

Fr. Perozich comments —

*I CAN'T BREATHE the breath of the Holy Spirit
GET YOUR KNEE OFF MY NECK, bishops and governors
FAITH LIVES MATTER
JESUS CHRIST MATTERS
THE HOLY EUCHARIST MATTERS
THE WORD OF GOD MATTERS
THE HOLY TRINITY MATTERS*

The Covid crisis set loose the oppression of the state on our Catholic faith. Our leaders, in the name of health, submitted. Now it is time to be free again before freedom to believe, to worship, to preach as Jesus taught us is silenced by the state which will become the new god in the U.S. and command us to worship as they demand of us to do.

Is “God and Caesar” still a realistic model?

John Grodelski - NCR

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/grondelski/is-god-and-caesar-still-a-realistic-model>

A man whose allegiances depend on the approval (or tolerance) of Caesar is a man who is a slave of the state.

As Catholics grapple with religious impact of civil restrictions imposed in the wake of the Coronavirus contagion, many are prone to invoke the paradigm of “God and Caesar” to delineate each side’s competence. When the Pharisees sought to trap Jesus (Matthew 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17, Luke 20:20-26) by asking whether it was lawful to pay Roman taxes -knowing that a “yes” would alienate him from many Jews while a “no” would give them grist to use against him with the Romans- Jesus was somewhat

evasive, replying we should “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” - without necessarily saying what belonged to whom.

Christians may reflexively treat the “God and Caesar” approach as their default way to understand questions of Church and state. They certainly have plenty of history to rely upon. Even theological liberals like John Courtney Murray found underlying inspiration in the model because, in defending the American model of Church/state “separation,” **his thought ultimately relies on an assumption implicit in the “God and Caesar” paradigm, i.e., that the reach of Caesar’s realm is inherently limited. The state is not omniscient. The state should not get involved in religious issues because its competence does not extend there.**

However, Catholic experience in the “culture wars,” particularly over the past two decades, as well as with some of the (over)reach of Coronavirus restrictions, suggests that not just the naïve optimism of Murray’s views but the “God and Caesar” model itself is under increasing stress.

Why? Because **we Catholics are assuming two distinct realms with two distinct lords: God’s and Caesar’s.** How they intersect and how they should interact may be subject to debate, but we treat both as distinct and real.

Our secular opponents increasingly don’t.

Even William O. Douglas once admitted that America is a nation “whose institutions presuppose a Supreme

Being.” Whether, in the light of his jurisprudence, he really believed it or just treated it as a throwaway line is, of course, part of the problem. Whether or not Douglas really believed that, however, most Americans did. And that is why, as the late Rev. Richard Neuhaus noted, the First Amendment is not schizophrenically about “free exercise of religion” butting up against a “strict wall of separation between Church and state” (and waiting for some federal judge to referee). No, **“no establishment of religion” is a tool to promote an end, the end of “free exercise of religion.”** Society does not necessarily have to be anti-religious or even pretend that “neutrality” means pretending religion does not exist.

But that is the problem.

Catholics think of “God and Caesar.” Secularists do not, because God is officially unknown and in practice deemed non-existent. What that means is that, if “God” is unknown and unknowable, then the only “real” player is Caesar ... and **Caesar is the one who determines what belongs to him and what belongs to this “unknown God.”**

Do you really think secular Caesar is going to share or voluntarily restrict his reach?

While John Courtney Murray opined about the “limited” state, whose reach was restricted, the fact is that since Murray wrote *We Hold These Truths* in 1960, the power of the state has been rather consistently on an expanding course. Let’s be honest: **since 1960, where has the power of the state receded?**

[We Catholics, too, have been complicit in the expansion of state power. While we occasionally pay lip service to “subsidiary,” **the most cursory survey over the past half-century of public policy positions of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (and the proportion of its budget deriving from government money) has promoted government expansion**].

“Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” The growth of Leviathan’s power over the past two centuries has steadily increased from two sources: the **expansion of government *and* a trend in American law, promoted by Supreme Court decisions, claiming that democracy requires society to be agnostic with regard to religion and religious values**. That mixed cocktail is a double whammy that is increasingly lethal to religious freedom.

Advocates of state overreach will not, of course, frame it in such clear terms. Commenting on Supreme Court oral arguments in a recent Church-State case (state regulation of employment in parochial schools), Linda Greenhouse bemoaned the supposed erosion of a consensus that “we’re all in this society together.” When I pointed out that **her vision of “together” meant religious citizens stripping off their faith identity as the price of admission to what Richard John Neuhaus called “the naked public square,”** a commentator rebuked me, opining that “churches ... really don’t get a public anything. What they get is guaranteed protection of their existence and privacy.” How generous

of him: that is an extremely attenuated notion of “free exercise.” Caesar will tell you how far “free exercise” goes, i.e., is free. Caesar will let us exist, as long as we stay in the sacristy, shut the blinds, and don’t make too much noise bell ringing. I don’t think so.

