

CHRIST

— VERSUS —

CAESAR

TWO MASTERS, ONE CHOICE

## What others are saying about *Christ versus Caesar*

Should the gospel inform our political views? *Christ versus Caesar* argues in the affirmative—and Connor Boyack makes a persuasive case that following Jesus’s teachings means our actions (and therefore the government’s) should be based on persuasion and voluntary actions, not mandates and prohibitions.

—Mark Skousen, Presidential Fellow, Chapman University

Intended to resonate not only with Latter-day Saints but also with Christians of any denomination, this book is a beautifully-written, scripturally-grounded, rigorous, and compelling case for why following Christ (and therefore the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount) requires rejecting Caesar (and therefore the state). In short, *Christ versus Caesar* is an eloquent case for why following Jesus has profound political implications we must confront in order to be true disciples.

—Alexandre Christoyannopoulos  
Author of *Christian Anarchism:  
A Political Commentary on the Gospel*

What should Christians “render unto Caesar?” *Christ versus Caesar* is a scripturally sourced response to that important question, which warns Christians they are being “seduced by [Caesar’s] statist systems that allow individuals to exert control over their neighbors and be enriched at their expense.” This book is important reading for those who wish to avoid that trap and the devastation that inevitably follows.

—Mark Benson Madsen, former state senator

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TWO MASTERS, ONE CHOICE

CONNOR BOYACK

**SOCIAL**

**HARMONY**

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*To the humble followers of Christ  
who, like me, are trying to figure out  
what Jesus meant, and what  
it means for us.*



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# FOREWORD



I am one of those Christians my friend Connor Boyack had in mind when he wrote herein, “A Christian of any particular denomination will find value in this book” and, moreover, that the book is “not meant to convert anyone to my particular views of Christianity.”

Connor is a Latter-day Saint, whereas I am a Presbyterian. He did not convert me, but then, he made it plain that conversion wasn’t his intention. Without a doubt, I can assert that he was right to predict that I would find value in what he has written. All of these adjectives explain why: informative, passionate, intriguing, challenging, principled, provocative.

Here and there I found passages I plainly disagreed with, though they still made me think. Occasionally, those same passages also pricked my conscience. All too often these days, people read only (or largely) what reinforces the views they already hold. But it doesn’t bother me to read things I didn’t know or that I might take issue with; I was always taught that a well-rounded and truly educated person knows at least something about views that are new or different.

Of the many verses in scripture that Connor cites, perhaps this one from Psalm 146 best encapsulates his core message:

Do not put your trust in princes,  
in human beings, who cannot save.  
When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;  
on that very day their plans come to nothing.

Amen to that! Whether you endorse more government, less government, or none at all, you can’t honestly survey the lessons of history and conclude that government gets better as it gets bigger. Power is so thoroughly

corrupting that I wouldn't trust my best friend with it, let alone someone who fancies himself a prince or a central planner. People who value liberty must always keep an eye on even the best and most humble of their public "servants," which reminds me of something the comedian Groucho Marx once said of his brother Harpo: "He's honest, but you gotta watch him."

In this book, Connor reminds us of the many lies and injustices perpetrated by governments that simultaneously proclaimed their commitment to truth and justice.

In fact, there are so many official lies and injustices in history that an alert and thoughtful citizen should not ignore the fundamental questions Connor raises: Is government a cynical racket or a legitimate representative of "the people"? Might it even be a devilish diversion that undermines faith in the very Highest of authorities? When its actions conflict with good sense or, more importantly, with the teachings of Christ, should a Christian pledge blind allegiance to it anyway?

Government is, by very definition, the only entity in society that can initiate force, legally and routinely. Within broad limits and for self-defense, you and I can use force in retaliation, but we cannot legally strike the first blow. That's a powerful privilege that government reserves to itself—in the form of taxation, conscription, eminent domain, and numerous mandates. As Connor points out, it "can command people to kill others, take their property, control their actions, and coerce them in all manner of ways" and often "without apparent consequence."

Christ warned that we cannot serve two masters, particularly when one contradicts the other. He was referring to money and God, but what about government and God? If one must choose between the two, is there any doubt which one Christ would want you to pick? Connor wants you to think deeply about that, perhaps for the very first time.

Civil disobedience comes in for close attention in this book. If asked, many people would likely say that civil disobedience is never justified, that we should always be patient and work through political channels to get redress for our grievances or to get bad policies changed. That sounds peaceful and appealing on the surface, but I wonder if anybody really believes that. I like what Henry David Thoreau had to say about it: "Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward."

It would certainly take a serious flight from conscience for a person to do the "lawful" thing and turn in an escaped slave in 1855. Or to incarcerate

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an innocent person just because of his race, as Franklin Roosevelt did when he ordered the internment of more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans in 1942. Or to stand idly by in the spring of 2020 as governors ordered virus-infected patients into nursing homes, killing thousands of elderly residents.

Though the one true and flawless King—Jesus Christ—did no wrong, earthly kings do wrong all the time. So do presidents, parliaments, congresses, and your local zoning board. Connor Boyack wants you to rethink the implications of that, for your faith and for the priorities in your life.

I commend Connor, a brother in Christ and a lover of human liberty, for this latest offering. On some critically important matters, it will prompt many readers to get off the fence and take a stand. And in a mixed-up world lacking in solid convictions, that's a good thing.

—Lawrence W. Reed

President Emeritus, Foundation for Economic Education  
Author, *Was Jesus a Socialist?*



# PROLOGUE



**T**his book is not meant to convert anyone to my particular views on Christianity. This book is also not meant to condemn those whose actions may appear inconsistent with Christ's commandments. As much as anyone else, I am an imperfect person who aims to be considered a saint, but who nevertheless falls short. We are all tempted by the worldly ways of Caesar.

Roughly one-third of people currently living consider themselves Christian.<sup>1</sup> With adherents of Jesus Christ separated into tens of thousands of differing denominations,<sup>2</sup> the reader deserves to know at the outset where this author stands regarding some core claims of Christianity, as this perspective colors the commentary throughout this book. While those of other Christian beliefs—or none—will no doubt find value in this analysis, it is primarily intended for those who share or are not alienated by the author's views.

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1. At the time of this writing, the global population is 7.7 billion; see "U.S. and World Population Clock," United States Census Bureau, accessed December 20, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/popclock/>. An estimated 2.3 billion people are Christian, though the number is likely a conservative estimate, since it relies upon official church membership figures, and many others might consider themselves Christian who have not affiliated with a church; see "Christians are the largest religious group in 2015," Pew Research Center, accessed December 20, 2019, [https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/pf\\_17-04-05\\_projectionsupdate\\_grl310px/](https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/pf_17-04-05_projectionsupdate_grl310px/).

2. Scott Eric Alt, "We Need to Stop Saying That There Are 33,000 Protestant Denominations," *National Catholic Register*, February 9, 2016, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/scottericalt/we-need-to-stop-saying-that-there-are-33000-protestant-denominations>.

I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe that we are children of a Heavenly Father. And I believe that God the Father loves His children regardless of where or to whom they were born. I believe He wants all of us to return to His presence. And so, I believe that He has communicated through prophets to teach us what is required.<sup>3</sup>

I not only believe in Jesus Christ, I believe Jesus Christ. I take His words at face value when He told His disciples in Jerusalem, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, I do not believe in a closed canon; I believe that Christ has spoken to others, as He said.

This claim causes angst for many Christians, as they were raised to believe that the Bible is the beginning and end of God’s word. In defense of this position, they often point to the book of Revelation, where we read, “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of . . . this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.”<sup>5</sup> But biblical scholars widely understand what those who employ this argument apparently do not: this verse applies only to the book of Revelation. Many other New Testament “books” were written after John received his revelation on the Isle of Patmos, and, more to the point, the Bible as we know it did not exist at the time. For centuries following John’s revelation, manuscripts were circulated throughout the early Christian community individually or in combination. Of the entire corpus of 5,366 known Greek New Testament manuscripts, only 35 contain the whole New Testament as we now know it, and 34 of those were compiled after A.D. 1000.

So, yes, I believe in additional revelation beyond what was eventually included in the Bible. I believe that God has spoken in modern times as well as in ancient, and that He has provided additional revelations to help His children better know how to return to His presence. I welcome these additional teachings, especially because they provide clarity and context for teachings from the Bible. This book will therefore avail itself of all these teachings in order to better understand the contrast between Christ and Caesar.<sup>6</sup> And while these additional scriptures will be cited for support, this

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3. Amos 3:7.

4. John 10:16.

5. Revelation 22:18.

6. This is especially important since various biblical passages have been cited both by political rulers to demand obedience and by their subjects to justify resistance and liberation. Additional clarity to resolve the conflict should be welcomed.

## *Prologue*

book's arguments will be helpful and appealing to all who share a belief in Christ's New Testament teachings.

If it is not already apparent to the reader, allow me to be more succinct: I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But before you close the book, let me caution you: the observations and criticisms contained within apply as much to my faith community as to any other. A Christian of any particular denomination will find value in this book.

A final word about my perspective in writing this book. Mortal rulers come in many forms: Caesar, Pharaoh, or Führer; king, emperor, or president. Each form of government has different aspects and degrees of evil, yet they share common characteristics that help us paint a picture to understand how Christ's counsel might apply today. For simplicity and to symbolically continue the references found in the gospels, the use of "Caesar" in this book is therefore used as an abstract reference to earthly rulers and governments generally. It also involves and implies the puppeteers pulling the strings behind the scene: Satan and his forces who build up their kingdom using idols, false prophets, and counterfeits to God, our only legitimate Ruler. Caesar, as referenced in this book, is the institutionalized antithesis to Jesus.

Christ's teachings serve as a reference point for our behavior. We may stray from the path, but He shows us how to return. Unfortunately, many followers have blinded themselves to some of the plain teachings of Jesus Christ pertaining to political matters. Our task is to open our eyes and return to the strait and narrow path. Let's proceed together.





# INTRODUCTION



The sun shone brightly on rural Litchfield, Illinois, one morning in 1940 as a caravan of twenty-one automobiles with nearly one hundred Jehovah's Witnesses descended on the city to distribute literature and seek converts. The city's population barely exceeded 7,000,<sup>1</sup> and some of the locals tried to chase them out of town. For nearly two miles, rowdy residents from Litchfield chased the Witnesses on poorly maintained roads until they blocked the highway, forcing them to stop. The men and women were pulled out of their cars, and the men were beaten for several minutes.<sup>2</sup> This was not simple religious bigotry; it was a direct response to the Witnesses' political views and allegedly insufficient patriotism.

