

With Successful Test Launch of New ICBM, Russia Threatens Nations That Assist Ukraine

The Wired Word for the Week of May 8, 2022

In the News

On Friday, April 29, just nine days after Russia successfully test-launched its Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile, Russian propagandist Olga Skabeeva, State Duma deputy Alexei Zhuravlev and State Duma deputy Yevgeny Popov discussed, on the state-owned Russian television channel "Russia 1," how many seconds a Sarmat missile would take to reach the capitals of Great Britain, Germany and France -- all countries that are supplying weapons to Ukraine.

"One Sarmat and that's it," said Zhuravlev. "The British Isles existed once, the British Isles don't exist anymore. I'm serious."

Popov then pointed out that Britain also has nuclear weapons, and if a Sarmat missile is used, "no one will survive" in this war, "no one will be [left] on the planet."

"We'll start over, from scratch," commented Skabeeva. She said that the flight time of the Sarmat from Kaliningrad to Berlin is 106 seconds, from Kaliningrad to Paris is 200 seconds and from Kaliningrad to London is 202 seconds.

A corresponding picture was shown on air with the caption: "The flight time of the RS-28 Sarmat missiles to the capitals of the countries that supply Ukraine with the most weapons."

"[The Western countries] should also be shown this picture," Zhuravlev said. "Count every second. What will you have time for? Hello, everything has arrived."

According to Wikipedia.com, the Sarmat is capable of carrying 10-15 (depending upon size) independently guided nuclear warheads or an unknown number of hypersonic glide vehicles. As an ICBM, its range is estimated to be about 11,000 miles -- enough to reach the United States. Its first test flight was conducted last month, and Russia hopes to have it operational by the end of this year, with 20 missile regiments operational by 2027. The missile is liquid fueled, making it less useful as a "second strike" weapon.

Most U.S. analysts depicted the test as "nuclear saber-rattling" by Russian President Vladimir Putin to distract his domestic audience from his country's recent military failures in Ukraine. These analysts said the threat to the United States or its allies is "extremely low."

On the other hand, the Russian declarations are in line with the declaration of Russian Foreign Minister (equivalent to our Secretary of State) Sergey Lavrov that the threat of nuclear war "should not be underestimated." Russian troops regularly train under the assumption that tactical nuclear weapons are used, and some analysts believe that the Russian use of tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine becomes more likely as Russian victory continues to be blocked and

Ukraine continues to launch counterattacks on Russian territory. These statements are thus in line with application of the military concept of "Escalate to De-escalate."

In this case, that means escalating to nuclear weapons on the Ukrainian battlefield to gain military success. Attacks on depots in NATO territories that are supplying arms to Ukraine would also fall under this concept. These attacks would at the same time serve as a warning that any effort to prevent Russian victory in Ukraine could lead to a full-scale nuclear war between Russia and the United States, Great Britain and (possibly) France. While the United States has a nuclear deterrent force, the country's leaders would then be faced with a choice: honor its NATO obligations -- and risk a nuclear attack on the homeland -- or back off, allowing a Russian victory and, in all likelihood, future Russian aggression.

In any case, no analyst puts the threat at zero.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[On Russian TV, European Countries Are Threatened With a Nuclear Strike for Assisting Ukraine. *Ukrayinska Pravda*](#)
[Putin Test-Launches 'Satan 2' Nuclear Missile to Make West 'Think Twice.' *New York Post*](#)
[Putin Rattles His 'Satan II' Nuclear Saber to Hide Russian Failures in Ukraine War: Analysts. *CNN*](#)

The Big Questions

1. How should we go about our lives as people of faith in a dangerous world? How do you respond when you feel threatened? Why?

2. Fear is often the central theme that drives a lot of news coverage: fear of war, fear of terrorism, fear of global warming, fear of economic disaster, fear of job loss, fear of victimization from crime, fear of pandemic and so forth. In what ways is

Christianity a different response to those things? What are its central themes when it comes to threatening situations?

3. How does Christ's instruction to love our enemies apply to people/groups/nations that issue threats?

4. Why are some people naturally worriers and others naturally carefree? Does either attitude reflect anything about that person's faith? If so, what?

