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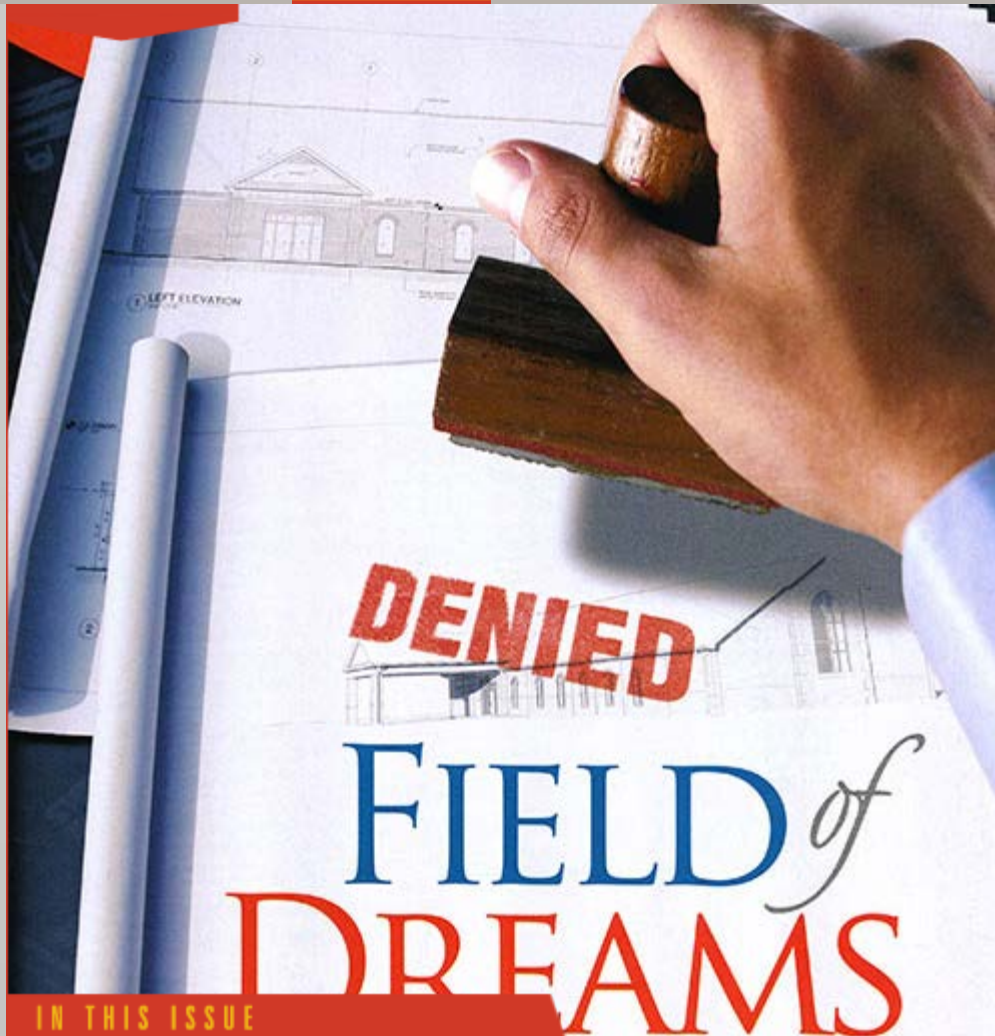
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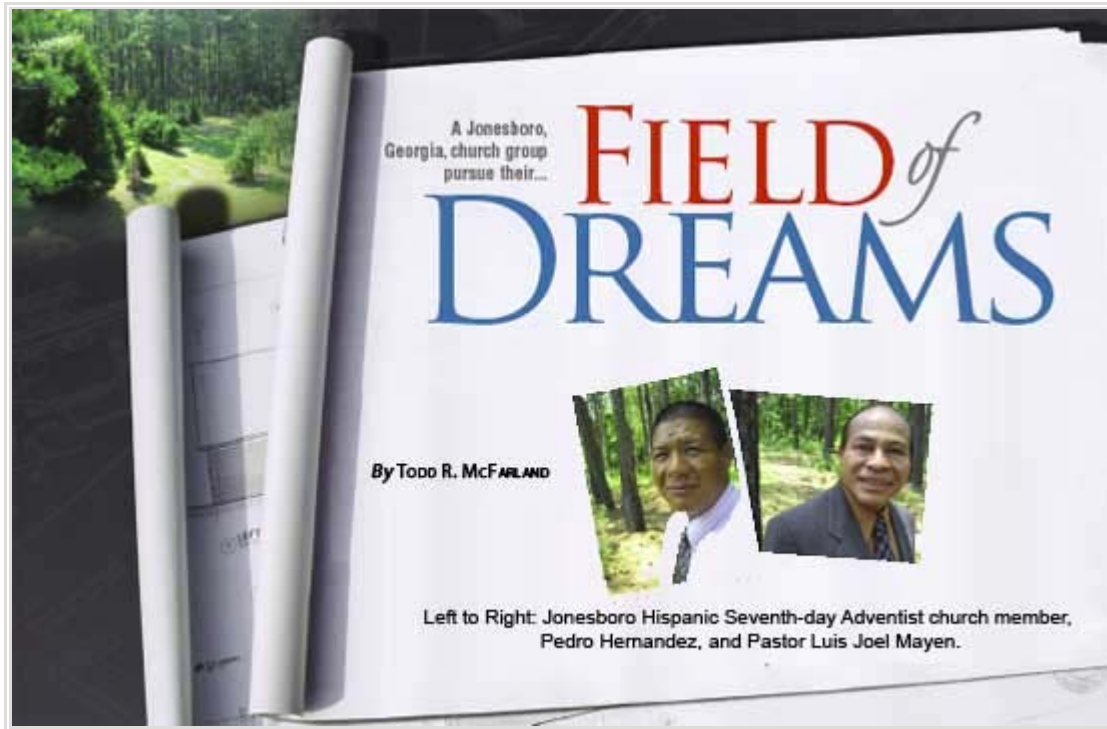
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JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2008