While others in the mob devoted themselves to destroying the Witnesses' literature and personal property—twelve of their vehicles were destroyed beyond repair—others threw the Witnesses to the ground and repeatedly kicked them. Some of the men were dragged over to a nearby car, where an American flag had been spread out. The city's chief of police sat in a nearby car, silently watching the spectacle unfold as the mob repeatedly bashed a man's head against the flag-adorned vehicle<sup>3</sup>—his punishment for being unwilling to salute the flag.

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1. The 1940 census showed 7,048 residents in Litchfield, Illinois. See "Population of Incorporated Places: 1940 and 1930," United States Census Bureau, accessed December 20, 2019, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-1/33973538v1ch04.pdf>.

2. "The Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses," American Civil Liberties Union, January 1941, [http://debs.indstate.edu/a505p4\\_1941.pdf](http://debs.indstate.edu/a505p4_1941.pdf).

3. Ibid.

In all, 64 of the Witnesses were beaten that day in an attempt to force them to display proper deference to the flag. This horrifying scenario was not an aberration that year. An estimated 1,500 Witnesses were assaulted in 335 separate attacks.<sup>4</sup> In an outburst of violence “unparalleled in America since the attack on the Mormons”<sup>5</sup> a century earlier, supposedly patriotic Americans suddenly and violently attacked fellow citizens who were deemed insufficiently loyal to the government.

These were not solely the acts of isolated ruffians, either. Prominent voices called for the expulsion of the Witnesses and other individuals like them. One newspaper editorial in Jackson, Mississippi, captured the sentiment shared by others:

Departure under pressure of a colony of “Jehovah’s Witnesses” camped on the Pocahontas Road just beyond the city limits was proper disposal of what threatened to become a serious situation. There is no room in Jackson or vicinity for any person who will not salute the American flag and openly says he will not fight for his country under any circumstances. It so happens that sturdy citizens of Jackson don’t believe in nonsense of that sort and will not tolerate its existence in or near this community.

And to think, these attacks all started with a third-grader. In September 1935, young Carleton Nicholls stood for, but refused to recite, the Pledge of Allegiance. The Nicholls family were Jehovah’s Witnesses, and—just months prior—their church’s president, Joseph Rutherford, had argued that reciting the pledge was tantamount to worshiping a graven image, something prohibited by the Bible. Rutherford said that the “nations of the world are under the control of Satan the Devil” and that requiring a “child of God to salute the national flag compels that person to salute the Devil as the invisible god of the nation.”<sup>6</sup> For Witnesses, the flag became an idol to avoid.

Eight-year-old Carleton was targeted by his teacher for being unwilling to pledge allegiance to the flag. Supported by his father, who joined him in class, young Carleton remained seated while the students were told to rise and salute the flag. “I will stand for no such insult to the American flag!” the principal raged. After refusing to leave, Mr. Nicholls and an associate who had joined him were taken to jail.<sup>7</sup> Rutherford shone a spotlight

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4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Steven K. Green, *The Third Disestablishment: Church, State, and American Culture, 1940–1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 67.

7. Susan Dudley Gold, *Saluting the Flag: West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (New York: Cavendish Square Publishing, 2014), 28–29.

on the incident, fueling media coverage, which inspired other Witnesses to follow Carleton's example. Within a year, more than 120 children had been expelled from schools for refusing to salute the flag—a behavior that the adherents had made part of their doctrine.<sup>8</sup>

Rutherford was determined to press the issue in pursuit of religious freedom. He made it clear that refusing to salute the flag did not convey a “disrespect of the flag or for the country but . . . a proper respect and obedience to almighty God.” Their actions were intended not to cause pointless confrontation, but to practice their faith. Jehovah's Witnesses, he said, would “not violate any of the laws of the state that are in harmony with God's law. But if a law of the state is in direct violation of God's law, they will obey God's law first and all the time.”<sup>9</sup>

Carleton's family sued the state, seeking a return to school. They argued in their petition that compulsory pledges of allegiance violated the boy's freedom of religion. On appeal, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court dealt a blow to Witnesses by dismissing the claim. The justices opined:

There is nothing in the salute or the pledge of allegiance which constitutes an act of idolatry, or which approaches to any religious observance. It does not in any reasonable sense hurt, molest, or restrain a human being in respect to “worshipping God” within the meaning of words in the Constitution. The rule and the statute are well within the competency of legislative authority. They exact nothing in opposition to religion. They are directed to a justifiable end in the conduct of education in the public schools.<sup>10</sup>

The black-robed lawyers on the Court further argued that the pledge was proper in order to instill in students “patriotism and . . . a recognition of the blessing conferred by orderly government.”<sup>11</sup> Courts elsewhere concurred. The New Jersey Supreme Court, for example, said in 1937 that the pledge “is, by no stretch of the imagination, a religious rite,” but rather a “patriotic ceremony.”<sup>12</sup> A year later, California's Supreme Court claimed that the flag salute was one of the “social and patriotic duties of the citizens” required to maintain “good order, safety and the public welfare of the nation.”<sup>13</sup> Making youth pledge allegiance to the flag “tend[s] to stimulate” in their minds “sentiments of lasting affection and respect for and unflattering loyalty to our

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8. Green, *The Third Disestablishment*, 67.

9. Gold, *Saluting the Flag*, 31.

10. *Carleton B. Nicholls, Jr., vs. Mayor and School Committee of Lynn*, 297 Mass. 65.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Hering v. State Board of Education*, 189 A. 629 (N.J. 1937).

13. *Gabrielli v. Knickerbocker*, 12 Cal.2d 85.

government and its institutions,” they said.<sup>14</sup> In turn, some states passed criminal statutes that added teeth to school district policies, including prison time and fines for influencing children not to salute the flag—effectively criminalizing religious belief and punishing parental teaching.<sup>15</sup>

As controversial as these cases were, the physical persecution against Witnesses came because of a case sparked in Pennsylvania by Walter Gobitas and his two children. Walter had been inspired by Carleton and others like him, and instructed his two children, Lillian and Billy, not to pledge allegiance to the flag at school. Billy’s teacher was so upset about his failure to pledge that she tried to force his arm into the air to make the salute.<sup>16</sup> Lillian’s teacher had a different response, hugging the young student and praising her for her valor,<sup>17</sup> despite being bullied by other children who threw stones at her while yelling things like, “Here comes Jehovah!”<sup>18</sup> The response of Lillian’s teacher can likely be explained, in part, by the fact that she was a Quaker, a faith tradition that had experienced its own persecution in the past.<sup>19</sup>

For their part, school officials unsurprisingly refused to budge, and the children were promptly expelled. Backed by legal support from their church and the ACLU, the Gobitas family’s case was randomly assigned to Judge Albert Branson Maris, who was also a Quaker. His 1938 decision was rather blunt:

The flag salute by children who are sincerely opposed to it upon conscientious religious grounds is not a reasonable method of teaching

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14. Ibid.

15. Green, *The Third Disestablishment*, 67–68.

16. At the time, Americans pledged allegiance with what is now known as the “Hitler salute”—arm fully extended toward the flag, palm down. As the Nazis gained power and the action was associated with their oppressive regime, tension arose in America due to the similarity. Organizations such as the Parent and Teachers Association, Boy Scouts of America, and the Red Cross, agitated for a change. Congress later modified the federal Flag Code in 1942, instructing Americans to place their hand over their heart instead.

17. Jeffrey Owen Jones and Peter Meyer, *The Pledge: A History of the Pledge of Allegiance* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2010), 122.

18. “Lillian Gobitas Interview on Experiences with Persecution,” Robert H. Jackson Center, accessed December 20, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGjfsUw5Dw4>.

19. Pennsylvania was a good place to pursue the legal battle, given the prevalence of Quakers in the area. The state was founded by William Penn, a Quaker himself, who had been arrested and charged with illegal preaching in England for trying to openly share his beliefs. Penn intentionally provoked a legal battle in which he was later successful. He set up his new American colony to be a safe haven for practitioners of alternative religions looking to escape the crushing intolerance of the Crown—Quakers, Huguenots, Mennonites, Amish, Lutherans, and more.

civics . . . but tends to have the contrary effect upon such children. Our country's safety surely does not depend upon the totalitarian idea of forcing all citizens into one common mold of thinking and acting or requiring them to render a lip service of loyalty in a manner which conflicts with their sincere religious convictions.<sup>20</sup>

Maris asserted that officials were not “empowered to censor another’s religious convictions or set boundaries to the areas of human conduct in which those convictions control his actions, unless compelled to do so by an overwhelming public necessity.”<sup>21</sup> A judge had finally recognized, in America, that forced patriotism could violate religious belief, after Witnesses were repeatedly told by other judges how their religious beliefs were not in any way negatively impacted by the compulsory loyalty. It was a temporary victory, however. On appeal, the US Supreme Court overturned lower courts on the 1940 Gobitas case and upheld the right of schools to expel non-conforming children in an 8-1 opinion. Chief Justice Hughes asserted that “the state can insist on inculcation of loyalty.”<sup>22</sup>

This Supreme Court ruling—and its public implication that Witnesses were disloyal—was all certain American “patriots” needed to oppress their nonpledging neighbors who refused to outwardly exhibit loyalty to America and its flag. The attacks began in earnest. One sheriff, when asked by a reporter why Witnesses were being run out of town, responded, “They’re traitors; the Supreme Court says so. Ain’t you heard?”<sup>23</sup>

To some extent, this horrible reaction is predictable. “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth,” Jesus taught his disciples. “I came not to send peace, but a sword.”<sup>24</sup> Those who follow Christ must embrace the implications of His message, and that means parting ways, in some circumstances, with those who reject it. While God wants all to become disciples, it is inevitable that not all will choose to follow Him; Christ’s message therefore causes division. We must choose. God does not want “lukewarm”<sup>25</sup> people who cannot pick a side. The Jehovah’s Witnesses had chosen their side and were acting in accordance with that decision. Loyalty to Christ means, for them, not professing loyalty to any competing authorities.

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20. Jones, *The Pledge*, 123.

21. Green, *The Third Disestablishment*, 68.

22. *Ibid.*, 69.

23. Shawn Francis Peters, *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses: Religious Persecution and the Dawn of Rights Revolution* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 84.

24. Matthew 10:34.

25. Revelation 3:16.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ—and *believe* Him—recognize His right to rule; He is king. Our loyalty is to God. We are all God’s children; we are one family. Thus, true disciples of Christ do not listen to other authorities that tell them to hold animosity toward or indifference about other people merely because they speak a different language, come from a different culture, or practice a different religion. We should not be tribal creatures that let imaginary lines on a map—the result of unjust wars and political conquests—define our loyalties and affections.