If the state must pretend that it does not know whether there is a god or not, then it can hardly be expected to reckon with that unknown god’s potential claims of allegiance over citizens. **Judicial agnosticism essentially cancels the “God and Caesar” paradigm by treating the god as a partner that Caesar neither knows, has to, or should deal with.** The upshot is that Caesar must distribute what is Caesar’s and what is God’s - and there is no appeal from his apportionment except back to Caesar.

Religion, stripped of any special status, shorn of its status as the inalienable *first right* enumerated in the *First Amendment*, **becomes simply just another human activity like gardening.** That’s how we arrive at the general test the U.S. federal courts use to determine whether or not a restriction on religious activity is unconstitutional: is it a “generally applicable” norm that does not single out any particular religion? If a “generally applicable” rule closes down churches alongside dine-in restaurants, gyms, and nursery centers and does not make discriminatory exceptions (e.g., Catholic churches must close but Episcopal churches don’t), then such a norm will pass legal muster.

It’s not a demanding test — as long as Caesar is not stupid enough to privilege one religious group — but it can

be wholly arbitrary. At first, seed sales in Michigan were “unessential.” This week they’re a permitted activity — not only can you now buy grass at the pot dispensary but also grass seeds at your garden center — and, as long as Caesar does not discriminate (grass seed at Lowe’s but not Yard n’ Garden), the rationale for his distinctions are relatively shielded from review. The wisdom of Caesar’s decisions is judged by Caesar (or at least Caesar’s judges). There is no escape from the immanent.

And that is what the French philosopher Jacques Maritain meant when he spoke of the “Minotaur of the Immanent.” If Caesar does not know whether anything can be transcendent, he will divide everything not between “what is Caesar’s” and “what is God’s” but between “the immanent public” and “the immanent private” — and since only the public can determine what the common good demands, **the boundaries of the “immanent private” are constantly under threat of shrinkage.**

Recovering “God and Caesar” will take a sea change in the secular worldview that has taken root in America (particularly its elite institutions), a transformation whose advocates will fight tooth and nail, claiming the recovery of God’s claims will be “undemocratic,” lead to “theocracy,” and foster “illiberalism.” Frustrated thespians will dress up in their “Handmaiden’s” costumes to add a splash of color.

But the truth is that **man’s liberty is never more threatened than by a society that hermetically seals itself in the immanent,** whether it does so explicitly like the communists (enforced atheism) or

implicitly like secularists (enforced secularism or laïcité as the price of participation in the “public square” of one’s own society). **A man whose allegiances beyond this world depend on the approval (or at least tolerance) of Caesar is a man who is a slave of the state.**

KEEP READING BELOW

June 2, 2020

America's New State-Run Church

By [Fay Voshell](#)

For what seems an eternity, one of the ongoing accusations leveled by secularists against Christians and the Church was that Christians kept their heads in the clouds. Believers have been told they have been too heavenly minded to be any earthly good, that they needed to be where the action really was, directing their energies to down-to-earth, pragmatic deeds.

So it is with some astonishment that the faithful see [Governor John Carney](#) of Delaware, along with other state governors such as California's Gavin Newsom, order church leaders and congregants to keep their nonessential

heads in the tech cloud. Carney's recommendation? "Do your best to practice your faith virtually."

No matter how virtuous or sentimental their motives, the almost complete capitulation of priests and pastors to banishment by government leaders like Carney has been astonishing. Few have meaningfully protested the exile of the Church into the cloud. In fact, nearly all churches *voluntarily* have closed their sanctuaries and ascended into cyberspace.

The nearly universal retreat into the cloud meant that the Church accepted social distancing more severe than the six feet enforced by grocery stores. It meant church leaders distanced themselves from their congregations altogether, consigning their flocks to a cyber-environment that is COVID-19 free but certainly not free from the virus of political correctness enforced the church of Big Tech minders.

Basically, **the Church acceded to a definition of itself as non-essential, thus relegating itself to the status of any other business or institution.** By beating a retreat into the cloud, the Church shrank itself into the tech matrix, subjecting itself to the arbitrary touch of a fingertip or click of a mouse, becoming just another one of the gods inhabiting the cloud above Mt. Tech Olympus.

But what is just as important as the ascension of the Church into the cloud is the fact that **state governments, now fortified by SCOTUS, will expect churches to continue to follow severe restrictions set up during and *after* the total**

shutdown. Churches will be expected to follow regulatory requirements for reopening that amount to the equivalent of a "fundamental transformation" of the churches.