Field Of Dreams

BY: TODD MCFARLAND



A central part of the "American Dream" has always been home ownership. Images of a white picket fence, a yard to cut, and a place to call one's own are as powerful today as they were in Mark Twain's *Hannibal, Missouri*. Renting—paying to be someone else's guest—has always conjured up images of second-class status, of not quite being a full member of society.

This dream of owning one's own home is just as true for churches as it is for individuals. Having their own house of worship is a powerful symbol and tool for any congregation. It demonstrates stability, presence in the community, and gives a locus for a congregation to grow and worship around. Renting simply cannot do this. Having to put things back for the "real" church that meets in the building after services, and moving church events to accommodate the owning congregation's schedule all serve to remind a church group that they are, in essence, "homeless."

There are also, of course, practical problems with renting. If you are sharing the church with another congregation, as is often the case, you are limited as to when you can use it. You cannot make changes or improvements to fit your worship style or needs. And, of course, there is always the risk of being evicted.

For all of these reasons the Jonesboro Hispanic church in Clayton County, Georgia, went looking for a place to build. And after an extensive search they found the ideal piece of land. It was seven acres, two more than the county required to build a church. The beautiful property was surrounded by trees, with a creek in the back. As a bonus, the house already on the land could be converted into meeting rooms and church office space.

While the property was not zoned for a church, no property in Clayton County was. A "conditional use permit" was required to build a church. While getting a conditional use permit required a vote by the county commissions, no one at the church expected a problem. A school was just across the street and there were six other churches within a radius of a mile or two. Further, the road the property was on was well traveled and scheduled to be upgraded to five lanes by the state.

Knowing that they needed approval to build their church and wanting to develop good relations with their new neighbors, some of the church leaders went door-to-door to reach out to the community. Much to their surprise, they discovered quite a significant amount of resistance to their building plans.



Clockwise from top:
Efrain Potoche, Hispanic
Ministries coordinator for the
Seventh-day Adventist church's
South Atlantic Conference;
Raquel Mayen-Reyes,
church member;
Attorneys Todd McFarland and
Andrea Cantrell Jones

During these initial visits and later discussions neighbors raised many concerns. One neighbor was concerned that the church would become upset if his dangerous dogs attacked the children! He maintained that he needed these dangerous dogs to protect himself from the local wildlife—even though Clayton County, Georgia, is south of Atlanta and is almost the definition of a suburb. The only "dangerous animal" within miles of this property might be a deer jumping across the road, or the occasional coyote—truly dangerous if you are a rabbit. For another neighbor it was the scaring off of the wildlife—particularly the deer—that was a concern. One might ask whether or not these two neighbors got along.

In addition to going door-to-door, the church held an open house on the property to get better acquainted and to address any neighborhood concerns. Only one person showed up, and said hardly anything.