We recognize in the persecution of the Jehovah’s Witnesses a sincerity that is often not exhibited by most Christians, including, potentially, ourselves—indeed, most self-professed followers of Christ are content to embrace two masters. Whether through apathetic indifference or awkward compartmentalization that requires ignoring clear scriptures to the contrary, these individuals attend their local chapel for worship services but frequent their summer cottage in Babylon.<sup>26</sup> And yet Christ is clear: no man can serve two masters.<sup>27</sup> We must choose whom we will serve.<sup>28</sup> Chief Justice Hughes rightly pointed out that the state demands loyalty, and Caesar impresses it upon the rising generation. Such propaganda is the hallmark of every state and always justified by its functionaries.

While the Jehovah’s Witnesses standing up for their faith are a recent example, similar examples are by no means unique or uncommon. Indeed, God’s people have often, when practicing their faith fully, found themselves in conflict with secular authority and the culture that supports it. Christians are generally familiar with the persecution heaped upon the early saints by Rome, but some wrongly believe that this persecution was because of Christians’ worship of Jesus. Rather, the persecution was a result of their unwillingness to worship the Roman emperor. Rome tolerated many religions, but demanded loyalty to the state above them all; numerous feasts and festivals were designed to create imperial unity and cultivate loyalty, but when Christians refused to participate, they were seen as disloyal. Since they refused to offer sacrifices or light incense to the gods, Christians were seen as subversive to the social order and, therefore, were harassed and executed by secular authorities.

While Caesar demands our loyalty, so too does God. What, then, is a disciple of Christ to do? How do we resolve these competing claims, if we can at all? Scripture is filled with examples where this conflict plays

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26. Neal A. Maxwell, *A Wonderful Flood of Light* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 47.

27. Matthew 6:24.

28. Joshua 24:15.

out—often, unfortunately, resulting in the saints siding with the secular state. What does all this mean for those of us living in modern times? Can we be patriotic and still follow God’s commandments to abstain from idolatry? Can we support the state but also maintain our submission to God? Can we be “good citizens” and also dedicated followers of Christ? In short, what would it look like if we took the Savior at His word and closely followed His commandment to serve and follow only Him? These are the questions we will explore in this book—questions that have significant implications for all who try, albeit imperfectly, to have “an eye single to the glory of God.”<sup>29</sup>

Overt persecution did not succeed in weakening the resolve of early Christians; martyrdom actually facilitated evangelism and encouraged the gospel’s dissemination by others seeking resurrection and salvation. And so, when Constantine came around, the strategy shifted: church and state were intertwined, and Christianity was “officially adopted” by Caesar. The centuries since have invoked theological chaos and confusion, enabled by scholars and priests who along the way have articulated all sorts of defenses in support of Caesar, contrary to the actions and beliefs of the early disciples, who took Christ’s message for what it implied, which includes renouncing any loyalty to Caesar. Indeed, the greatest threat to Christianity has not been from external threats but from internal dissension and dilution of doctrine.

It is the thesis of this book that many Christians today have failed to separate Christ from Caesar, often because they fail to recognize the modern implications of scriptural warnings about Babylon, Caesar, and the secular state. Christians let their loyalties waffle between the two, lavishing both with their affections. Effectively they try to serve two masters at once, contrary to Christ’s clear statement on the matter. This book presents a simple question with an obvious answer that is apparently difficult for many Christians to comply with: *to which master should men be loyal?* The task before us is to peel back the centuries of corrosive conflation between Christ and Caesar and explore what a disciple of the former ought to do in rejecting the latter. This task is not for the faint of heart. But then again, none of Christ’s doctrine is.

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29. Doctrine and Covenants 4:5.

# CHRIST AND CAESAR IN CONTEXT



Vincenzo Guo Xijin is a Christian in China—an affiliation that comes, as you might imagine, with many problems. These problems are exacerbated for Guo because he is in a position of leadership within the Catholic church. Since the Communist state was founded in 1949, there has been tension between the Vatican and Chinese leadership. Officially atheist, the Communist Party nevertheless allows for “normal religious activity,” which is limited to activities taking place within government-sanctioned religious organizations and registered places of worship.<sup>1</sup>

For Catholics, the state-approved church is called the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, and it is governed not by the Pope, but by Communist leadership. The state selects ministers, censors religious material,<sup>2</sup> and keeps a close eye to ensure that outside influences—in this case, the Vatican—do not threaten Party control. As a result, an underground church emerged, one that is faithful to the Vatican but not recognized by Chinese authorities.

Bishop Guo was asked by the Vatican to step aside and allow another individual to be the bishop instead—Vincent Zhan Silu, who was excommunicated in 2011 after being installed as bishop by the Communists in

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1. “Freedom of Religion in China,” Wikipedia, accessed December 27, 2019, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom\\_of\\_religion\\_in\\_China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_religion_in_China).

2. “China Bans Online Bible Sales as It Tightens Religious Controls,” *The Boston Globe*, April 5, 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2018/04/05/china-bans-online-bible-sales-tightens-religious-controls/t2y731JyPR43POcn03pbbM/story.html>.



2000 without Vatican approval.<sup>3</sup> Guo obliged, but was still unwilling to align himself with the Communist-controlled church, nor would he encourage his priests and congregants to do so. Party bosses followed, monitored, and visited Guo for months, attempting to pressure him into signing an agreement to affiliate with the state-controlled church. A Vatican-affiliated news agency explained: “Authorities have been exerting pressure, blackmailing and threatening priests to push them to sign this accession in exchange for government recognition without which their ministry is forbidden.”<sup>4</sup> In a letter to the government, Guo wrote:

The government has already decided to persecute priests who refuse to sign the request [for membership in the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association]. If I am unable to protect them, it is not worth my time to be recognized as an auxiliary bishop. I am willing to face persecution together with other priests.<sup>5</sup>

The former cardinal of Hong Kong has openly criticized the concessions made by the Vatican in hopes of gaining recognition by and access to China. Cardinal Joseph Zen flew to the Vatican to air his concerns directly with the Pope and later went public with the confidential agreement the Vatican had made to undo Zhan’s excommunication and install him as a bishop, a move approved both by the Vatican and Chinese authorities.<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis told Cardinal Zen that he had told his aides “not to create another Mindszenty case”—a reference to a Hungarian cardinal, József Mindszenty, who had vocally opposed both fascism and communism, and who was imprisoned by the Nazis and then tortured by the Communists. Pope Paul VI, under pressure from Hungarian authorities, eventually stripped Mindszenty of his religious authority. During this time, some felt that “the Vatican cared more about offending the Kremlin than defending religious believers. Of course,

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3. “Is the Mindong Case a “stress test” for Sino-Vatican relations?,” *La Stampa*, March 30, 2018, <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider-en/2018/03/30/news/is-the-mindong-case-a-stress-test-for-sino-vatican-relations-1.33999218>.

4. “China pressuring priest at center of agreement with Vatican,” *ABC News*, November 22, 2019, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-pressuring-priest-center-agreement-vatican-67221304>.

5. “Msgr. Guo Xijin: Persecution is preferable to joining the Patriotic Association,” *AsiaNews.it*, June 18, 2019, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Msgr.-Guo-Xijin-Persecution-is-preferable-to-joining-the-Patriotic-Association-47315.html>.

6. “Vatican courts China with plan to install excommunicated bishop,” *The Guardian*, January 30, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/30/vatican-china-ties-excommunicated-bishop-hong-kong-cardinal-shantou>.

the opposite was the goal; but the actual effect sometimes looked timid, craven, self-defeating.”<sup>7</sup>

Put simply, the goal of Chinese authorities is to control and subdue religious elements that pose a threat to their rule. To that end, they are comfortable only with installing state-friendly ministers whom they can bring to heel when necessary, or whom they never have to bring to heel, because they owe their position to the state, not to the church. And so, many Christians are perplexed why there is an attempt to negotiate with a hostile government that wants to eliminate, not accommodate, their religion. “Why should the Catholic Church participate in its own dissolution and destruction?” one Catholic observer said,<sup>8</sup> echoing concerns shared by other Christian groups in the country who face restrictions on teaching their faith to their children, getting baptized, and preaching what they believe.<sup>9</sup> Chinese Christians face mandates to remove depictions of Jesus and replace them with Communist state leaders; as one pastor reported, “The government is trying to eliminate our belief and wants to become God instead of Jesus.”<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, for many Christians around the world, affiliating with their faith is not controversial or demanding; it is easy to claim to worship Jesus. But stories such as this one suggest that remaining faithful during times of persecution and corruption is what really demonstrates someone’s commitment to Christ. Do we compromise with Caesar and his competing demands or stubbornly refuse to concede? Can a disciple of Christ support the state? If so, how oppressive must it be before that support should be revoked? And how should a Christian act in regard to governments that are seemingly democratic, protective of religious freedom, and constitutionally limited to supposedly protect individual rights? Should Christians in China resist their government, while their American counterparts co-mingle with the state?

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7. Paul Kengor, “Pope Francis and the Cardinal Mindszenty Treatment in China,” *Crisis Magazine*, February 12, 2018, <https://www.crisismagazine.com/2018/pope-francis-cardinal-mindszenty-treatment-china>.

8. “Social scientist: Vatican is ‘negotiating the surrender’ of China’s real Church to the Communists,” *Life Site News*, February 5, 2018, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/social-scientist-vatican-is-negotiating-the-surrender-of-chinas-real-church>.

9. “China BANS Christian children from attending church and threaten parents with legal action,” *Daily Express*, July 30, 2016, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/694830/China-BANS-children-from-attending-church-and-threaten-parents-with-legal-action>.

10. “China tells Christians to renounce faith in Jesus & worship President Xi Jinping instead,” *Christian Today*, July 19, 2020, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/china-tells-christians-renounce-faith-in-jesus-worship-president-xi-jinping/135221.htm>.

Scriptural history informs us that God's people become more earnest and more faithful with opposition; "for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."<sup>11</sup> In modern times, God pointed out that "my people must needs be chastened until they learn obedience, if it must needs be, by the things which they suffer."<sup>12</sup> It is one thing for Christians to remain faithful when persecuted by a hostile Caesar; many scripture stories lead us to praise God's faithful who remained loyal to God above all else.<sup>13</sup> It is another thing entirely when Caesar appears nonthreatening and eager to collaborate. God's commandment to side with Him permits no exceptions when Caesar's demeanor or demands appear soothing and simple. And so, we must be especially on guard when finding ourselves in environments that are *not* like they are in China, or were in Hungary; our commitments to discipleship may face their greatest challenge in times when fellow Christians perceive Caesar as friendly or worthy of support.

For some Christians, the extent of their worship involves going to church a few times a year and thinking about God that often. For others, it is enough to have been "saved," as if it were a single event in one's past, a milestone to move on from and reference as needed or when convenient. But Christ demands more than mere lip service to His teachings. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth," Jesus said, quoting Isaiah, "and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me." And then, the kicker: "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."<sup>14</sup> It is as the apostle Paul told Timothy: people would "turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."<sup>15</sup> It is convenient to affiliate with Christ while your heart is with Team Caesar; it is another thing to believe Christ and follow Him, especially when the culture considers such behavior to be unpatriotic, fringe, or extreme.