5. Where would Christianity be today if the apostles had let their fears control them? (See [Acts 4:29-31.](#))

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Psalm 23:5

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies ... (For context, read [Psalm 23:1-6.](#))

Psalm 23 comes out of the Middle Eastern world, where in biblical times, there were some strong traditions about hospitality. For example, a man being pursued by enemies could run to someone's tent and, even if that were the tent of a foe, he could ask for refuge. Custom dictated that the tent owner not only take that person in, but also prepare a meal for him. His enemies could stand and glare outside the tent, but could do no more as long as the pursued person remained inside. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies."

In World War II, during the bombing of London by the Nazi regime, this verse from Psalm 23 was a favorite one for Communion services -- even in one instance while part of the church was hit while the service continued. The Lord's Supper was God's table spread for worshipers, and it continued to nourish them spiritually even while their city was under attack.

There are also parallels in the natural world. During times of drought, animals that are normally predator and prey, such as the lion and the gazelle, can sometimes be seen drinking at the same time from scarce water holes. The common problem they face, needing water, seems to impose a sort of truce on them, and the available water becomes the table spread in the presence of enemies.

Questions: In what literal ways does God spread a table before us even in the presence of enemies? In what spiritual ways does God spread a table before us? What is our obligation, if any, toward those whose tables contain less than ours?

Hebrews 12:28

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; ... (For context, read [Hebrews 12:25-29.](#))

In the verses immediately preceding verse 28, the author of Hebrews talks about God's voice shaking the earth. Then he quotes God as saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven." The writer goes on to say that this "indicates the removal of what is shaken -- that is, created things -- so that what cannot be shaken" -- i.e. the kingdom of God -- "will remain." He adds "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks," ...

The writer's point here is that there is no guarantee that the earth or the things on it will remain steady and survive forever. Life, in fact, is constantly being shaken up. But these verses from Hebrews remind us that God's kingdom, the realm where Christians have their other citizenship, cannot be shaken or destroyed. And by extension, that means that we have a haven of ultimate security.

Questions: To what degree, if any, does the promise of an unshakeable kingdom to come at the end of time help you deal with present fears in this world? To what degree should it help?

Matthew 10:28

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (For context, read [Matthew 10:1, 16-31](#).)

This verse is part of a passage where Jesus is preparing the Twelve to go out on a teaching and healing mission throughout Israel. As part of their preparation, Jesus warns them about persecution they may encounter. Jesus assures them that those who, despite persecution, remain faithful to the end "will be saved" (v. 22). That is, though they may not be rescued from the persecution, their spiritual survival is guaranteed. That eventually leads to the comment in verse 28, that the disciples should not focus on temporal fears, but instead have an eye on eternity.

In the context of the text, Jesus' remarks are aimed at helping these disciples fulfill their mission of proclaiming the gospel. He did not want them to hesitate to speak out due to fear of bearing public witness. In essence, however, Jesus' comment is about preferring eternal security over temporal security when the two are in conflict.

Questions: In what ways do Jesus' remarks to his disciples in the specific situation of the mission journey apply to the larger context of our lives as Christians? In what ways do his remarks speak to our fears about earthbound threats?

Romans 8:38-39

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (For context, read [Romans 8:31-39](#).)

This statement is part of Paul's great testimony of faith to the Christians in Rome about all the forces that threaten people in this life. Paul begins that list in verse 35: "hardship ... distress ... persecution ... famine ..." In verse 36, he interrupts the list to quote Psalm 44:22 to show that hardships and other difficulties have always pursued the faithful. In verse 37, he makes an affirmative statement about the way Christ's love enables the faithful afflicted ones to hold on. Then, in verse 38, Paul resumes the list of threats: "death ... life ... angels ... rulers, ..." *Not one of these alone, nor all together, can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus.*

Questions: How, if at all, does Paul's testimony in these verses ring true for you? When has it been hardest for you to believe these verses? How might your group pray specifically for you this week?

For Further Discussion

1. Respond to these comments of TWW team member Frank Ramirez regarding the Russian broadcast described in the "In the News" section above: "Regarding existential threat -- it's not always clear how serious the threat is, but we can feel the threat deeply. 9/11 was a terrible day in American history when around 3,000 Americans were lost. Only a few years before, around a million Rwandans, with the full support of some pastors, were murdered one by one, close at hand, often close up and personal with machetes.