Curiously this lack of participation at the open house did not extend to the public hearing for the permit. The neighbors showed up in force. One got up and opined that in her experience churches brought crime to the neighborhood. Others expressed the view that a church was not appropriate for the neighborhood. Another felt the area already had too many churches. One person stated that a church with seating for 120 members would need 3,000 parking spaces! Unsurprisingly, given the level of opposition, the county voted to deny the permit.

After the hearing was over with and the church members were filing out, one neighbor said to the pastor, "You Hispanics—anytime you arrive anywhere, you bring snakes and rats." Another went on to say, "You are dirty, filthy people. We don't want Hispanics here." This Clayton County, Georgia, resident went on to express a desire that instead of building a church, maybe a restaurant—Mexican perhaps—could be built instead.

After the comments and reception at the hearing, the church group felt it had no choice but to resort to litigation. Attorneys specializing in religious liberty issues at the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church began working on the church's behalf. A local attorney named

Andrea Jones, of Dillard & Galloway, was retained and filed suit in both state and federal court against the county.

This lawsuit made not only all of the "standard" zoning claims but also relied on the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000. This federal law, often referred to as RLUIPA, was designed to combat exactly this type of animosity against religious organizations. It was a law that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, along with many other denominations, worked hard to get passed.

The goal of the law is to make sure that churches are treated equally both with other religious organizations and with secular groups. In short, if a county denies a zoning variance and this "substantially burdens" the religion, the county has to prove that it has a compelling reason for denying the request. The law also says a county cannot deny a church a permit if it gives one to a similar secular organization, such as a fraternal organization or lodge.

In this case, the county could point to no burden at all. The neighbor's complaints were not based on any legitimate objection to having a church in the area. Rather, they were religiously and racially based—as the comments about Hispanics and the preference for a restaurant instead of a church demonstrated. It became clear that the combination of a racial and religious minority simply scared these people. This was something different, something that was going to upset the status quo and they didn't like it. Had this been a more mainline church, or an all-white or all-black congregation there would have been fewer, if any, problems.

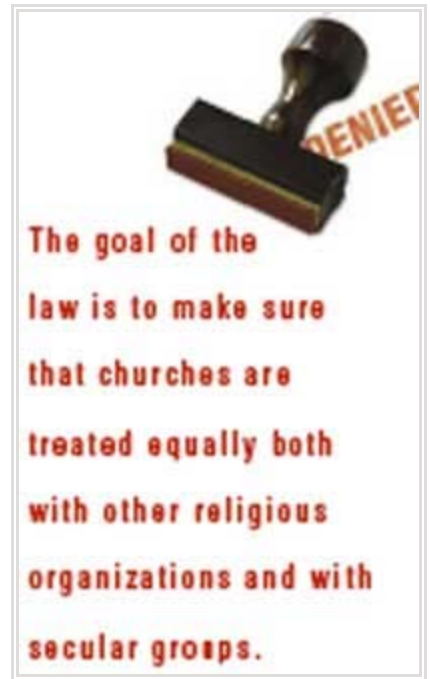
This of course is how the neighbors were treating the church, but what about the county commissioners? While its commissioners were smart enough not to make any of the ignorant comments their constituents made, they were unwilling to stand up to them. When the neighbor stood up and announced that churches attract crime, not a single commissioner said a word; instead they all sat there like this was a reasonable proposition. When it came to vote, they followed the wishes of the racially and religiously bigoted individuals who came out to speak against the church.

This of course is the problem with any democratic system; it is only as "good" as the people who vote in it. Politicians are rarely a courageous group and those inhabiting Clayton County, Georgia, are not the exception. But minority churches are often not able to use this process to their advantage. By definition they are a minority and therefore have limited political pull. Further, the very nature of small churches is that many times the congregants come from surrounding communities in order to get the critical mass needed to support a congregation. Thus, even with their limited numbers they are often not in the decision-making political jurisdiction. Oftentimes they have no effective way to affect the political calculus being made in their case. For the elected officials there is no political upside to voting for the permit, and quite a bit of a political downside.

Congress recognized many of these facts when it passed RLUIPA. This law was passed after a long and winding path that started with the Supreme Court changing the standard for religions challenging decisions made by representative bodies in the early 1990s. Congress realized that sometimes the political process does not always work in every community every time. So they passed a law to give minority religions a chance to challenge local decisions in federal court. Religious institutions cannot challenge every decision and the law does not make them exempt from zoning and permitting requirements. What the law does is give otherwise disenfranchised religious communities a chance to challenge the decisions of sometimes arbitrary and capricious local zoning boards.

