

St Stephen's News

St Stephen's Anglican Church · Timonium, Maryland

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A parish in the classical Anglican tradition

October 25th 2016

FROM THE RECTOR

Church v State: How Daniel drew the line at apostasy

Governments from time immemorial have clashed with what today we know as Judeo-Christian teachings. Indeed, the struggle between the state and our forebears in faith long predate Jesus' crucifixion and the subsequent Roman persecution of his followers.

It, thus, is hardly surprising that ideologically secular governments both here and in Europe have thrown down the gauntlet to Christians of all denominations.

The age-old problem has very little to do with specific teachings about sin. Indeed, forgiveness and love for our men lie at the heart of the Christian message. The root of the antipathy of government elites to the faith is that Christianity teaches that our duties to God supersede our obligations to the state.

This understanding of mankind's relationship with God underpins American republican democracy. Indeed, the Founding Fathers believed it to be so important that they enshrined specifically protected their fellow citizens' freedom to profess and practice their faith (or lack of it) in the First Amendment.

Such tolerance on the part of governmental elites, however, is decidedly unusual. Even in ancient times politicians found it irksome to deal with Christian and pre-Christian sensibilities.

The Roman of the imperial period, who had supplanted worship of the Gods with the worship of the state in the person of the emperor – dealt with the problem in a typically “in your face” and brutal fashion.

Others, like Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar in the 6th Century BC, took a rather more subtle approach – a strategy that's outlined in the first Chapter of the Book of Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar ruled a sophisticated empire – far more advanced than the vanquished Kingdom of Judah. And he and his top civil servants regarded the Jewish people as obstacles both to imperial civil order and to economic and social progress.

For example, they 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 being a humane and formidably intelligent sort of chap, decided that the best way to solve the problem was to win the hearts and minds of the 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 people – who included Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah – were to study the Babylonian culture: languages, literature and fine art. And in the realm of science, there was to be a particular emphasis on astronomy, for which Babylon was justly famous. □

All this was to be provided free: housing, education and clothes, together with the singular honor of supplies of food and wine from Nebuchadnezzar's own kitchen. Those who graduated with honors would be given the glittering prize of a senior post in the imperial civil service – which meant it was an offer few ambitious young people would be likely to refuse.

The Book of Daniel shows that Daniel and his companions took full advantage of educational opportunities Nebuchadnezzar offered them. They became star students.

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

The first step in Nebuchadnezzar's campaign to erase their Jewish loyalties was the time-honored 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 "Beltshazzar. Hananiah was renamed Shadrach;

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, Edie, Bill, Alan, Terry, Helen, Jim, Adele, Linda, John, Judy, Neal, Aida, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Eunice, Tom, Robert, David, Jan, Susie, Sophia, Bobby, Lee, Pam, Cary, Courtney, Marie, Joanna, Finnie, Kim, Kendall, Gloria, June, John & David

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Stephen, Melba, Scott, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Ned, Cindy, Jacob, Casey & Beth

IN MEMORIAM:

THOSE WHO MOURN:

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; Lt Cdr Emma Hawkins, RN; MSGT Michael Holter, USAF, Cpt Fiodor Strikovski US Army

Mishael, Meshach; and Azariah, Abednego.

Daniel accepted all this – the free education, free clothes and free housing, as well as his job as an elite 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. Indeed, the Babylonian manner of preparing food was probably very similar to Jewish practices.

Besides, the king had been perfectly accommodating in everything else, so he would probably have had no objection to keeping kosher. 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 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 English expression.

Daniel's purpose in forgoing the king's food -- something of a 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 to serve as a constant reminder of his faith.

It's important to remember that Daniel's efforts to maintain his faith did 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 blue print 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 apostasy. GPH✘

FROM THE PARISH LIFE COMMITTEE

Worship + fellowship = coffee

Worship and fellowship are a tradition at St Stephen's where the call to worship is followed by the warmth of chatting and refreshments at Coffee Hour. Part of the value of the after service mingling is in its preparation by your fellow members who set out the goodies for all to share.

The preparation is simple, especially when the value is considered. The church provides coffee, juice, cheese, crackers, cookies and fruit, and the preparer simply plates them in the kitchen and sets them out on the table. Supplies, napkins etc are in the cabinet under the coffee urn.

For those who enjoy preparing something home cooked, feel free to bring that as well. Coffee Hour prepping is open to all gals or guys who wish to serve. Also, a coordinator is needed to help follow up on sign ups. To help with coffee hour, fill in your name for a date on the sign up sheet on the bulletin board by the side door or contact Priscilla or Dick Huffman, (301-646-4422)

St Stephen's Anglican Church

11856 Mays Chapel Road, Timonium, MD 21093
Office: 410 560 6776 · **Rectory:** 410 665 1278
Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Ven. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*
The Venerable Michael Kerouac, *Vicar*
The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. John Novicki and
The Rev. Robert Ludwig, *Associate Rectors*
The Rev. M Wiley Hawks, *Pastoral Care Chaplain*
Mrs Happy Riley, *Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding Coordinator*

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist

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

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

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

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club

Tuesday, 7am: Fellowship Breakfast (Nautilus Diner)

Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle

Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

Trafalgar Day Tea

Sunday, October 30th, 2.00-4.00 pm

(Admission forms in Office \$40.00)

Choral Evensong

6.00 pm, Sunday, November 6th

Parish Life Committee

Tuesday, November 8th, 7.00 pm

Charlotte's Recognition Tea

Sunday, November 13th, 2.00 pm

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