"You can't compare the level of pain people feel, but the existential threat of a lone successful terrorist attack, with nothing on that scale repeated on our shores, [perhaps gives us some sense of how] the Mutually Assured Destruction would be experienced if a nuclear war were to begin in Europe. It's hard to know if the 'banter' quoted on this [Russian] show was meant as a serious threat, or the equivalent of saying 'Boo!' to get a rise out of someone.

"I think [we] ought to respond to this threat by emphasizing, more than ever, ways in which we can contribute to the kingdom of God. Churches can explore how to help refugees with relocation, support feeding the hungry, support their denomination's work in Ukraine, and in other war-torn areas of the world, and of course pray without ceasing."

2. Jesus said, "Pray for those who persecute you." For what specifically should we ask when praying for warmongers? How does Christ's instruction to love our enemies apply to those who attack others? What does loving one's enemies mean in terms of resisting them?

3. Read [Esther 4:6-17](#) and discuss Esther's response to the possible threat to her life.

Responding to the News

Consider the ideas for responding in the third paragraph of Frank Ramirez's entry in the "For Further Discussion" above.

Prayer

O God, we pray that the hope that is ours through faith in Christ will enable us to speak that hope to the world, even in times of threat. Please grant wisdom, courage and perseverance to all who work for peace and justice. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Other News This Week

Russian Church-State Partnership Divides the Faithful

The Wired Word for the Week of May 8, 2022

In the News

Some Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) congregations in the Russian diaspora are leaving the ROC over its support of Russian President Vladimir Putin's attack on Ukraine. This follows hundreds of ROC congregations in Ukraine which have left the ROC to affiliate with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which has been recognized as self-governing (autocephalous) by most other Eastern Orthodox churches. Andrey Sinitsyn, a Russian living in Italy, worships at one of the churches that have broken ties with the Moscow patriarchate and are realigning with the Orthodox Church based in Istanbul, whose leader opposes Russian aggression.

"Kirill [Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus' and Primate of the ROC since 2009] got too close to the government," Sinitsyn says. "It's unacceptable. The church should be independent."

Sergei Chapnin, who once worked for Kirill, said the patriarch is after "power and influence, but because of the war, he actually loses it."

Fr. Ioann Burdin, a priest from a parish outside Moscow, said it isn't only Ukrainians who are jumping ship; people in Russia are also leaving the church in protest over Putin's war, which has forced nearly 8 million Ukrainians from their homes. At great personal risk, hundreds of Russian Orthodox clerics signed a letter calling for an end to the war. Burdin was interrogated, fined and threatened with legal action after he described Russian military movements as "fratricidal conflict."

Global affairs columnist, Janine di Giovanni, of *Foreign Policy*, writes, "Putin has woven nationalism, faith, conservative values, and the restoration of the *Russky mir* ('Russian world')." She calls Kirill Putin's wingman. Kirill characterized the rise in authoritarianism in Russia as "a miracle of God." Both men have publicly supported each other's rise to power in their respective spheres of influence. Some might find the body language of the men in [the photo in this article](#) revealing, as it appears to show Kirill bowing to Putin.

In Putin's hometown of St. Petersburg, the Russian president has been depicted as an angel blessing the city and as a Roman emperor. Some ROC sects even pray to Putin, whom they exalt as a kind of patron saint or the reincarnation of the apostle Paul. Many Russians see Putin as the nation's spiritual father, sent by God to Russia as a kind of messiah. One senior Russian government official declared last year that "If there's Putin -- there's Russia, if there's no Putin -- there's no Russia."

Speaking at a March rally in Moscow to celebrate the anniversary of the annexation of Crimea eight years ago, Putin said his motive was "to liberate people from the genocide ... in Donbass and in Ukraine," adding his version of Jesus' words from John 15:13, "there's no other love other than if someone that gives their soul for their friends."

According to Fr. Cyrill Hovorun, a University College Stockholm professor who used to work in the Moscow patriarchate, Putin is supplying the guns for the attack, while "the church is the main supplier of the ideology" he uses to justify his actions.

Patriarch Kirill has characterized the Russian invasion of its neighbor as a holy war against an evil and morally corrupt West with its "excess consumption" and "gay pride parades" that could lead to an "apocalypse." In a March sermon, Kirill said that nothing less than "human salvation" is at stake. Under these circumstances, there could be no doubt in his mind that God is on the side of Russia.