That is exactly what happened in the Jonesboro case. Once the litigation started, it became clear that the county had no legitimate reason to deny this request. When the few non-ludicrous or irrelevant reasons given for denying the permit were examined, it became clear that the county's own staff did not consider the objections valid. The alleged increase in traffic turned out to be a non-issue when the county's traffic planner was deposed. The church needed 40 parking spaces by county regulation, not 3,000! The accusation of increased criminal activity fell into the ludicrous category.

What became clear during the litigation was that the county was essentially buying itself political cover with its constituents with the church members' money. By having a lawsuit they were able to go to the voters and say they had no choice. Blame it on those idiots in Washington for passing this law.



The frustrating part for the local church of course was that this delayed the project by about two years. Further, it cost thousands of dollars in attorney fees and litigation expenses; not a penny of which would so much as buy a brick. While RLUIPA does have a provision allowing a religious institution that prevails to recover its costs, the county was not willing to pay as part of the settlement. Thus the church had to make a decision—continue on with the litigation that it would almost certainly win, but would take another six months to a year; or eat the costs paid to the lawyers and get on with building their church. They chose to move on.

In many respects, Jonesboro Hispanic was fortunate. As part of the sisterhood of churches of the Seventh-day Adventist Church they have access to resources and funding that many local congregations would not have. The church's headquarters employs an attorney who works full-time on religious liberty issues throughout the country. Further, the various organizational levels of the church worked together to fund the litigation from donations earmarked to support religious liberty, as well as regular donations.

Today the Jonesboro church is back on track to build its new house of worship. The path it took to get to this point was longer and more expensive than it should have been for either side. What this case really reinforces is the need for fostering a respect for those that are different than us. Laws can give some protection, but not until a respect for our fellow humans' right to freedom and worship is respected by everyone—from dangerous dog-owning neighbors to county board chairs—will we have true freedom.

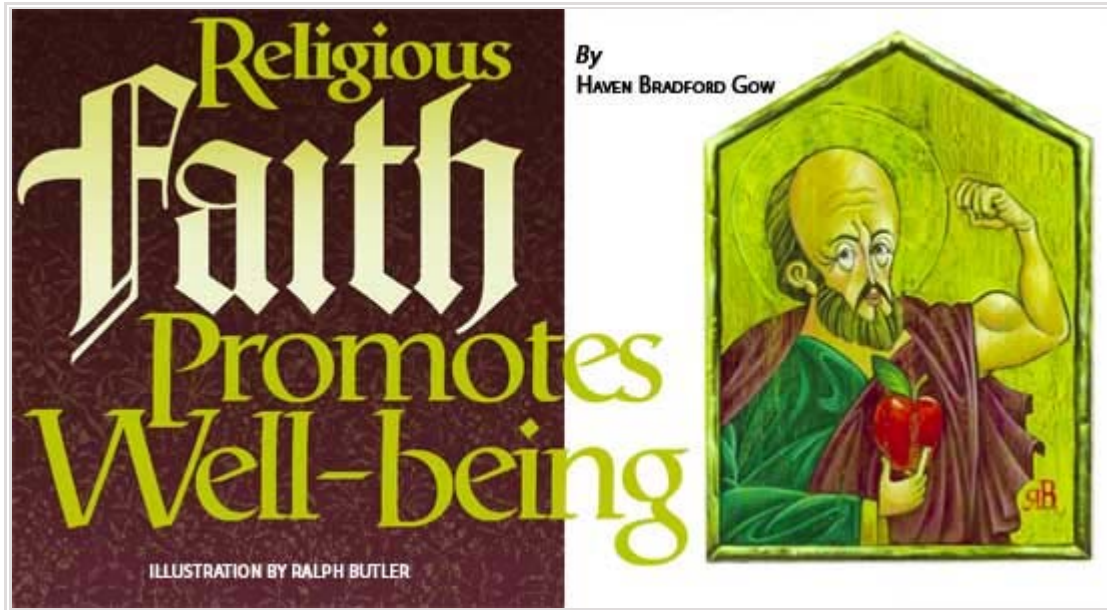


Todd McFarland is an associate general counsel for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, specializing in religious accommodation issues. He writes from Silver Spring, Maryland.