Paul warned Timothy of a time in which people "will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears."<sup>16</sup> It is not that remarkable of a prophecy, perhaps, since it describes an apparent human condition: God's people had long been watering down His doctrine to suit their comfort level, preferring those who preached easy, affirming messages to others who rebuked the people's

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11. Hebrews 12:6

12. Doctrine and Covenants 105:6; see also Doctrine and Covenants 1:27.

13. Acts 5:29; Exodus 1:22; 2:2; 7–10; Jeremiah 22:13–19; Matthew 2:13; Daniel 3:4–6, 12; 6:7–10.

14. Matthew 15:8–9.

15. 2 Timothy 4:4.

16. 2 Timothy 4:3.

apostasy.<sup>17</sup> But God “had compassion on his people” and “sent to them . . . messengers” in order to teach the gospel. Yet the tendency to “go along to get along” with society is and always has been strong, so “they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets,”<sup>18</sup> repeating a pattern that unfortunately fills the scriptural record.

Have you ever wondered why God’s people constantly fashioned idols to worship? Moses was delayed on Mount Sinai, which led the children of Israel to demand that Aaron “make us gods”<sup>19</sup> to praise and follow. A golden calf was fashioned as the object of worship, showing the ongoing influence of the Egyptian religion and culture among the people. It is evident that “in their hearts they turned back to Egypt,”<sup>20</sup> unable to overcome the spiritual and emotional pull of their previous life. It is a cycle we see repeated in the Bible: monotheistic Jews were constantly surrounded—and conquered—by other people who believed in different or multiple gods. The temptation to blend in with society was evidently overpowering at times. In time, Israel “walked in the statutes of the heathen” and “feared other gods,” going so far as to build altars to these gods right in their communities in order to more easily participate in pagan rituals.<sup>21</sup>

It is easy for a modern reader to set these stories aside as irrelevant. Surely we are *nothing* like these wayfaring Israelites with pagan tendencies. We are faithfully monotheistic, for starters; we would not be caught dead worshipping a cow. But where Moses lifted up a brass serpent to physically heal the injured Israelites who would look at it,<sup>22</sup> Jesus later taught that He would be spiritually lifted up to offer eternal life to all who would look unto Him.<sup>23</sup> And where Israel once worshiped physical idols, our idolatry is more spiritual, sophisticated, and modern.

But we are no less tempted by carnal loyalties and power than our wilderness-wandering brothers and sisters from biblical times.

The idolatrous Israelites “rejoiced in the works of their own hands,”<sup>24</sup> and therein lies the central theme of this book’s analysis. Idolatry is not merely about stupidly worshipping a man-made object. It is also about honoring and supporting man-made institutions as a replacement for God. It

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17. 2 Chronicles 18:7; 36:15–16; Isaiah 30:10; Helaman 13:24–27.

18. 2 Chronicles 36:15–16.

19. Exodus 32:1.

20. Acts 7:39.

21. 2 Kings 17:7–13.

22. Numbers 21:4–9.

23. John 3:14–15.

24. Acts 7:41; see also Psalm 115:4–8.

is about relying upon and deifying the arm of flesh. Do we fear and follow God, or man? Christ wants us to trust and have faith in Him. He had already shown Israel how He could guide and provide for them, and yet they wanted to take matters into their own hands. They turned their backs on the Deliverer out of a desire to secure protection and prosperity for themselves—the whole point of pagan sacrifice.

Our modern idols can be “any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath.” God states that “thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.”<sup>25</sup> But why? Why should God demand our loyalty and makes us choose between Him and, well, basically everything else?

### *Who Was Jesus?*

Jesus Christ is King,<sup>26</sup> and from this simple statement flows all the problems with Caesar.

Known by many names,<sup>27</sup> Jesus’s given name was *Yeshua* in Hebrew and means “Jehovah saves.” During his life, he would have been called *Yeshua Bar Yehosef* (“Jesus, son of Joseph”) or *Yeshua Nasraya* (“Jesus of Nazareth”) to identify and separate him from the other Yeshuas around, as it was a common name at the time.<sup>28</sup> As His ministry began, disciples recognized in Jesus the fulfillment of past prophecies about a king who would rule all nations and save Israel. They began calling him their Messiah, the anointed one. (“Christ” comes from the Greek translation of the word.) In the Old Testament, God instructed prophets to anoint a person and proclaim him king, signifying that God had Himself given that person authority to act as His representative.<sup>29</sup> Thus, calling Jesus the Messiah, or Christ, was rich in meaning for those who began using the term—it was a recognition that this

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25. Exodus 20:4–5.

26. Isaiah goes further, saying that “The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king” (Isaiah 33:22)—comprising judicial, legislative, and executive functions. He is not just King, but the Alpha and Omega—the beginning and the end—of all authority. See also 2 Nephi 10:14.

27. “Jesus Christ, Names and Titles of,” *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, accessed December 27, 2019, [https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Jesus\\_Christ\\_Names\\_and\\_Titles\\_of](https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Jesus_Christ_Names_and_Titles_of).

28. Brian Palmer, “Happy Birthday, Dear Yeshua, Happy Birthday to You!,” *Slate*, December 24, 2008, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2008/12/was-jesus-a-common-name-back-when-he-was-alive.html>.

29. 1 Samuel 15:1, 17; 1 Kings 19:15–16; 2 Kings 9:3; 11:12; 23:30; 2 Samuel 12:7.

man was the foretold king who would save God's people. Jesus Christ was and is the Savior anointed by God to rule His kingdom.

That was, of course, a point of contention for the earthly kings who claimed political authority over the area. Consider Herod, the "client king" whom Rome allowed to rule in Judea after they conquered it in 63 B.C. When the visiting wise men sought a new "King of the Jews,"<sup>30</sup> Herod was "troubled" and unsurprisingly eager to learn the child's location and identity. Already, Herod had killed close members of his own family who posed a threat to his jealous rule.<sup>31</sup> Herod asked the chief priests and scribes about the report, and they told him that a prophecy suggested Bethlehem as the location. Falsely claiming to want to worship the child as well, Herod instructed the wise men to return and reveal the child's identity to him once they learned it. As the story goes, the travelers were warned in a dream not to tell Herod, who then slaughtered all the baby boys in Bethlehem and the surrounding area in order to snuff out his competition.<sup>32</sup> Jesus and his family, of course, had already escaped to Egypt. Thus began the life of God's Anointed One on earth, facing from the outset a political threat from a self-declared rival.

Jesus was born into a world of sociopolitical tension. Many Jews believed themselves to be living in the last days and yearned for the long-promised Messiah to save them from their oppressive rulers and become their new political king. As the disciples of Jesus began applying the label to Him, it was not a simple platitude. There was a very real hope that Christ would be a sort of warrior priest, assembling an army to overthrow both the Herodian dynasty and the Roman occupation. This explains the confusion among His followers when they had to confront the reality that this was not what Christ actually came to do.<sup>33</sup>

Jesus was not a revolutionary in the conventional, insurrectional sense, but his actions and teachings were indeed quite revolutionary. Though He came not to abolish but to fulfill the existing law,<sup>34</sup> Christ's actions (associating with "unclean" people like publicans, lepers, and Samaritans) and teachings (loving

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30. Matthew 2:2.

31. "Herod, King of Judea," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed December 27, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Herod-king-of-Judaea>.

32. Contrary to the huge massacre often envisioned, it is likely that given the population at the time, there were only a dozen or two babies killed at most. See "Truth or Fiction: Did Herod Really Slaughter Baby Boys in Bethlehem?" *Desiring God*, December 22, 2015, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/truth-or-fiction-did-herod-really-slaughter-baby-boys-in-bethlehem>.

33. Acts 1:6; even after Christ's resurrection, His disciples were still expecting some sort of temporal rule over Israel.

34. Matthew 5:17.

one's enemies and turning the other cheek, among many others) were indeed a revolution against the Jewish society's status quo. And it is a mistake to see these teachings as theological in nature only, as if they were limited to matters of belief, and not of action. Nor were they confined to the church, and not applied to government. In truth, the gospel is a template for living, not just a code of conduct for how adherents are to worship and what they are to believe. As will be explored later in the book, these teachings—and the actions they suggest are required—have profound implications for how we should treat one another, not just directly, but also indirectly through intermediary organizations and affiliations such as governments. God's commandments carry political implications that we ignore at our own spiritual peril.

Of course, the most notable contest between Jesus and the state comes toward the latter end of his mortal ministry, when Jewish leaders plotted to murder Jesus and hoped to trap Him to facilitate their evil desires.<sup>35</sup> For them, the grave sin of blasphemy was reason enough to punish Jesus. When brought before the Sanhedrin, the chief priests accusatorially asked Him "Art thou the Christ?"<sup>36</sup> Jews had been waiting for God's Anointed One to come yet rejected Him when standing in their midst. And when Jewish authorities were satisfied by Jesus's answer enough to levy punishment, they instead decided to offer Him up to the Romans. Obviously, Roman rulers did not care about the theological squabbles of their subjects, so the Jews conjured up political crimes instead, telling Pilate, the governor, that Jesus had been "perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King."<sup>37</sup> He was accused of disobeying and competing against Caesar, and Caesar permits no such competition.<sup>38</sup>

John records the interaction between Pilate and Jesus:

Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?

Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?

Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?

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35. Matthew 26:3–4; John 11:53.

36. Luke 22:66–71.

37. Luke 23:2.

38. The essential feature of the state is that it asserts a monopoly on violence—Caesar punishes those who aggress against others, but legally justifies his own aggressions.

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.<sup>39</sup>

Pilate eventually returned to Christ's accusers, claiming to find no fault in Jesus, but the bloodthirsty Jews pushed back. "Shall I crucify your King?" Pilate asked them. The chief priests—the religious authorities of the time responsible for teaching and defending the gospel—remarkably replied: "We have no king but Caesar."<sup>40</sup> In one simple statement, the spiritually empty religious establishment sided with the state and against God. Jesus was ultimately killed in the common Roman practice of crucifixion. "This is Jesus King of the Jews,"<sup>41</sup> a sign above His head told onlookers, no doubt to demean and diminish the many claims made about Christ.

Later resurrected and returned to God's glory, Christ awaits His second coming and triumphant return. Christians look forward to that day when, during the Millennium, Jesus will rule as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords"<sup>42</sup> after an "end of all nations."<sup>43</sup> Of that day, we have been told:

But, verily I say unto you that in time ye shall have no king nor ruler, for I will be your king and watch over you.

