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When Government Replaces God and Family **by Christine Smith**

Freedom is the emancipation from the arbitrary rule of other men. — Mortimer Adler

It is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. It knows best what we need and what must be done. We must trust in its absolute power, knowledge, and presence in all areas of our lives. For this overseer is the source of justice, truth, wisdom, wrath, and mercy.

So it appears big government has become for the American people.

We used to think of “God, family, and country,” but the significance of the first two has been effectively diminished in this society where self-reliance is the exception rather than the rule. Most Americans would scoff at the assertion they have made the government into a god, but a look at their dependency on the federal government and loyalty to it prove otherwise.

Americans are a people whose subservience to their “leaders” results in nothing less than a form of worship. Standing ready to receive their adulation are scores of political “saviors” promising much while blatantly abusing the power of the office entrusted them. Nationalism has become like a religion whose followers swear by the state, even to the point of condemning fellow citizens as traitors if they resist, reject, or condemn the aims and actions of the government.

Government as god

Consider some properties shared by a number of religious faiths:

- A benevolent, often patriarchal, entity.
- Reverence not only for that benevolent force, but also for the symbols representing it.
- Willingness to sacrifice.
- Pledging a percentage of one’s income.
- Cultural tradition of organized worship and desire to help others.

Even a cursory examination of American society finds all of these aspects of religion common to the “civil religion” of the U.S. government.

From cradle to the grave, it is to the government that people now look to provide all the things a father should provide for his family or which they previously had prayed for God to provide. These include one's physical needs of housing, food, medical care, transportation, security, and safety, and a stipend ensuring financial security into retirement.

In our society, family and God have now been replaced by the all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present big government. Government is viewed as the source to protect you and yours from any invading terrorizing force, be it natural or man-made. Rather than looking to help one another as Americans once did, they look to government to ensure that none is hungry, none is without shelter, and none is without health care. Significantly fading is the reliance Americans once had on churches, charity, and family. People even look to government to provide a fundamental building block of one's moral character, values, and intellectual development by entrusting the education of children to it.

Big government is more than willing to play the part of societal benefactor. Where Americans once looked to their faith and family for true benevolence in times of need, they now look to the god of government, even for daily existence. It gladly steps in, reaping the benefits of undeserved power and absolute rule over the lives of millions.

Reverence, a profound respect, is maintained for government even when people are unhappy with what it does. Many believe one must never express disrespect for the government, its politicians (especially its president), or its sacrosanct symbols, such as the flag. Toward God, if one is a believer, such reverence comes naturally as we acknowledge our own fallibilities and shortcomings in understanding the mystery of life. A deep revulsion occurs when another desecrates the symbols and icons of our faith.

But to give such reverence to government, simply a group of fallible human beings, is to bestow a higher value on "them," resulting inevitably in the manipulation of one's deepest emotions. This explains the extreme uncontrollable reactions many have toward other citizens who express their displeasure with government policy through such public demonstrations as burning or otherwise desecrating the flag. To irrationally react with such extreme emotionalism over the desecration of a national symbol (behaving as if the nation itself were being attacked) is a sure sign of misplaced veneration.

Self-sacrifice and the surrendering of one's will, or permitting one's choices and behavior to be governed by a teaching believed to be divinely inspired, is a major decision. Some make it; others reject it. But all agree it's an enormous decision, since everything in one's life is predicated on it. But why have millions subordinated their own thoughts to the mindset and actions of this government with such fervor? "My country right or wrong" is so pervasive. Regardless of the revelations that the government funds terrorists and evil dictators, uses torture, engages in regime changes worldwide, is responsible for the deaths and suffering of tens of thousands of innocents, and all manner of other despicable and horrendous acts of imperialism, the people's greatest

anger is often expressed against those who criticize and identify the government's perpetrations of evil and immorality.

Liberty and nationalism

To speak against the president and his administration is considered abominable; worse yet, to speak against the troops terrorizing and killing people worldwide is to commit the ultimate sin, with accusations of treason not far behind. The personal will of such Americans has become adulterated by nationalistic pride. They think not with their own minds, nor feel with their own hearts, but mouth the will of the government that praises such red-blooded patriotism.