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2000

Religious Faith Promotes Well-being

BY: MR. GOW



According to physician-medical scholar Dr. Walt Larimore, author of *10 Essentials of Highly Healthy People* (Zondervan), several studies demonstrate that religious faith and spirituality can and do have a positive impact on our mental and physical well-being. Please consider:

Longer Life: "Between 1987 and 1995, a nationwide study of more than 21,000 adults showed a seven-year longer life expectancy in those who attended religious services more than once a week when compared to those that never attended."

Lower Blood Pressure: "A study of 401 men in Georgia published by Duke researchers in 1989 showed lower blood pressure (and less hypertension) in those who considered religion very important and who attended church regularly."

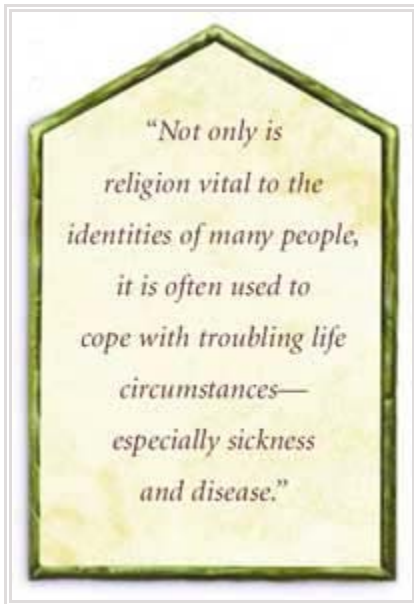
Improved Mental Health: "According to a 1997 Duke University study of more than 4,000 adults age 60 and older, frequent attendees at worship services had significantly reduced rates of depression and anxiety."

Overall Well-being: "Epidemiologist Jeff Levin's 1994 research showed that adults age 60 and older who considered themselves religious had fewer health problems. . . ."

In his book *Faith and Mental Health* (Templeton Foundation Press), Dr. Harold Koenig, founder and director of Duke University's Center for the Study of Religion/Spirituality and Health, points out that "many studies have explored the relationship between religious practices and positive emotions such as well-being, happiness, hope, meaning, purpose, and optimism. Of 100 studies that examined religion and well-being prior to the year 2000, nearly 80 percent found a statistically significant relationship between greater religious involvement and greater life satisfaction, happiness, better mood, or higher morals."

In their work *The Spiritual Brain* (Harper, San Francisco), Canadian scholar Mario Beauregard and journalist Denyse O'Leary discuss a study of the impact of religious faith on mental and physical well-being. Social scientists Edward Larson, Dale Matthews, and Constance Berry "conducted a detailed review of 158 medical studies on the effects of religion on health, 77 percent of which demonstrated a positive clinical effect. . . . Similarly, a prospective study of nearly four thousand seniors (aged 64-101) who were not disabled but lived in a residence during 1986-1992 found that private religious activities such as meditation, prayer, and Bible study were associated with greater survival rates."

Physician and cancer survivor Dr. Wendy Harpham tells us in her book *Diagnosis: Cancer* (W. W. Norton) that "a cancer diagnosis



challenges your spiritual faith. The effect can vary widely, precipitating intense fear or providing incredible calm. Your faith may fluctuate from day to day, leaving you feeling confused, angry, or lonely. In facing your mortality . . . you put your spiritual beliefs to the test. A cancer diagnosis often prompts patients to ask the big questions, such as, "What is the meaning of *my* life?" "Do I believe in God?" "Where is God in my time of trouble?"

In this regard, an article by Carolyn Susman, a health issues writer for the *Palm Beach Post*, observes: "We probably all know people who believe in the power of prayer to aid the sick. . . . But now, those who believe in prayer are getting support for their views from . . . the scientific community. Praying for sick patients, as a means to get well, may actually contribute to their recovery, according to a new study by Duke University researchers." According to Tracey Koepke, a spokesperson for the Duke University Medical Center, researchers found that "the patients who were prayed for had better outcomes than the patients who were not prayed for, because they had fewer adverse outcomes than the others."

Jamie Kosik, a researcher at the Florida Cardiovascular Research Center in Atlantis, says this about the Duke study: "It's simply something where you can offer some old-fashioned healing touches and kind words, and we should always be looking at ways to make the patients more comfortable. This would be an excellent way of doing it rather than a pill."