Government leaders, now heartened by the swing decision of Chief Justice John Roberts, **will continue to commandeer the way church is done by altering the liturgy, the habits, and the ways and means of worship** as surely as if an altar devoted to Zeus were placed in the sanctuaries and congregants were forced to bow down and offer incense to the god.

[Delaware](#) is but one example of the establishment of the new state churches. As of May 18, Delaware's governor issued his state church initiatives, including the new liturgical practices conforming to COVID correctness:

- Attendance is limited to a maximum of 30% of occupancy.
- Social distancing of 6 feet or more is required (except for
- members of the same household).
- The length of the service can be no longer than one hour.
- Individuals age 13 and up are required to wear a cloth
- face covering.
- Services are limited to one day per week.
- Gathering times must be staggered to permit cleaning
- before the next service.

- Churches are asked to establish a system for staggering
- the arrival of worshippers.
- Older citizens are advised not to attend at all.

When have we seen similar draconian restrictions on the Church? It may help to review the Bolsheviks' responses to the Orthodox church that formed Russia's spiritual life from 988 A.D. on.

Robert Conquest, the author of [*Harvest of Sorrow*](#), relates that Lenin's letter of November, 1913 to Maxim Gorky stated the party position quite flatly:

Every religious idea, every idea of God, is unutterable vileness ... of the most dangerous kind, *contagion* of the most abominable kind. Millions of sins, filthy deeds, acts of violence and *physical contagions* ... are far less dangerous than the subtle, spiritual idea of God decked out in the smartest ideological costumes. Every defense or justification of God, even the most refined, the best intentioned, is a justification of reaction.

In other words, the Russian Orthodox Church itself was considered a pathogen within society. Churches were regarded as ideologically germ-ridden places to be sanitized by correct thinking.

Lenin went on to say it was **best to start the eradication of the church by giving "an impression**

of toleration with control, humiliation of the churches rather than with overt suppression. (Italics mine.)

In sum, **church activity was to be reduced to the performance of services alone.** Russians were to practice their faith by ritual only, much as governor Carney advises when he suggests Christians should learn to practice their faith "virtually."

The exile of the churches into virtual reality provides an opportunity for some self-examination.

Perhaps the COVID-19 crisis will encourage church leaders to think about how and what happens when sanctuaries are vacated and seven devils loosed by the State enter as the shutdown is somewhat lifted.

They might wish to reflect about what to do when the State wishes to cleanse the church of "diseased" doctrines — to think about what to do when the Church's beliefs are declared hate speech pathogens.

Just as importantly, leaders also might think about how the flock has been deprived of community and thus of corporate worship and corporate prayer. They may wish to meditate on the sacramental aspect of the community of the saints.

For many if not most churches, **the celebration of Holy Communion is when the body and blood of Christ are offered as essential spiritual food pastors and priests are required to dispense. But the shepherds of the flock almost universally have**

quit offering spiritual wine and bread, leaving their sheep to fend for themselves.

In short, within a space of weeks, Americans have seen the entirety of American Christendom shut down and the overnight ascension of what is essentially a secularist state church. The initially nascent state church has now been more firmly established by SCOTUS's decision to allow state control of churches for reasons of "health."

When any government even temporarily takes over the churches for any reason, **it has essentially shattered the autonomy of the Church, making it subservient to the State.** The Church under orders from the State is then **subject to forcible conformance to State dogma.**

The **state that dictates when and where and how and to whom the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered is the state that has taken over the church and substituted its own sacraments.** The **state that dictates** the how, when, and where of the **baptism** of children is the state that has created its own church. The **state that decides** when, where, and how many of the faithful can listen to the preaching of the Word or **how many can assemble to pray together is the state that also dictates what is to be preached and prayed.** The state that insists that worshipers wear and sing through face masks is the state that determines the way virtues of the state churches are signified. The state that ranks the Church of God to be an institution equal to bars, restaurants, and public schools is

the state that will disregard the unique status of the Church and its constitutional rights.

As the directives from the state begin to strangle the Church, the latter is faced with a choice it probably should have made at the beginning of the state takeover. **Pastors and priests must make the decision to open their churches to worship services and to continue the churches' ministries as they were before the coronavirus coup. They must remember what the Church is and obey God rather than the State.**

For if they do not, it's predictable that the almighty State will squeeze the churches harder, requiring total conformity to the State that certainly seems ready to hijack the Church's mission, to vitiate its standing in constitutional law, to appropriate its wealth, and to take over its institutions by force if necessary.

It's time for all believers, leaders and congregants alike, to remember the words of St. Ambrose: "Not only for every idle word must man give an account, but for every idle silence."

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