



LIFE·PAC®

History & Geography



Alpha Omega Publications®

HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY 1205

THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS GOVERNMENT

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HISTORY 1205

THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS GOVERNMENT

Each American is responsible to stand up for what is right, whether against a bad law or for a moral cause. Each individual counts. As Everett Hale said, "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. What I can do, I should do and, with the help of God, I will do!" Each Christian should also do the right thing when it comes to protecting freedoms which enable us to worship the Lord in the way we know is right.

OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. The objectives tell you what you should be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAC®.

When you have finished this LIFEPAC, you should be able to:

1. Explain some ways the government works for and against the Christian.
2. Explain the term "discrimination," and how different groups have been and are being affected by it.
3. Explain how Christian attitudes should be in American society.
4. Explain the workings and effects of public opinion polls.
5. Explain the power and influence of the media in regards to the truth.
6. Explain the considerations in getting involved in politics.
7. Explain propaganda and how it is used.

Survey the LIFEPAC. Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.

I. GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT WITH CHRISTIAN LIFE



**“The true test of character is not how much we know how to do,
but how we behave when we don’t know what to do.”**

-John Holt

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Review these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Explain some ways the government works for and against the Christian.
2. Explain the term “discrimination”, and how different groups have and are being affected by it.
3. Explain how Christian attitudes should be in American society.

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

American Civil Liberties Union Non-profit organization works to defend “freedom of expression...and equal protection...”

constitutional rights Freedoms and opportunities granted and given to the citizens of the United States

First Amendment Congress shall not make a law to establish a religion or prohibit free worship

invocation A prayer; usually given at the opening of a meeting or event

multi-cultural Having diverse human thinking, beliefs, and backgrounds within a society

neutral Belonging to neither side; uninvolved

overturned Reversed; changed the outcome

parochial Being backed by a church or parish; having to do with the church

ruling A decision handed down from the court

Protestant Reformation Movement in 1500s which resulted in “church-schools” and the education of the common man

secularize To make more humanistic and take away the religious aspect of something

Note: All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAAC appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.



THE CHRISTIAN AND AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

The authorities were adamant: there will be no nativity scene at the town hall this Christmas! Practically every year some town in America is involved with a holiday controversy such as this. Though some Christians argue that we are losing our biblical Christian roots, others feel that in all fairness we should respect a “**multi-cultural**” nation whose religions should all be represented. Who is right? We hear of our “**constitutional rights**” –what does that mean to the Christian?



The First Amendment to the Constitution tells of the government's involvement in religion—or lack thereof. It states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." The third section of Article VI of the original Constitution also provides that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." It sounds like Christians have freedom of religion, clear of any problems from the American government. What is "freedom of religion?"

Freedom of religion, as defined in the First Amendment, is two-fold. First, the government is forbidden to establish a religion, either directly or indirectly. People are referring to this fact when you hear them use the phrase "separation of church and state." Second, the government is forbidden to interfere with or regulate religion.

The government helps Christians in many ways. Obviously, there are important ways that the American government involves itself in the Christian's life. As you drive down the interstate highway, you know that the government is responsible for the creation and maintenance of the highway system in our country. As you finish your checkup with the dentist or doctor, you can know that the licensing approval for the professional to start his practice came from governmental authorities. The building code for your home, the mail that comes to your house, and even the amount of gas that goes into your family car are carefully guarded and regulated by the government. These are good and honorable ways that the government is involved in our everyday lives. Christians are thankful for the protection of the police and fire departments that are at the ready to assure our safety every hour of every day.

When does government involvement become a concern for Christians? We should be aware that, as Bible-believing Christians, honoring our God is sometimes viewed by others as being in conflict with the American way of life. One of the great issues of Christian beliefs and state involvement came in the mid-1990s in the situation surrounding Alabama Judge Roy Moore and his desire to continue posting a copy of the Ten Commandments in his Etowah County courtroom. A court case arose concerning his Ten Commandments plaques and his insistence in beginning the daily court proceedings with a religious **invocation**. The state supreme court agreed with Judge Roy Moore's beliefs that the display of the Ten Commandments reminds us of the Christian roots which were necessary in the creation of this nation. The high court's **ruling**, much to the surprise of many people, permitted Moore to continue posting the Ten Commandments and opening his court sessions with a prayer.