Why should people in the medical profession be concerned about the spiritual aspects of health issues? In his book *Spirituality for Patient Care* (Templeton Foundation Press), Dr. Harold Koenig, a professor of psychiatry and medicine at Duke Medical Center, explains: "Not only is religion vital to the identities of many people, it is often used to cope with troubling life circumstances—especially sickness and disease. In certain parts of the United States nearly 90 percent of medical patients report that religious belief and practices are important ways that they cope with and make sense of physical illness, and over 40 percent indicate that religion is the most important factor that helps them to cope."

Please consider, too, the medical philosophy of Dr. Thomas Adams, formerly a pediatrician at King's Daughters Hospital, Greenville, Mississippi, who has traveled to various parts of the world as a Christian medical missionary and has also practiced medicine in Washington, D.C. Dr. Adams sees merit in the Asian (or Eastern) approach to medicine, as it takes into account the whole person (mind, body, and soul); he says that while Western medicine emphasizes drugs and technology, the Eastern way recognizes that we often cannot heal the body unless we heal the mind and soul as well.

We would do well to heed the wise and instructive words of the above scholars and medical practitioners so we may become not only physically healthy but mentally and spiritually healthy as well. As the New Testament says, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44).

Concerning this matter of religious faith and mental and physical well-being, in her book, *Hope in the Face of Cancer* (Harvest House), cancer survivor Dr. Amy Givler, a family physi-cian and professor at Louisiana State Uni-versity Medical Center (Monroe), observes:

"Can someone—no matter how sick—just decide to get better and pop out of bed? . . . Most doctors can recall a time when a patient outlives all expectations so he or she could attend a wedding, a graduation, a bar mitzvah. But . . . it's not just a matter of wanting to live."

Dr. Givler indicates in her work that recovery from cancer results from a combination of good medicine, religious faith, a positive outlook on life, and good luck. According to Dr. Adam Cohen, a fellow at Duke University Medical Center, several studies reveal that religious people tend to be happier and healthier than nonreligious people, though it is not for certain why. Dr. Cohen says highly spiritual people may be happy and at peace for several reasons, such as appreciating the beauty in nature, feeling close to God, or being more prone to feeling a sense of awe and gratitude.

When the late psychiatrist Dr. Viktor Frankl, author of *Man's Search for Meaning* (Simon & Schuster, Inc.), was in a Nazi concentration camp, he survived because of faith in God, the love for his wife, and the desire to find meaning and purpose through helping others in the camp. He said he was inspired by fellow camp members who accepted their suffering and hardship with grace and dignity, never forgetting that they possessed intrinsic moral worth and dignity because they were made in the image and likeness of God.

Dr. Frankl's splendid and inspiring words and insights remind me of my late father, Joseph W. Gow. A few years ago I discerned a glimpse of God's love and what heaven must be like as I watched my father die a noble and courageous death from cancer. My father purposefully came home from the hospital that particular day, just so he could prove to me how much he loved me. He was dying an

agonizingly painful death from cancer that had spread throughout his body and brain.

Fearing that he would die in a dreary hospital room without having had the opportunity to say goodbye to me, my father ordered the doctor and nurses to permit me to accompany him home, despite the fact he would have to endure excruciating pain.

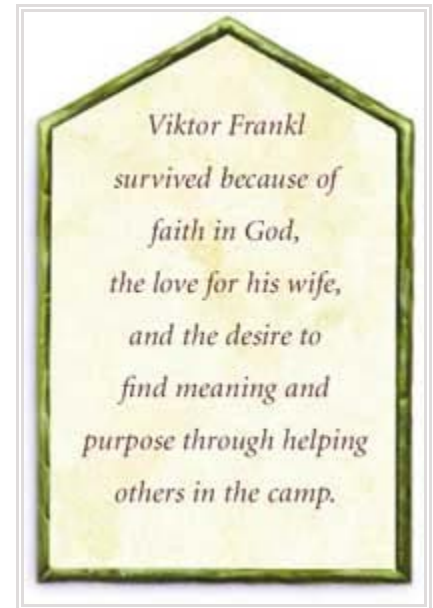
As I was driving him home, I kept looking at my father in the rearview mirror and thinking about how noble and courageous he was and how precious was each second that he remained alive.

In his own bed, and with me by his side, my father passed away with peace of mind and soul; he understood and taught me through his loving example that one not only must live nobly, but die nobly as well.

I thanked God for inspiring and giving my father the strength and nobility of mind, spirit, and character to show me his selfless, sacrificial, and effusive love. And then I experienced a flash of insight: My father's love was a reflection of God's love for me.