Wherefore, hear my voice and follow me, and you shall be a free people, and ye shall have no laws but my laws when I come, for I am your lawgiver, and what can stay my hand?<sup>44</sup>

But what implications do Christ's teachings have regarding law before He returns? What can we learn from His comments about Caesar and submitting to authority? And what do modern Caesars look like, and how do they demand our loyalty?

### *All Hail Caesar?*

The Roman occupation of Judea was just one of many conquests to which the children of Israel were subjected. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece each took their turn claiming political authority over the children of Israel. During the time of Christ, the Romans were the occupiers,

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39. John 18:33–36.

40. John 19:15.

41. Matthew 27:37.

42. Revelation 19:16.

43. Doctrine and Covenants 87:6.

44. Doctrine and Covenants 38:21–22.



and Caesar was the political authority. In modern times, Christians live in and are subject to a variety of governments and earthly rulers. And while Christ's mortal ministry reveals some commentary about Caesar that we will later explore, these references surely apply not just to the single political leader at the time of His ministry, but to political leaders generally. God's teachings before and after Christ's earthly life build an even stronger case for Christians to choose Him over the current Caesar of the day. Whatever the form of government we might live under as our "Caesar," there are bound to be a few common characteristics.

**Caesar demands loyalty.** Political leaders do not easily tolerate dissent. Early Christians struggling under the Roman occupation were targeted because their deity was seen as a rival monarch, a "king in direct conflict with the dictatorship of the emperor."<sup>45</sup> Caesar was deified and worshiped as the protector and provider of the empire. The idea of an invisible God assuming these titles obviously undermined the Roman leader's claims of legitimacy and might. Those who refused to praise the monarch were perceived as disloyal. The modern state, in contrast, does not demand our theological reverence; its demand for loyalty is religiously indifferent. One can believe whatever they wish about a higher power, but Caesar lays claim to earthly power. Caesar expects our financial tributes and personal compliance. And like a community that is expected (or happy) to support the local sports team merely because of where they live, Caesar expects those within his jurisdiction to bow the knee and confess his superiority because he is master of that geographical domain. All who live there are expected to be loyal and comply accordingly.

**Caesar asserts divinity or divine support.** Mortal men proclaiming themselves as god is nothing new. Political rulers have long asserted a claim to divine approbation and appointment. Egyptian pharaohs, Japanese emperors, Roman rulers, English kings, and modern-day rulers have all either claimed to be deity or claimed to have deity's support for their actions. Political rulers tend to appeal to and appear to appease the god or gods of the masses, leveraging people's religious feelings in support of Caesar's desired policies. By portraying himself a servant of God, Caesar can discourage dissent by encouraging the faithful to support his policies, since he allegedly shares their faith.

**Caesar desires worship.** Caesar is Christ's counterfeit; he replicates the worship of God to instead support the state. To be praised and given loyalty,

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45. Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 46.

an alternative quasi-religious system is built for worshiping Caesar. Political temples and monuments (the Capitol, statues, Washington Monument, and so on) are erected for visitation and veneration. Rituals are created (voting, swearing into office) to encourage a shared political faith. Seminaries of learning (public schools and universities) ensure the rising generation learns what Caesar approves. Common prayers and hymns (the Pledge of Allegiance, the national anthem) cultivate fidelity and reverence. Sacred symbols and texts (the flag, the Constitution) are propagated to remind citizens of Caesar's greatness and presence—a shared identity for the masses who are affiliated with the state and its might. Like all great counterfeits, many people perceive these substitutions as legitimate and worthy of their devotion and support. “Abraham Lincoln used to say,” remarked Rudy Giuliani, “that the test of your Americanism was . . . how much you believed in America. Because we're like a religion, really. A secular religion.”<sup>46</sup> American Christians often cling to their flag as much as their Bible. “The name of the nation [has become] as holy as the name of God. The presidency is turning into a priesthood.”<sup>47</sup> Caesar most desires worship because reverent subjects do not revolt; they see their subjugation as a worthy sacrifice.

**Caesar refuses to answer to a higher power.** As Christ's counterfeit, Caesar sees himself as the highest power in the earthly domain; he is the supposed sovereign, able to do as he pleases. And while superficially Caesar may claim to answer to or represent God, in reality Caesar asserts that he is a law unto himself. The state sanctions and excuses evil conduct that, if committed by a citizen, would be subject to swift punishment. Caesar plunders, controls, and kills people with impunity, confident that he can get away with it. Doctrines such as executive privilege and immunity (“the king can do no wrong”) are invented to justify Caesar's actions and exempt him from accountability. They are evidence that he thinks himself a god.

**Caesar offers protection from the enemy.** The core function of government is to physically protect citizens from foreign threats and suppress domestic disturbances. Caesar is eager to offer this service and be seen as the people's protector, so they in turn praise him for all success in this regard. Caesar desires and claims to be the source of safety and security—and where enemies do not naturally exist, he manufactures them. For as H.L. Mencken said, “The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace

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46. “Text of Mayor Giuliani's Farewell Address,” *The New York Times*, December 27, 2001, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/27/nyregion/text-of-mayor-giulianis-farewell-address.html>.

47. George Monbiot, “America Is a Religion.” Published in the *Guardian*, July 29, 2003; see <https://www.monbiot.com/2003/07/29/america-is-a-religion/>.

alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.”<sup>48</sup> Caesar cultivates support and perpetuates his power by reminding the people of the dangers he says he is uniquely able to help them avoid.

**Caesar uses coercion.** Rome did not rule over much of Europe by asking nicely. Caesar constantly seeks more power—to expand dominion for greater control. Christ is “gentle and humble in heart,”<sup>49</sup> while Caesar is the antithesis of these virtues. The modern state is particularly violent and uses force to command respect, enforce its will, and suppress dissent. While Caesar prefers people voluntarily comply with his edicts and perceive them to be reasonable and right, he is not unwilling to employ coercion to get his way.

**Caesar seeks the praise of the world.** With pomp and circumstance, and public relations campaigns, Caesar widely proclaims his virtues and points to the grandeur of his projects. Whether building roads and public works, vanquishing a foe, or providing food or services to the masses, Caesar is egocentric and proud of his accomplishments—and he wants the world to know it. He is vain and competitive, seeking to aggrandize himself relative to other challengers.

There are many other characteristics we might assign to Caesar based on the historical record of fallen empires and modern nation states, but this list will suffice. To review:

- Caesar demands loyalty.
- Caesar asserts divinity or divine support.
- Caesar desires worship.
- Caesar refuses to answer to a higher power.
- Caesar offers protection from the enemy.
- Caesar uses coercion.
- Caesar seeks the praise of the world.

As we evaluate how Christians should act in relation to Caesar, these characteristics are important to remember. While Christians often study and ponder the attributes of Christ, they typically fail to contemplate Caesar’s. This is akin to going to battle without doing any homework about one’s enemy.

This enemy comes in many forms, which might cause Christians confusion, for if Jesus was referring to the Roman empire, how do his words relate to a modern republic? Do we apply his rebukes to North Korea, but not North Dakota? And since the empires of past millennia are vastly different

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48. H.L. Mencken, *In Defense of Women* (1918).

49. Matthew 11:29.

from the modern nation state—including participatory democracies where “we the people” are supposedly in charge—does what Christ counseled even remain relevant? Yes, there exists a wide range of forms of government under which God’s people have been ruled throughout history. From dictatorships to constitutional republics, Caesars come and go. But we can eliminate the confusion and consistently apply Christ’s counsel by understanding the influence that manifests itself in each Caesar.

### *The Whore of All the Earth*

After His baptism, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, “to be with God.”<sup>50</sup> Led up to a high mountain, He was shown “all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.”<sup>51</sup> Surely such a spectacular review of God’s creations would be edifying and inspiring—a much needed spiritual boost for the Son of God before He began His ministry. In interruption, Satan arrived with a temptation: “All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.”<sup>52</sup>

Cast down to this earthly domain, Lucifer sees earthly possessions as “delivered unto” him—and uses worldly treasures to finance efforts to reign on the earth. Adam’s son Cain was the first to fall prey to Satan’s promise that one can “murder and get gain,”<sup>53</sup> and then get away with it. Countless others throughout world history have similarly “entered into a covenant with Satan, after the manner of Cain.”<sup>54</sup> This was Satan’s offer to Jesus as well: “If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.” It is interesting to note that Jesus did not indicate that Satan was making an offer he could not fulfill; it was, perhaps, not an empty promise. In other words, it is within Satan’s ability to influence those who desire and use power and wealth, and their allegiance can lead to action that Satan desires. Jesus did not call out his fallen brother for lying. He simply stated: “Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”<sup>55</sup>

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50. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 4:1.

51. Matthew 4:8.

52. Luke 4:6–7.

53. Moses 5:31.

54. Moses 5:49. See also Ether 8:22–23 and 11:15; this book will later explore the pervasive influence of secret combinations and how Christians must recognize and reject them.

55. Luke 4:8.

Lucifer's efforts did not spontaneously start once he was cast down; they are a continuation of the very reason for which he was cast down. Despite being "in authority in the presence of God" and "in the bosom of the Father" he was "thrust down from the presence of God"<sup>56</sup> for waging a full-blown assault against God's plan. "I will ascend into heaven," he said. "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the most High."<sup>57</sup> Lucifer's power play was to tell the Father that he would "redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor."<sup>58</sup> That honor was actually God's power,<sup>59</sup> and thus Lucifer's diabolical forgery was merely a deceitful attempt to increase his own power and prestige at God's expense.<sup>60</sup> This war in heaven resulted in Lucifer's expulsion down to the earthly domain in which he now operates. Since that time, God's children have wrestled against "principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."<sup>61</sup> Jesus recognized that Satan, for now, is the "prince of this world"<sup>62</sup>—the whore that has dominion over all the earth<sup>63</sup>—and the war against allegiance to God is still being fought. This prince "is in control, even in our own land. He is guiding the governments as far as the Lord will permit him."<sup>64</sup> Satan "sitteth to reign" in the hearts of those who rule the nations,<sup>65</sup> and those influenced by him "fill the judgment seats in many nations,"<sup>66</sup> offering their allegiance in exchange for wealth and power.

The true nature of these spiritual battles has been shared with several prophets. For example, the apostle John saw a detailed vision of the future, including many significant events.<sup>67</sup> Revelation's imagery illustrates a great battle between two churches<sup>68</sup>—or, rather, two distinct and differently minded

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56. Doctrine and Covenants 76:25.

57. Isaiah 14:13–14.

58. Moses 4:1.

59. Doctrine and Covenants 29:36.

60. Moses 4:3.

61. Ephesians 6:12.

62. John 12:31.

63. 1 Nephi 14:11.

64. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 3 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 314–15.

65. Doctrine and Covenants 86:3.

66. Bruce R. McConkie, in *Conference Report*, Apr. 1980, 99.

67. Nephi was also given the same vision but was instructed not to document much of what he saw—that task fell to John (1 Nephi 14:24–28).

68. The Greek word *ekklesia*, and the Hebrew *qahal*, are both translated into modern language as "church" but are synonymous with "assembly"—a group of people

groups of people: the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of the devil. This divine duel unfolds with apocalyptic controversy in the pages of scripture. Unfortunately, John's writings are difficult to interpret, and thus difficult for many to apply to their modern circumstances. Though "plain and pure, and most precious and easy to the understanding of all men,"<sup>69</sup> when John had finished his task, a "great and abominable church" corrupted his words "that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men."<sup>70</sup> So who, or what, is this great and abominable church—the "whore of Babylon"?

Some religious leaders like Martin Luther and John Calvin have suggested that the evil force described in Revelation is the Roman Catholic church.<sup>71</sup> In contrast, one religious scholar argued, "No single known historical church, denomination, or set of believers meets all the requirements for the great and abominable church." He continued: "Rather, the role of Babylon has been played by many different agencies, ideologies, and churches in many different times."<sup>72</sup> But this vague interpretation of nameless and ever-changing actors is unsatisfying, for we cannot avoid a whore we do not recognize; we must know an enemy in order to defeat it.

Lucifer has been and continues to be that enemy. The whore persecutes and slays the saints,<sup>73</sup> seeks and uses wealth,<sup>74</sup> and has earthly dominion.<sup>75</sup> Nephi helps point out that the kingdom of the devil exists "to get gain . . . , to get power over the flesh, and . . . to become popular in the eyes of the world."<sup>76</sup> These are the characteristics of Caesar, and they are what the prince of this world offers. Indeed, we can substitute Caesar's name for the name of he who influences those who seek dominion over others:

- Satan demands loyalty.
- Satan asserts divinity or divine support.

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gathered, but not necessarily for religious purposes.

69. 1 Nephi 14:23.

70. 1 Nephi 13:26–27.

71. "The Time Is Near," Catholic Answers, accessed December 27, 2019, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/the-time-is-near>. Elder Bruce R. McConkie shared this view and published it in his book, *Mormon Doctrine*.

72. Stephen E. Robinson, "Warring against the Saints of God," *Ensign*, January 1988, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1988/01/warring-against-the-saints-of-god>.

73. 1 Nephi 13:5; Revelation 17:6; Revelation 18:24.

74. 1 Nephi 13:7–8; Revelation 17:4; Revelation 18:3, 11–16.

75. 1 Nephi 14:11; Revelation 17:15, 18; Revelation 18:3, 23–24.

76. 1 Nephi 22:23.

- Satan desires worship.
- Satan refuses to answer to a higher power.
- Satan offers protection from the enemy.
- Satan uses coercion.
- Satan seeks the praise of the world.

God's fallen son demands allegiance.<sup>77</sup> He claims to be a god,<sup>78</sup> able to save us,<sup>79</sup> and thus demands we worship him,<sup>80</sup> just as he demanded of Jesus.<sup>81</sup> He perceives himself the ruler of this world<sup>82</sup>—the highest power. He creates a false impression of protection, lulling us away with the prospect of “carnal security.”<sup>83</sup> He encourages murder and “all manner of secret works of darkness”<sup>84</sup> to get his way. He seeks for honor and praise.<sup>85</sup> And so, Caesar is Satan. Thus, the great contest is not between Christ and random rulers of earthly governments, but between Jehovah and Lucifer—the Son of God and the son of perdition. The war in heaven continues on earth today, and the prince of this world uses dictators and democratic rulers alike to pursue his ends.

With this context, it makes sense why Satan would seek to remove plain and precious parts of scripture that describe his activities, for an informed group of saints is better equipped to fight him and warn others to join them. We look to China with great alarm where Caesar is evidently forcing Christians to “adapt to socialist society” by retranslating scripture and injecting communist commentaries into the New Testament,<sup>86</sup> yet millions of Americans have passively accepted a similar precedent without even realizing it. The King James Version of the Bible is a product of similar Caesarean intervention; whereas the widely popular Geneva Bible contained commentaries and interpretations that educated the reader about concerns with political authority, the English Caesar at the time considered it “untrue, seditious, and savoring too much of dangerous and traitorous

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77. Helaman 6:21–26.

78. Moses 1:19; 5:13.

79. Moses 4:1.

80. Moses 6:49.

81. Luke 4:7.

82. Luke 4:6.

83. 2 Nephi 28:21–22.

84. 2 Nephi 9:9.

85. Isaiah 14:13–14.

86. “China Trying to ‘Rewrite the Bible,’ Force Churches to Sing Communist Anthems,” *The Christian Post*, accessed December 29, 2019, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/china-trying-to-rewrite-the-bible-force-churches-sing-communist-anthems.html>.

conceits.”<sup>87</sup> For example, a marginal note in Exodus praised the defiance of Pharaoh to preserve baby Moses’s life—an act worthy of one who follows God, but that cannot be tolerated by a competing Caesar. King James said of this note that “to disobey a king is not lawful” and that such “traitorous conceits should not go forth among the people.”<sup>88</sup> So the government helped organize and fund the creation of an approved Bible that would deny the people these commentaries so as to continue cultivating the “divine right of kings” and corrupt combination of church and state. Many Christians continue to use this Caesar-approved set of scriptures today.

But true Christians cannot tolerate any such combination; we must renounce all affiliation with the kingdom of the devil. Membership in God’s kingdom is exclusive and requires relinquishing membership in, and allegiance to, the enemy’s kingdom. Thus we read that

there are save two churches only; the one is the church of the Lamb of God, and the other is the church of the devil; wherefore, whoso belongeth not to the church of the Lamb of God belongeth to that great church, which is the mother of abominations; and she is the whore of all the earth.<sup>89</sup>

In other words, everyone who is not exclusively with the Lamb actually belongs to Satan’s kingdom.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, membership in Christ’s church does not mean that one is a member of God’s kingdom.<sup>91</sup> Saints can unwittingly (or intentionally) be on Team Caesar, if they are not careful.

Christ is clear about this. In one parable, He tells of a field of wheat suddenly having tares—vexatious weeds—sprouting up among the crop. “An enemy hath done this,” He said.<sup>92</sup> There are some among the wheat who are actually tares—“corruptions of the Church”<sup>93</sup> who profess membership in God’s kingdom. These tares are contaminating the field until the harvest.

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87. Cleland Boyd McAfee, *The Greatest English Classic: A Study of the King James Version of the Bible and its Influence on Life and Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1912), 53.

88. Ibid.

89. 1 Nephi 14:10.

90. Alma 5:39.

91. Robinson stated: “Just as there are Latter-day Saints who belong to the great and abominable church because of their loyalty to Satan and his life-style, so there are members of other churches who belong to the Lamb because of their loyalty to him and his life-style. Membership is based more on who has your heart than on who has your records.” Robinson, “Warring against the Saints of God.”

92. Matthew 13:24–30.

93. B.H. Roberts, ed., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1904), 267.



Similarly, and even more explicitly, the parable of the ten virgins points out that many who claim to be Christian do not sufficiently steer clear of the whore. All ten virgins received invitations to the marriage celebration, fully expecting to be allowed inside. Outwardly, they all appeared prepared and interested in the bridegroom—after all, they had gone through the motions of trimming their lamps once they had been notified of his arrival. But half of them were foolish and had not been sufficiently faithful. “Lord, Lord, open to us,” they begged. The Lord simply replied: “I know you not.”<sup>94</sup> Jesus taught this same concept in the Sermon on the Mount:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.<sup>95</sup>

It is a sad but simple truth that many Christians support institutions and efforts sponsored by Satan. His global whore is comprised of whoever “fighteth against Zion,” since, as God said, “they who are not for me are against me.”<sup>96</sup> Who fights against God by competing against him for our allegiance? Who claims power to rule, and dominion over the earth? Who aims to dethrone God to exalt himself for our worship? Caesar.

### *This Is the Way*

The followers Jesus attracted during his mortal ministry were not called Christians until years later in Antioch, as missionary work spread.<sup>97</sup> Previously, it appears that the manner of life practiced by disciples of Christ was simply called “the Way.” As Jesus taught his flock about his impending return to heaven, Doubting Thomas said, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” Jesus replied, “I am the way.”<sup>98</sup> This was taken at face value; the disciples came to understand that Christ’s teachings were a set of instructions for returning to God’s presence. Living

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94. Matthew 25:1–13.

95. Matthew 7:21–23.

96. 2 Nephi 10:16.

97. Acts 11:26.

98. John 14:5–6.

how God taught was literally “the way” back to heaven. It is no surprise, then, that this is what the life Christ requires of us came to be called. Paul mentions that he previously persecuted “this Way”—those practicing this lifestyle—unto death.<sup>99</sup> Later, once converted to it, he sought after those who “belonged to the Way”<sup>100</sup> so that he might gather them to Jerusalem. As missionary work spread, “there arose a great disturbance about the Way.”<sup>101</sup> Paul noted that the Jewish establishment considered “the Way” as “heresy,”<sup>102</sup> and Luke pointed out that the Roman governor at the time had a “knowledge of [the] Way.”<sup>103</sup> Christianity is not a set of doctrines to be read about in books of scripture and superficially pondered in sporadic religious services. It is the way we ought to live.

The Way of Christ may look odd to the rest of the world; Caesar’s followers are used to a different (and more popular) set of standards. Disciples of Jesus striving to be “in the world but not of the world” find themselves surrounded by a culture that enables and encourages the opposite of Christ’s teachings. The dominant culture, comprised of a shared set of attitudes, values, and practices that promote the cult of Caesar, is the problem.<sup>104</sup>

God’s people have long struggled to maintain a cohesive identity, and fidelity to God, while surrounded by cults. Time and again “they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in.”<sup>105</sup> But Christ’s kingdom is essentially counter-*cultural*—the true religion contrasted against the imposter cult and its would-be gods. Whereas Romans proclaimed their emperor as savior of the world and the prince of peace prior to Christ,<sup>106</sup> the disciples of Jesus appropriated these terms and applied them to the true Savior, for which Caesar was a mere counterfeit.

Jesus has set an example for us<sup>107</sup>—the Way we should follow. “That which ye have seen me do,” He said, “even that shall ye do.”<sup>108</sup> Like sheep,

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99. Acts 22:4; New International Version.

