: Choral Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)

6 pm: Choral Evensong (as announced: evensong.ststeve.com)

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6 pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5 pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Mondays, 6.30 pm: Bridge Club

Tuesdays, 7 am: Fellowship Breakfast (Nautilus Diner)

Wednesdays, 6.30 pm: Silly Summer Suppers

Thursdays, 10 am: Knitting Circle

Fridays, 10.30 am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

Wednesday, 19 August, 12 noon

The Ladies Who Lunch meet at Pappa's

Sunday, 6 September, 6 pm

Parish Hymn Raffle

Thursday, 17 September, 2 pm

Afternoon Tea

Saturday, 19 September, 6 pm

Parish Picnic and Auction

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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