Mr. Gow is a TV and radio commentator and writer who teaches religion to children at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Greenville, Mississippi.



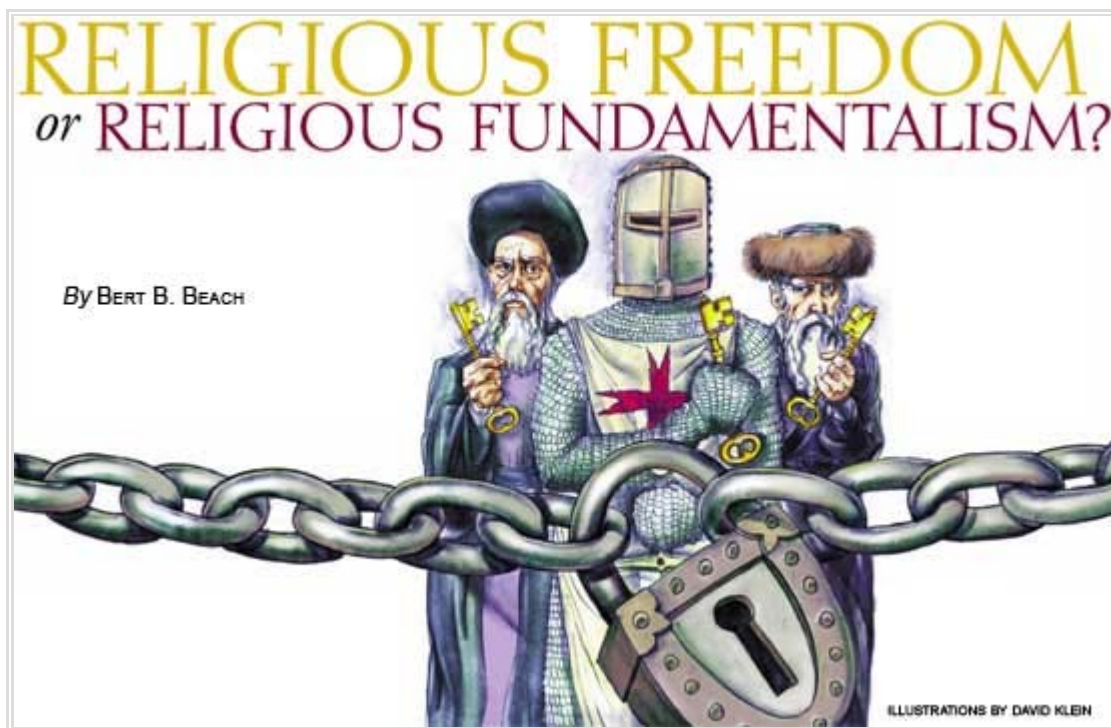
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2008

Religious Freedom Or Religious Fundamentalism?

BY: DR. B.B. BEACH

Religious Freedom or Religious Fundamentalism?

By Bert B. Beach



Originally, the term *fundamentalism* began to be used in the United States in the 1920s. At that time it referred to a traditionalist movement confronting "liberal religion," particularly "higher criticism," heavy concentration on the sociopolitical gospel, and godless evolution.

Since then, it has become clear that the term *fundamentalism* has considerably shifted its denotation. Today, religious fundamentalism has penetrated all major religions, the most obvious being Islam, and has become a dangerous, worldwide phenomenon. It is essentially a reaction, at times violent, against most things "modern," including democracy, and repudiating "secularization."

Most human societies in our world today are able to absorb change and move toward pluralization. The fundamentalist, in contrast, is opposed to change in general, and more specifically, to pluralism of worldviews. He wants one view—always his own view—to have exclusive validity, and therefore domination and control. His worldview or religion protests, even with anger and violence, against the sweeping changes that have already overwhelmed some societies or threaten to do so. Fundamentalism, as an ideological organizing system of thinking, expresses resentment against the secularization of society, with its resulting moral permissiveness and amoral consumer-oriented materialism and globalization.

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the American, French, and Russian political Revolutions, and the scientific revolution of the past couple of centuries have resulted in a diminution, especially in the industrialized West, of transcendent issues, such as sin, salvation, and the afterlife. The trend—at least in theory, if not always in practice—is toward toleration and freedom to "live and let live," favoring flexibility in dealing with sociopolitical and cultural issues.