100. Acts 9:2; New International Version.

101. Acts 19:23; New International Version.

102. Acts 24:14; New International Version.

103. Acts 24:22; New International Version.

104. Both terms, *cult* and *culture*, come from the same Latin root, which means to “grow.”

105. Judges 2:17.

106. The imperial cult of Rome treated the emperor as a divine being—one to be worshiped and honored by his subjects. Caesar was showered with such titles as Savior of the World, Bringer of Peace, and Son of God.

107. 3 Nephi 18:16.

108. 3 Nephi 27:21.

we are to follow the Shepherd's Way.<sup>109</sup> More than mere actions to replicate, though, Christ's words leave would-be disciples with instructions which we must follow if we are to call ourselves disciples. Many profess "to know the Christ," yet "deny the more parts of his gospel."<sup>110</sup> What, then, does the gospel actually require of us that deviates from Caesar's cult and culture? If one were to follow "the Way" today, what would that look like?

These questions become easier to answer when considering an opposite question so we can know what to avoid: what do members of the "church of the devil" believe in and practice? After all, "if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that the devil is your shepherd, and ye are of his fold."<sup>111</sup> The devil's core doctrine is what Lucifer has long sought for—to destroy the agency of man.<sup>112</sup> Since the "war in heaven,"<sup>113</sup> he has lusted after God's power. He fashions himself a god—the prince of this world<sup>114</sup>—and uses the earth's resources and our fallen nature to command and control as if he were God. As the great imitator<sup>115</sup> who desires to be God,<sup>116</sup> he promises power and wealth<sup>117</sup> to those who do his bidding. But more than that—he promises what mankind has always sought after: security and salvation.

How exactly did Satan seek to destroy our agency? The gift of moral agency—to choose for ourselves and receive the consequences of our actions—requires three things: options from which to choose, freedom to choose between them, and consequence for our choice. Like a three-legged stool, agency can be weakened or destroyed (in theory) by attacking any one of the three. Contrary to what some have thought,<sup>118</sup> Satan does not seek to force us to be righteous; no scripture mentions this being the case. Thus, Lucifer's premortal proposal that allured a third of God's children<sup>119</sup> included the ability for individuals to disobey God. He did not aim to

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109. John 10:27.

110. 4 Nephi 1:27.

111. Alma 5:39.

112. Moses 4:3.

113. Revelation 12:7.

114. John 12:31.

115. James E. Faust, "The Great Imitator," *Ensign*, November 1987.

116. Isaiah 14:14.

117. Moses 5:31; 3 Nephi 6:15; Moses 6:15.

118. For more analysis of this position, see Connor Boyack, "A Widespread Misunderstanding About Satan's War on Agency," Connor's Conundrums, <http://www.connorboyack.com/blog/a-widespread-misunderstanding-about-satans-war-on-agency>.

119. Revelation 12:4; Doctrine and Covenants 29:36.

destroy agency by compelling only righteous behavior. Even Satan apparently recognized that mankind would need differing options and, accordingly, the freedom to choose between them. This is demonstrated further by Lucifer's claim to want to "redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost." Redemption implies a deviation from what God requires; to redeem is to rescue from bondage or regain possession of what was lost.<sup>120</sup> This would not be necessary under a system of coerced obedience to God, since there would be no redemption needed from wrong choices; Lucifer therefore was not attempting to destroy agency by removing options to choose from, or the ability to choose them. These aspects of agency would remain intact even under Lucifer's suggested alternative to God's plan.

This then leaves the final component of agency: consequence for our choice. This is the "eat, drink, and be merry"<sup>121</sup> option that we see throughout scripture.<sup>122</sup> Deviating from God is justified as a "little sin" that will be overlooked; "at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God," says the devil.<sup>123</sup> This was no doubt enticing to the premortal masses listening to Lucifer pitch a contrasting proposal. The ability to make whatever choice one wanted, and be saved nonetheless, was and remains tempting for many. Satan encourages people to follow him so they can do what they want to do and be held guiltless. It is the promise given to Cain,<sup>124</sup> and it is the offer that seduces all who belong to the devil's church.

God gave us agency so that we "may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity" in order to "be accountable for [our] own sins in the day of judgment."<sup>125</sup> Just as a hired agent is accountable to his employer for the agency given him—say, for example, signing a contract or completing a series of tasks—we are accountable to God for the agency we are given in this life. We are to worship Him and glorify His name only. We are to rely upon Him for our security and salvation, and not the arm of flesh. He is our king, not Caesar. But the history of the world provides us with ample evidence that mankind repeatedly falls short of this standard; wicked people want to escape accountability for their actions, like a rogue agent who wants to avoid reporting to his master that he did not follow instructions.

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120. See "Redeem," Webster's Dictionary 1828, accessed January 10, 2020, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/redeem>.

121. 2 Nephi 28:8.

122. Several examples will be provided later in the book.

123. 2 Nephi 28:8.

124. Moses 5:30–31.

125. Doctrine and Covenants 101:78.

This, then, brings focus to Satan's efforts today. The goal is not merely encouraging people to be sinful—telling a lie, having an affair, stealing from someone, and so forth. Rather, he persuades people to commit evil acts in pursuit of power and wealth while deceiving them into believing they can do so without consequence. He undermines agency by leading the agent to believe that he has no master who will one day hold him to account—rejecting such accountability “in an attempt to sedate his conscience.”<sup>126</sup> Rogue individuals, though, cannot dominate others without being held accountable. If you commit murder, chances are fairly certain you will be caught and imprisoned, and in some cases even executed. If you steal from others, they will sue you or call the police. If you try to physically control your neighbor's actions, he might physically push back in defense of your aggression. In short, a person who aims to coerce others will suffer the consequences.

But not if you represent Caesar.

Those who have the support—or control—of the state can “get away with murder,” both figuratively and literally. They can command people to kill others, take their property, control their actions, and coerce them in all manner of ways. They do so without apparent consequence; Caesar is the god that controls the actions of mankind. The prince of the world orders people around as he pleases.

The state, then, is the institutionalization of consequence-free coercion. It is the mortal mechanism through which Satan encourages his followers to seek power and wealth at others' expense.<sup>127</sup> He says, through Caesar, that we can disobey God's commands and still be legally compliant, and therefore culturally accepted. Good is called evil, and evil good.<sup>128</sup> This satanic domination of government, present in our day, also existed in the past. It is the reason that at least two previous societies effectively imploded.<sup>129</sup> We

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126. Lynn G. Robbins, “Be 100 Percent Responsible,” BYU Devotional, August 22, 2017, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/lynn-g-robbins/be-100-percent-responsible/>.

127. “Those [two contending] forces are known and have been designated by different terms throughout the ages. ‘In the beginning’ they were known as Satan on the one hand, and Christ on the other . . . . In these days, they are called ‘domination by the state,’ on one hand, ‘personal liberty,’ on the other.” David O. McKay, “Two Contending Forces,” Brigham Young University, May 18, 1960.

128. Isaiah 5:20.

129. Both the Jaredite and the Nephite nations were destroyed because of the secret combinations of conspiring individuals who gained control of the government and oppressed God's people. See Helaman 2:13–14; Ether 8:21. These stories will be analyzed later in the book.

have been warned to avoid them in our day,<sup>130</sup> yet many Christians continue to support Caesar, and thus the satanic influences that follow.

The Way requires rejecting the counterfeit of Christ, and therefore renouncing any affiliation with the great and abominable church. As agents of God, the Way requires us to be held accountable for our actions, serving our King and doing whatever He has commanded. And as will be later discussed, Christ's teachings also suggest that the Way requires:

- Loyalty only to God, therefore no oaths or pledges of allegiance to Caesar in any fashion.
- Loving those who attack us, therefore not using military forces to wage war against them.
- Leadership through serving others, not exercising political power over them.
- Submission to true law, but not necessarily to whatever edicts a political authority may decree.
- Pursuing societal change through persuasion, not coercion.
- Rejecting the state, which institutionalizes coercion against others.

Ideas such as these are controversial for some, yet that is perhaps because we Christians have become such comfortable Caesareans that we are no longer practicing the Way. The Savior's words deserve to be taken seriously by those who claim to follow Him, yet we embrace the ones that are convenient while dancing around or altogether ignoring those that are culturally unpopular.

At the dawn of the restitution of all things,<sup>131</sup> God took stock of the state of affairs and had this sour note to sing about His children: "They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol."<sup>132</sup>

Satan is the prince of this world—the idol in whose image mortal counterfeits attempt to replace God. Caesar is the means through which he operates in this world. The state is the system through which he pursues his ancient agenda of corrupting God's people. He wants "to deceive and to blind men"<sup>133</sup> to the fact that they are members of his church—that they are flirting with the promise made to Cain,<sup>134</sup> and worshiping Caesar while attempting

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130. Ether 8:23.

131. Acts 3:21.

132. Doctrine and Covenants 1:16.

133. Moses 4:4.

134. Moses 5:31.

to court Christ in the same breath. This is how Satan operates “under such perfect disguise that many do not recognize either him or his methods.”<sup>135</sup> God was not referring to a world of atheists when describing those who “seek not the Lord.” He described a largely Christian society that had become deceived by the prince of this world, and who had fashioned themselves a god in his likeness. This Caesarean corruption is how we worship idols without realizing it—not in overtly pagan fashion, with golden creations which we publicly praise, but by rejecting the Way of Christ. Like God’s people long before us, we profess to follow Him while instead embracing the world’s way.

“Wide is the gate, and broad is the way,” Jesus taught, “that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.”<sup>136</sup> This need not be our fate. Our agency allows us to choose the way we will pursue, but choose we must.

### *Two Masters, One Choice*

After Christ’s crucifixion, the Sadducees schemed how to snuff out the remainder of His subversive sect. “Let us straitly threaten them,” they said, “that they speak henceforth to no man in [Christ’s] name.”<sup>137</sup> And that is what they did. But Peter and his fellow followers of the now-resurrected Lord continued defying the whore’s demands to stop preaching and gathering; missionary work continued, as did the miracles. In response, the high priest and his fellow council members, part of the sociopolitical elite, “were filled with indignation” and ordered the religious renegades to be seized and imprisoned.<sup>138</sup>

After being released by an angel and continuing their ministry, the apostles were once again brought before the council. Peter was questioned as to why he had defied their threats. “Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in [Christ’s] name?” Peter’s response provides the theological foundation upon which Christians have defied Caesar in succeeding centuries: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”<sup>139</sup> This continued a long tradition of fidelity to God despite defying the state: Moses’s life was spared by such defiance,<sup>140</sup> and he later defied Pharaoh;<sup>141</sup> Jeremiah rebuked Jehoiakim;<sup>142</sup>

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135. See *Messages of the First Presidency*, vol. 6 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), 179.