Kirill has trumpeted Russian propaganda that Ukraine wants to eradicate Orthodox Christianity and has committed "genocide" against ethnic Russians in Ukraine's Donbas region. He has also parroted the Kremlin's line that Ukraine is a part of the ROC's "canonic territory," that Ukraine is part of Russia, which poses no military threat to anyone. Even after the Bucha massacre on April 3, Kirill praised Russian soldiers and insisted that Russia is "peaceful."

Paul Coyer, a contributor to *Forbes Magazine*, wrote in 2015 that the ROC played a critical role in "publicly conflating the mission of the Russian state under Vladimir Putin's leadership with the mission of the Church." The patriarch and president have worked closely together, Coyer said, "to sacralize the Russian national identity ... based upon a shared, theologically-informed vision of Russian exceptionalism" that was used in the past to bolster the rule of "the Holy Orthodox Czar."

Tatiana Bondarenko, a 53-year-old Ukrainian Orthodox Christian, lost her home in Donetsk in the 2014 war, and her husband, who was killed in the current conflict in Mariupol in March. Homeless again, Bondarenko said, "Please, my God, Patriarch Kirill has blessed this war, he is not the one who has a moral right to tell us that 'God is love,'" her eyes flooding with tears. "He has blessed Putin's friend, commander [Victor] Zolotov and the Russian soldiers to kill us, Orthodox believers of Ukraine."

Ukrainian Orthodox Church clergy are calling for an international ecclesiastical tribunal to hold Kirill accountable for what they term the "heresy" of blessing "the physical destruction of his flock by Russian troops."

"We ... can't continue to remain in any form of canonical subordination to the Moscow patriarch. This is a command of our Christian conscience."

Russian pastor Andre Furmanov told *World* correspondent Jill Nelson that religious minorities in Russia face hostility from the ROC as well as from the government. "My church, we literally have been kicked out of every place we ever rented. We bought a place and it was destroyed by the pro Orthodox extremists who would actually call us extremists," he said. Some pastors have been arrested and churches raided, as efforts to curb dissent have increased, he added.

More than 15,000 anti-war protesters have been arrested since the war against Ukraine picked up momentum in February. Anyone who describes the military operation in negative terms faces a possible 15-year prison sentence. Under such circumstances, it isn't easy to fight state-sponsored repression, Furmanov stressed, but he wants Ukrainians to know that Russians love them and pray for them, and that they are trying to counteract the false narratives promoted by the government and the official church dogma.

"The responsibility of what is happening now lies on all of us," the Russian priest, Burdin, said.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Putin's War Creates Schism in Russian Orthodox Church \(Video 5:21\). CBS News](#)
[Patriarch Kirill of Moscow. Wikipedia](#)

[\(Un\)Holy Alliance: Vladimir Putin, The Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Exceptionalism. Forbes](#)

[United in Faith, Divided by War. World](#)

[Patriarch Kirill / A Former KGB Spy & Spiritual Guru Is the Driving Force Behind Putin's Ukraine War \(Video 8:28\). CRUX](#)

The Big Questions

1. Where do you see evidence of "unholy alliances" between government agents and religious figures in the Bible? Where have alliances between government and religion in the Bible been more positive?
2. What factors contribute to unhealthy church-state relationships, and how can those factors be minimized?
3. How might church-state partnerships be formed that could be beneficial to society, as well as useful to religious and governmental organizations?
4. How should church leaders hold themselves and one another accountable to teach the truth and to live out the ethics of Jesus Christ?
5. When church leaders betray the Lord and fail to protect those under their care, what should the people of God do?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Mark 12:13, 17

Then [the chief priests, the scribes and the elders] sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. ... Jesus said to them, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were utterly amazed at him. (For context, read [Mark 11:27-33](#); [12:1-17](#).)

Shakespeare's phrase, "Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows," from *The Tempest*, has been reworded in recent years to read, "Politics makes strange bedfellows," meaning that sometimes people who don't seem to have anything in common come together to achieve a common political interest.

In this incident, an odd group came together with the common goal of trying to trip Jesus up. The chief priests, the scribes and the elders, the Pharisees and the Herodians shared some things in common, but differed in other significant ways. They all wished to have the heavy boot of the Roman occupiers off their necks, but disagreed about what should replace the status quo. For some, who benefited from a symbiotic relationship with Rome, they didn't really want to rock the boat. The Pharisees wanted to restore the kingdom of David, while the Herodians' goal was to preserve the throne for a member of the Herodian dynasty.