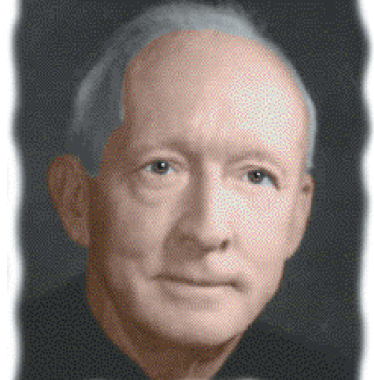
The Alabama Ten Commandments ruling was bitterly fought by the **American Civil Liberties Union** and the Alabama Freethought Association. Those groups had sued State Chief Justice Perry Hooper to use his authority to order a stop to Judge Moore's courtroom religious displays. The high court, however, did not agree, saying that even though the Chief Justice Hooper is indeed the administrative head of the court system, he does not have the specific authority to stop Judge Moore's courtroom from displaying the Ten Commandments and prayer which opens the court sessions. The ruling **overturned** a previous lower court ruling of 1997 that claimed that Judge Moore's practices were unconstitutional, and said that the Ten Commandments could remain in the courtroom only if other historical documents were added in order to "**secularize**" the display. As a nation whose roots are steeped in Christianity, a serious and severe question arises: does the state have any right to take away the Ten Commandments display, or any other biblical display, for that matter?

History shows us coordination of church and state. The *Protestant Reformation*, which occurred in the 1500s in northern Europe, encouraged fresh studies of the Bible and education for all persons rather than a chosen few nobles. Schools, called **parochial** schools, were established in the parishes to teach reading, writing, arithmetic,



and religion. They were taught by the ministers of the churches and were partially supported by state funding. The practice of state and church working together to support schools was the beginning of public education. This practice was carried over into colonial America. The children of the colonies were widely scattered, so the only way to reach all the children was to create public schools and to pass laws requiring children to attend. Massachusetts passed the first compulsory attendance law in 1852, other states soon followed with similar action, and support for the schools was achieved through taxation. Gradually, governments passed laws regulating the studies to be taught, the length of the school term, the kinds of schoolhouses to be built, and other related matters. Through the years, the state assumed greater degrees of control over education in America, to the extent of distorting some original purposes of democratic education.

The “establishment of religion” clause of the First Amendment came into question in 1947. The controversy concerned the use of public funds for pupil transportation in parochial schools. By a five-to-four vote, the Supreme Court ruled such aid improper, as Judge Hugo Black asserted, “No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion.”



Judge Hugo Black

Another Supreme Court ruling which further separated church and state occurred in 1962. It had long been customary in many public schools to offer morning prayers or to read passages from the Bible. This practice was exercised on every possible basis, ranging from wholly voluntary action by individual teachers to a uniform requirement prescribed by state authorities. For years the Supreme Court avoided a direct decision on the constitutionality of these practices, but in 1962 action was taken after atheist Madelyn Murray O’Hare required her son Bill to refuse to be involved in the morning school prayer. After a volatile court case, the justices invalidated a school prayer requirement and any requirement in public schools of Bible reading or recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, regrettably stating, “In the relationship between men and religion, the State is firmly committed to a



position of neutrality.” Although the “neutrality” rulings succeeded in banning public funds for parochial school use and banning prayer and Bible reading from public schools, Supreme Court rulings have generally remained **neutral**.

So what Christian freedoms are allowed in this republic? After all, we are not in a theocracy which would honor God as our leader. The controversy continues as the courts bow to “public **policy**” and the will of current **public opinion**. In effect, we have the freedom to worship in our

church assemblies, but there is a question as to how far we can take our right to worship “outside of the church.” There is constant attention paid to removing the name of God from our American currency. There have been people who would want to see “one nation under God” removed from the Pledge of Allegiance. Some other legislation which may open the door to freedoms in one area may be hurtful in another area. For example, legislation designed to curb obscenity and to protect the public from the harmful effects of lurid publications dealing with crime and bloodshed remains flexible in order to comply with “**contemporary** community standards.” Unfortunately, such leniency as this has provided open doors to liberalized secular school systems adopting text materials which encourage a progressive breakdown of social morality, leaving students uncertain of distinctions between right and wrong. The balance seems unsteady at times, and the Christian must guard his freedoms of worship to God.