136. Matthew 7:13.

137. Acts 4:17.

138. Acts 5:17–18.

139. Acts 5:29.

140. Exodus 1:22; 2:2.

141. Exodus 7–10.

142. Jeremiah 22:13–19.

Mary and Joseph fled from Herod's murderous mandate;<sup>143</sup> Daniel rejected King Darius's anti-prayer decree;<sup>144</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego chose God over Nebuchadnezzar;<sup>145</sup> and many other examples likewise affirm that worldly powers—wickedness encouraged and coordinated by the devil—fight against God. One scriptural story after another elevates prophetic heroes in the reader's eyes specifically because they rebelled against the Caesar of their day.

Those who would follow Christ must renounce the world and its prince. Jesus told His disciples that each person must “deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”<sup>146</sup> But what does it mean to take up His cross? It is to “deny [ourselves] all ungodliness, and every worldly lust.”<sup>147</sup> We are to reject Christ's counterfeit and the mortal temptations of power and wealth that Caesar represents and utilizes. He then tells us to “forsake the world, and save your souls.”<sup>148</sup> We cannot embrace Caesar and the satanic influences he manifests without corrupting ourselves. Following Jesus means leaving the world behind and avoiding all the related traditions and institutions that compete against Christ for our loyalty.

Both Christ and Caesar demand our allegiance. The great and abominable church—the great whore, or the organized oppression of men by one another through earthly rulers and political institutions—does not tolerate individuals who pledge allegiance to God and claim citizenship in His kingdom alone. And for all the praiseworthy examples from scripture cited earlier, there are also many failures. God's people have long been seduced by their various Caesars and often choose to flirt with the whore. In Christ's case, it was the establishment leadership—the chief priests—who called for His murder while in the same breath shouting, “We have no king but Caesar.”<sup>149</sup> In earlier times, the children of Israel outright rejected<sup>150</sup> God by demanding a king so that they would “be like all the nations.” They did not want God to be their protector; they preferred that His fallen prince be the one to “judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.”<sup>151</sup> Samuel had warned them of what would come from embracing mortal rulers,<sup>152</sup> and

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143. Matthew 2:13.

144. Daniel 6:7–10.

145. Daniel 3:4–6, 12.

146. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 16:25.

147. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 16:26.

148. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 16:29.

149. John 19:15

150. 1 Samuel 8:7.

151. 1 Samuel 8:5, 19–20.

152. 1 Samuel 8:11–18.



went so far as to call down “thunder and rain” to ruin their wheat harvest in order to demonstrate God’s displeasure at their demands.<sup>153</sup> Prior to this, Israel attributed to Gideon, rather than God, their spectacular saving from the Midianites. To Gideon they said, “Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.”<sup>154</sup> But Gideon refused, rightly rebuking them. “I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you.”<sup>155</sup> But once Gideon died, his wicked son offered to fulfill their wish.<sup>156</sup> The would-be king murdered dozens of his siblings to eliminate their competing claims to his newly established throne, which the Israelites conferred on him.<sup>157</sup> Across the ocean, the new Jaredite settlement faced—and failed to resist—the same temptation. As the patriarchs prepared to die, they gathered their family together to inquire what they wanted of them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the trend, “the people desired of them that they should anoint one of their sons to be a king over them.” This response was “grievous” to the patriarch prophets. The brother of Jared noted, as did Samuel to the children of Israel, “Surely this thing leadeth into captivity.”<sup>158</sup>

The tension between Christ and his counterfeit is also demonstrated in the story of King Ahab, the unfaithful Caesar who corrupted the children of Israel by promoting the worship of the pagan god Baal in their community. He and his wife exterminated God’s prophets in hopes of eliminating the competing faith.<sup>159</sup> Elijah, a prophet who evaded their murderous attacks, used God’s power to bring a three-and-a-half year drought upon Israel in judgment for their wickedness.<sup>160</sup> Toward the end, he challenged Ahab in a prophetic duel at Mount Carmel to demonstrate the counterfeit nature of the Baal worship that plagued God’s people. Four hundred fifty false prophets among the children of Israel converged, against the lone Elijah, to try to demonstrate their power. “How long halt ye between two opinions?” Elijah challenged them. “If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.” He challenged the people to stop their polluted mixture of following both God and false idols.<sup>161</sup> Yet their response was revealing: “And

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153. 1 Samuel 12:17.

154. Judges 8:22.

155. Judges 8:23.

156. Judges 9:1–2.

157. Judges 9:5–6.

158. Ether 6:22–23.

159. 1 Kings 18:13.

160. 1 Kings 17:1.

161. 1 and 2 Kings contains several examples of kings doing things that were “right in

the people answered him not a word.”<sup>162</sup> Put differently, “the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center.”<sup>163</sup>

We may read such stories and feel proud of ourselves for avoiding pagan idols, but this is foolish; our society is as susceptible to supporting Satan, through his modern Caesars, as our brothers and sisters of old were susceptible to their Caesars’ wiles. Dismissing the apparent naiveté of our predecessors is not only unproductive, but it may cause us to fail to recognize and reject current counterfeits. Indeed, the broad appeal of modern secular humanism,<sup>164</sup> in substance, if not in name, offers ample evidence that today’s culture is just as guilty of chasing idols;<sup>165</sup> men continue to worship the work of their own hands.<sup>166</sup> The modern state is itself a counterfeit religion with its attending rituals, requisite sacrifices, scripture, authorities, seminaries, and more. The state is, and long has been, Satan’s domain through which to tempt God’s children to worship him. The effort to centralize power under political mediators is therefore a rejection of God.<sup>167</sup> Political power itself rests on distrust of God; we seek to do through the state that which we are unwilling to leave to God.

Just as righteous kings failed to tear down pagan sites of worship,<sup>168</sup> continuing to infect God’s people, today many of us pursue a tainted worship of Christ that allows for and accommodates Caesar’s influence in our lives. We pledge allegiance to both, constructing a syncretic religion that results in us drawing nigh unto God with our mouths, and honoring Him with our lips, while our hearts are far from Him.<sup>169</sup> God calls this “vain worship.”<sup>170</sup> If more

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the eyes of the Lord,” yet these kings did not remove “the high places,” a reference to pagan worship sites at which sacrifices were made and incense burnt. See, for example: 1 Kings 15:9–14; 22:41–43; 2 Kings 12:1–3; 14:1–4; 15:1–4; 15:32–35. The answer as to why otherwise righteous kings did not remove these sites may be that the religion had become so corrupted that the Israelites believed that Baal worship was one and the same with worshiping Jehovah; the religions had fused to accommodate the surrounding culture, of which the Israelites were a part. And on that basis, the Israelites had fallen into apostasy, despite believing themselves faithful. For additional analysis, see Stephen C. Perks, *Baal Worship: Ancient and Modern* (Taunton: Kuyper Foundation, 2010).

162. 1 Kings 18:21.

163. 1 Nephi 16:2.

164. Secular humanism is an atheist philosophy in which man is glorified as the author of his own destiny.

165. Doctrine and Covenants 1:16.

166. Isaiah 2:8; Micah 5:13; 2 Nephi 20:13.

167. As this book will later explore, the Book of Mormon provides ample evidence of this.

168. See footnote 190.

169. Matthew 15:8.

170. Matthew 15:9.

Christians rejected Caesar and abstained from participating in counterfeit statist practices, it is likely that those who worship in vain would look upon them with disdain and scorn. Just as prophets of old were ignored, attacked, or even killed for pointing out the corrupt religious beliefs of their community, those who follow the same course today are likely to be shunned by modern society—including those who profess to follow Christ.

While followers of the Way were “counted public enemies” because “they pay no vain, nor false, nor foolish honors to the emperor,”<sup>171</sup> modern Christians have been plagued by their collusion with Caesar. When we divorce Jesus from his revolutionary ideas on alternative social systems, we inevitably segment His teachings into different categories that we selectively adopt to fit our needs. Indeed, the temptation becomes to conform Jesus to our ideas rather than ours to His, leading Caesareans to imply a divine endorsement for their statist creeds; worship turns vain, and we “teach for doctrines the commandments of men.”<sup>172</sup> It may happen subconsciously and unintentionally, but it happens all the same; Christ’s counsel is ignored or warped to support war and violence, and the paternalistic control of one group of people by another. We seek after, and thus create, a god who endorses our idea on how the world ought to be run. Christ becomes a mere caricature, His teachings idolatrously intertwined with Caesar’s to be culturally accommodating and appealing.

The scriptures are clear about this eternal contest, and one must choose sides.<sup>173</sup> We can either place our trust and have faith in God’s law of love or in the coercive and human state—but not both. We either follow His commandments and rely upon Him to resolve our conflicts or we trust the arm of flesh<sup>174</sup> and praise mortal strength for our protection.<sup>175</sup> We are called to be “strangers and pilgrims”<sup>176</sup> in the world—not seduced into supporting its fallen prince. “No man can serve two masters,” Jesus taught, “for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.”<sup>177</sup> We therefore must choose Jesus only—and not, as many do, be content with Christ with a side of Caesar. “Put away the gods

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171. Tertullian, as quoted in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol XI (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), 113.

172. Ibid.

173. Revelation 3:16.

174. 2 Nephi 4:34; Jeremiah 17:5.

175. Deuteronomy 8.

176. 1 Peter 2:11.

177. Matthew 6:24; note that Mammon may also reference Caesar, because the coinage of the time bore his image and served to further deify him as a competing, idolatrous god.

which your fathers served,” the prophet Joshua proclaimed to the children of Israel. “Choose you this day whom ye will serve.”<sup>178</sup>

Between these two masters—Christ and His counterfeit—we must ultimately choose. But can we choose if we do not understand the choice? If we do not recognize the counterfeit, can we understand it? It is perhaps for this reason that, “with great earnestness,” we should “waste and wear out our lives in bringing to light all the hidden things of darkness,”<sup>179</sup> in order to help others see and avoid the pitfalls that have plagued God’s people for millennia. Many Christians continue to stumble “because they are taught by the precepts of men,”<sup>180</sup> as if “they are walking in darkness at noon-day”<sup>181</sup>—as good a description as any for Christians who fail to understand the problems with supporting Caesar. The faithful must shake off these chains<sup>182</sup> of ignorance, for we are commanded to “contend against . . . the church of the devil.”<sup>183</sup> It is a fight of eternal importance, and befriending the enemy is not a winning strategy.

No more excuses. No more flirting with the whore and halting between two opinions. It is time for the followers of Christ to abandon their summer cottage in Babylon, shake off the statist counterfeit religion, and choose only Him.

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178. Joshua 24:14–15.

179. Doctrine and Covenants 123:13–14.

180. 2 Nephi 28:14.

181. Doctrine and Covenants 95:6.

182. 2 Nephi 1:13.

183. Doctrine and Covenants 18:20; 84:117.