So this group presented Jesus with a conundrum: Should they pay taxes to the hated Roman emperor, or not? They thought that no matter how Jesus answered, he would be in trouble with someone. If he advocated paying taxes, the people would rise up in anger, but if he suggested that they should refuse to pay, the wrath of the entire Roman Empire would squash him like a bug!

But Jesus saw through their hypocrisy, and asked to see a coin of the realm. Then he asked, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's."

The answer to your question, Jesus was suggesting, is not an "either-or" but a "both-and" proposition. You have certain obligations to human rulers, and other obligations to the divine king. Give to each what rightfully belongs to them.

Questions: How would you define the things "that belong to the emperor" and the things "that belong to God"? How are those things different? What should you do if an earthly ruler demands that you give him or her things "that belong to God"?

Luke 23:2, 10-12

They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." ... The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies. (For context, read [Luke 23:1-25](#).)

In another instance of politics making strange bedfellows, at Jesus' arraignment before Pilate, the Roman governor, the prisoner's accusers lied about him and pushed Pilate's fear buttons. The preceding scripture text makes it clear that Jesus did not forbid the Jews from paying taxes to the emperor. But they claimed that Jesus had declared himself to be the Messiah, a king, a troublemaker who stirred up the people (v. 5), which would have alarmed Pilate, who was responsible for nipping any hint of rebellion against Caesar in the bud.

When the accusers let slip that Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate thought he saw a way to pass the buck to Herod, who had jurisdiction of that region (vv. 6-7). But when Herod couldn't get anywhere with his interrogation, he listened to the prosecution's witnesses (the chief priests and the scribes), and then joined with his soldiers in mocking Jesus, before sending him back to Pilate (vv. 8-11).

Then Pilate called together Jesus' accusers, the leaders and the people, and announced that neither he nor Herod had found him guilty of any of the charges they had made against him. Even so, Pilate would acquiesce to their request that Jesus be punished in some way, by flogging him (vv. 13-16). But the crowd demanded the death sentence, "and their voices prevailed" (v. 23).

Questions: Why do you think this unjust trial and cruel verdict became the catalyst that turned Herod and Pilate from enemies into allies and friends? Why do you think Pilate went along with the religious leaders, even though he had concluded that Jesus was innocent?

John 18:36-37

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that

I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." (For context, read [John 18:28-40](#).)

Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God. That kingdom was the focus of many of his parables. When Jesus was brought before Pilate, the Roman governor asked him whether he was the king of the Jews. Jesus replied with the words in this text.

Questions: What might be a modern equivalent of fighting to keep Jesus from being handed over to his enemies? Where, if at all, do you see people doing this today? Does this mean that they are looking for a worldly kingdom headed by Jesus? What might motivate them?

What makes the kingdom of God different from earthly kingdoms? What kind of kingdom are you fighting for?

Matthew 4:8-9

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." (For context, read [Matthew 4:1-11](#).)

Matthew 16:24-26

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?" (For context, read [Matthew 16:21-28](#).)

At the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, after his baptism, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness, where he was tempted and tried by the devil. Our first text describes the third recorded way the devil tempted Jesus, who refused Satan's offer with the words: "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him'" (4:10). Jesus was determined to build God's kingdom, even though it cost him his life.

In the second text, Jesus foretold the suffering and death he would face before his resurrection, but Peter rebuked him (16:21-22). Jesus recognized Satan's third temptation in Peter's words, and answered him in much the same way as he responded to the devil in the wilderness: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

It is as if Jesus said, "You would prefer I take the easy way to glory, but that is not God's way! What would it profit me if I gained all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, but forfeited my very soul? Even so, if you want to follow me, you must be prepared for a life of self-sacrifice."

Questions: Why do you think Peter pushed back against the idea that suffering and death were integral to the way Jesus understood his mission and what it would cost?

What for you is the hardest thing about following Jesus? Why do it, if it is so hard?

For Further Discussion

1. Respond to this, from John Wesley's Sermon 37, "The Nature of Enthusiasm":

"Beware you are not a fiery, persecuting enthusiast. Do not imagine that God has called you (just contrary to the spirit of Him you style your Master) to destroy men's lives, and not to save them. Never dream of forcing men into the ways of God. Think yourself, and let think. Use no constraint in matters of religion. Even those who are farthest out of the way never compel to come in by any other means than reason, truth and love."