People fork over personal information, grant access to personal communications, and submit to the tracking of their travel and finances. Willing to sacrifice liberty for security, they even submit to the ultimate sacrifice of their own blood in an unquestioning collective willingness to die for any cause the government equates with defense of country. Of course, government stands ready to bestow its title of hero on those who needlessly die as pawns in the game of empire building.

And no greater levy is collected from the American people than that collected by the government. In many religious denominations, a tithe (10 percent) is suggested. The act of giving a percentage of one's income is meant to further works we believe in. We tithe because we want to make sure needs are met and good is done. Compare that to the approximately 50 percent of the average U.S. citizen's income given to the government in taxes (federal, state, local, and Social Security taxes, Medicaid, property taxes, fuel taxes, licensing, et cetera).

Nationalism gives one a feeling of belonging; it builds a fervor for a mission and confidence in even the most fearful and weak. Being part of the group is comforting, and merging in with patriotic crowds at ball games, fraternal groups, parades, and other gatherings brings a source of pride, confidence, and strength. Nationalism provides a belief system which all can fervently embrace. Reciting the Pledge, singing songs, and waving the flag with others build ritualistic camaraderie. It smothers any sense of personal responsibility, even for such acts as the killing of innocents in foreign lands. National justification now substitutes for moral justification. It is a perfect example of the danger of collectivism. No crisis, regardless of how severe, justifies supporting one's government if it is committing immoral and unethical acts.

Patriotism is when love of your own people comes first; nationalism, when hate for people other than your own comes first. — Charles de Gaulle

Such nationalistic "us versus them" thinking is sometimes evidenced in the pervasive animosity expressed toward immigrants. Nationalistic distrust, suspicion, and fear of those who are different sometimes translate into organized anger and violence here and abroad.

Freedom and dependency

Men do indeed make gods in their own image, with the self-serving nature of today's politicians a direct reflection of the self-serving nature of a weak people. They form a perverted unconstitutional alliance with government, both as individuals and through their businesses, because they permit selfishness to dictate actions rather than ethics. They look to government to forcibly take from some to give to others in need, distancing themselves yet further from true charity and true religion.

Government was created by us, to be subservient to us. It doesn't grant us rights or bestow blessings. Nor should it provide necessities of daily life. People's desire for such a benevolent entity is natural, and I would say it is insightful as they recognize a void in their lives; but making government the entity to which they attribute such virtue is just plain wrong and a most dangerously misplaced trust. Government is not humanizing; rather it is a bureaucratic power-grabbing establishment that is the antithesis of liberty, justice, freedom, compassion, and happiness.

Commitment to reliance on faith and family is being replaced by allegiance, reverence, and submission to the state as Americans become more and more dependent on government for their very existence. Nationalism, which oftentimes involves glorification of the state, has nothing to do with freedom, but instead is a form of slavery. As a people, Americans are allowing government to become the supreme authority over their faith, their conscience, their very lives.

Man was born to live in liberty, without restraint or regulation. We thrive when we work for what we achieve rather than having it given to us. The foundations which made this nation strong are being destroyed as families lose economic independence, send their children to failing government schools, and pay taxes for programs that destroy personal autonomy and wreck havoc worldwide. And as people suffer, they mistakenly look to government to solve their problems. Evil is an insidious process. While a society would reject and resist the worshiping of a human being and his administration if it were thrust upon them all at once, they succumb to it and do not question it if it is gradually introduced. People are now willingly compromising the principles this country was founded upon in exchange for security and being saved from whatever crisis they fear. That gradual abridgment of freedoms can devolve into an extreme darkness of tyranny over a society, before people realize what has happened.

No government should be the source to protect and maintain a person throughout his life, but that's what is happening in the United States. Government has become a false god, an idol with feet of clay, and as such is destined to fail — to crumble — and along with it the liberty and economy of the people, who in their weakness and fear mistakenly venerated it.

The important thing for libertarians to remember is that people can choose again. Our job is simply to point the way to the truth, and encourage others to join us. As crisis after crisis torments the American people, each gives ample opportunity to reiterate what we have been

sharing all along: do not look to your oppressor, the government, for solutions to the very problems it created. Right now, more than ever before, people are discovering the truth of libertarian ideas. It will be those who refuse to worship the graven images of government who will remain ready to restore or rebuild this nation upon principles of freedom, thereby returning us to the peace, prosperity, and harmony Americans once enjoyed and were respected for.

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This article was originally published in the December 2009 edition of *Freedom Dialy*.