

# Editorial: Government should not unite the U.S. under ‘one God’

September 21, 2016

Why should Christians be concerned about the United States uniting under “one God”?



Marv Knox If Americans can agree on anything—and it seems we disagree on everything—it’s the notion division is tearing our nation to shreds. Unity would provide a healing step forward. Unity would be wonderful.

And since Christians comprise a majority of Americans, then any uniting we might do under “one God” would be uniting under our God. We’re talking about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, revealed to us in the incarnation of Jesus, still experienced through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

So, “one God” is our God. Majority still rules, right?

Well, wrong. And we’ll get to the reasons in a minute.

**“... under one God”**

You might be wondering where the idea of uniting under “one God” came

from. It sounds vaguely familiar, doesn't it? Start mouthing the Pledge of Allegiance, "... and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible ...." Oh, yeah. That's it.

No, wait. "... one nation under God ...." Yes, the Pledge mentions unity "under God" but not under "one God."

So, where did the notion of uniting under "one God" come from? You get 10 guesses, and if none include "the presidential campaign trail," then start over and try again.

"Imagine what our country could accomplish if we started working together as one people, under one God, saluting one flag," [Donald Trump told participants at the recent Values Voters Summit.](#)

That quote is a variation on a theme the Republican candidate has been repeating since early this month, [the Huffington Post reported.](#) Trump echoed it in speeches in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Florida and the District of Columbia.

### **Sounds good, but ...**

Proclamation of "one God" holds compelling power, particularly for Jews and Christians. Our Scriptures repeatedly teach the essential unity—the oneness—of our God. Moreover, they decry the idea of multiple gods and condemn idols and false gods. We are people who serve the one God.

So, you can surmise that politicians who promise to unite our nation under one God speak authentically and powerfully, don't they? Well, only if you checked your brain in the fridge where they stored the Vacation Bible School treats and never, ever paid attention in Sunday school.

Politicians—particularly presidential aspirants—who pledge to unite all Americans under "one God" are exercising poor New Testament

interpretation, bad theology, historical ignorance, aversion to the heritage of Baptist Christians and frightful politics.

### **God's way is not coercive**

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus first and then the early church refused to coerce people to follow him. Jesus began his ministry by resisting temptations that would have overridden people's free will. Throughout his ministry, he told amazed miracle witnesses to "tell no one," lest others jump on his bandwagon without thoughtful, personal reflection. And even at the end of his ministry, he refused force that could have been his in an instant. The church mirrored its Lord, growing through weakness and humility, not strength and force.

Jesus and the church behaved as they did because that's how God intended. From Genesis through Revelation, the Bible reveals God to woo, not force, God's followers. God creates all people with free will and refuses to violate that will. To be authentic, faith must be free. And any form of coercion—from the power of the state or the crush of peer pressure—violates the essential freedom God implants in every soul.

History validates this theology, particularly from the inverse. Our Founding Fathers witnessed the horror of religious wars engaged by state-sponsored churches. They recognized the evil of forced conformity. And so they guaranteed religious liberty—not by setting up state-sponsored religion, but by creating a secular democracy in which all faiths and no faith are protected equally. By creating separation of church and state, they created the most fertile field for faith the world ever has experienced.

### **Champions of liberty**

Baptists have been champions of absolute religious liberty and church-state separation. From the colonial creation of Rhode Island, to the adoption of the First Amendment, to the contemporary advocacy for freedom for all

faiths and no faiths, Baptists have led the way. The notion of government rallying all Americans to unite under one God—our God, Whom we love and Whom we wish all people would love, too—violates the essential tenets of Baptist doctrine and heritage.

And the idea of the government advocating only one concept of religious belief should scare every thinking American. It's a step onto a slippery slope that descends to the cobblestone streets of 1930s Germany, the horrible gulag of the Soviet Union and the crammed cities of today's China. In those places and more, only one view of religion was/is acceptable, and horror reigns.

The specter of coercive religion already hangs over our nation. [Americans are more divided by religion than by race](#). Sadly, [hate crimes against Muslims are higher now](#) than at any time in the post-9/11 era.

As evangelistic Christians, we desire all people to unite in their love for and acceptance of Jesus. But even the notion of doing so through pressure and coercion violates Scripture, theology, history and centuries of heritage. If we want people to follow Jesus, our only authentic power is the power Jesus wielded—self-sacrificing love.

Forcing Americans to unite under “one God” is an awful idea whose time never will come.

**Follow Marv on Twitter: [@marvknox](#)**