2. Last September, cultural analyst, Mark Hadley, [reviewed the science-fiction movie *Dune*](#), with special attention to its message about what he calls "religion's cozy relationship with power."

"The imperial government both takes advice from and wields power over the dominant faith," Hadley wrote. But the Reverend Mother character warns that the government-religion partnership benefits neither in the long run: "When religion and politics travel in the same cart, the riders believe nothing can stand in their way. Their movements become headlong -- faster and faster and faster. They put aside all thoughts of obstacles and forget the precipice does not show itself to the man in a blind rush until it's too late."

"Historically speaking, the closer the faithful have come to power, the more fraught the relationship has become," Hadley adds. "The question is, why do men and women of good conscience continue to make this mistake?"

How would you answer Hadley's question?

3. Mark Hadley points us to [1 Samuel 8](#), when the people of Israel ask the prophet Samuel to appoint a king over them. Their "ostensible goals of national faithfulness and peace are not bad things," Hadley says. But the deeper problem with their request was that "it revealed their desire to be kingmakers and their preference for a ruler who would serve their purposes. In short, it is a goal that takes God off the throne." They wanted to wield power, in place of God.

What do we need to do to ensure that we keep honoring God as God, and never try to usurp God's place on the throne?

4. Damaris Parsitau, a lecturer and researcher in Religion and Gender Studies, [reported in *The Elephant*](#) last year on the challenge facing Christians in Kenya, as politicians court religious figures for support: "Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) Archbishop Jackson Ole Sapit, ... in 2019, warned ACK clerics against accepting corrupt money. 'Let us not allow Harambee money to become a subtle way to sanitize corrupt leaders,' said Sapit."

Parsitau describes the exchange of money for power as a kind of covetousness, which, of course, is forbidden in one of the Ten Commandments.

"Given the fact that liberal democracy thrives where the secular and religious domains keep a safe distance from each other, the churches' acceptance of hefty cash donations from politicians has led Kenyans to question the very credibility and legitimacy of these churches' leadership," Parsitau continued. "Donations to churches have brought to the fore the causal interplay between church and state, the intersection between faith, politics and governance issues. The donations have also raised critical questions about the relationship between Christianity and religio-ethnic politics."

"In Kenya, God, politics, money and ethnicity are often inseparable," Parsitau asserted. "The appropriation of biblical language and rhetoric and its imagery by politicians during the

campaign periods sought to paint their politics as God-driven and God-ordained, while casting their antagonists' politics as driven by the dark, evil forces of Satan and witchcraft."

"Politicians have perfected the art of appropriating religion in times of crises," the researcher said. But religious piety does not guarantee good governance or policies that will benefit the people, Parsitau warned.

"When the Church and its clergy accept monetary contributions from politicians, it compromises them. The Church loses its voice, conscience and ability to hold politicians and the state accountable," Parsitau explained.

Discuss what might contribute to corrupt, ineffective leadership in the church and in government. What lessons from the Kenyan situation might we glean that would be useful in our own nation?

5. In the United States, denominations vary greatly in their level of political activism and advocacy. How much influence should the government have over religious bodies? How much influence should religious bodies and leaders have in civil affairs and governmental policy? What is the appropriate relationship between "church and state"?

Responding to the News

1. Listen to or sing one or both of these hymns and think about what is most precious to you. What are you chasing? Will you be satisfied with whatever you attain? Do you need to reorient your direction, to find or rediscover the narrow way that leads to life?

[If I Gained the World, But Lost the Savior](#)
[I'd Rather Have Jesus](#), sung here by [Willie Nelson](#)

2. For further study of the issues raised in this lesson, you may find this resource useful: Theologian John Dominic Crossan's new book, *Render Unto Caesar: The Struggle Over Christ and Culture in the New Testament*. Here's a link to TWW team member [Bill Tammeus' recent review](#).

3. You may find this webinar, scheduled for May 18th, of interest: ["Should Your Church Get Political?"](#)

Prayer

O God, help us always to seek first your kingdom and your justice, and not to hanker after power and the accoutrements that go with it. May your will be done on earth, in our hearts, in our communities, in our nation, as it is done in heaven. For your honor and glory alone, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.