Human-to-human conflicts are ultimately counterfeit controversies, distractions from the spiritual struggle for hearts and minds.

Religious fundamentalism is in its essence not a doctrinal issue, but a basic outlook directed toward the current world order, protesting against laissez-faire societies. The resulting protest often becomes vehement, inflexible, pitiless opposition to anything new, and tramples on the human rights of the exponents of different opinions and progressive change. Fundamentalism makes its case not only in the media, but in bloodshed every day—from misguided zealots who blow up abortion clinics in the name of Jesus, to doctrinaire fanatics who blow up peaceful villagers or city dwellers in the name of Allah.

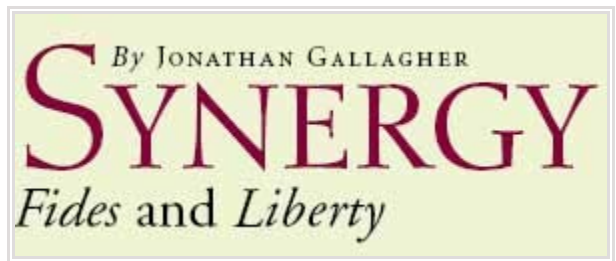
Despite all the differences of creed and kind, observers can point to some consistent threads running through the tapestry of

fundamentalism: the quest for purity and perfection; the search for absolute certainty, tradition, and authenticity; and the predilection for a total, global worldview that controls, or at least strongly impacts, all aspects of life. The attention it gives to tradition and the past is often an illusory attempt to "restore" that which never was. This false dream characterizes many expressions of fundamentalism.

The paradox of the modern world is that while scientific standards are becoming more and more precise and demands for objectivity ring in our ears, moral standards are becoming vaguer, more situational, and increasingly imprecise. The breakdown of traditional morality has been followed by growing social permissiveness. The economic and cultural exploitation of Third World countries and segments of society in Western countries is a reality. Fundamentalists, with some reason, are protesting.

One key reason for the growth of contemporary fundamentalism is *marginalization*. This occurs when any group—by race, ethnicity, language, religion, or economic status—is made to feel irrelevant to decision-making and feels excluded from participation in society. This is increasingly the case with the poor in today's world. The speed of travel and almost instant worldwide communication have placed the poverty, misery, and unequal social structures of whole groups of people in close proximity to wealth and special privilege. Fundamentalism can then become attractive as a form of protest by those who feel hopelessly marginalized and exploited.

An increasing number of people groups feel "out of the loop." Having won independence and nationhood, many citizens of younger nation states hunger for the esteem they believed would come with national identity. They feel humiliated by economic, cultural, and occasionally military hegemony exerted over them by more powerful states. The resentment of the marginalized may well be the most prolific breeding stable for fundamentalism, and tends to push back religious liberty.



I'm in Monroe, Louisiana, for a religious liberty weekend organized by the local *Liberty* magazine representative. The first meeting, Friday evening, was with the rabbi and his congregation at the local synagogue. I see copies of the magazine, various issues, in the library and in the entrance way. They're being used. The rabbi is explaining to everyone present the importance of the magazine, and how essential it is for them.

Saturday morning, we're with the Adventists. Same comments. Sunday morning with the large local Baptist church. Same again.

Not your regular kind of promotion. These people mean it. They see religious liberty as essential, and are ready to support such vital tools as *Liberty*. This cuts across denominational borders, and brings together people who would not normally be meeting and sharing together. Plans are laid. Joint projects developed. The mayor comes along. . .

Synergy. Based on shared values and common concerns. People who care deeply about promoting and preserving religious freedom, and who are ready to commit their own personal resources to such a cause. Working together, the end result is more than a sum of the individual components.

Like *Fides et Libertas* and *Liberty* magazine. I have the privilege of being the editor of the former. But *Fides* only happens because of the good graces of *Liberty*—you'll notice that it is "printed in partnership with Liberty magazine." *Fides* is the academic journal that seeks to provide both a theoretical and practical basis for religious freedom, to make clear why such a fundamental freedom is so important. It complements *Liberty* in its vital contributions to the same cause. Working together to make sure that the total is more than the sum of the parts.



It would appear that many religious fundamentalists view a human rights-oriented secular nation as both a danger and a failure. It has not achieved social justice, they say. It has not provided family stability, sobriety, respect, and honor. Often the result, or at least the reality, of secular national government appears to be greatly increased crime and divorce rates, drug culture, pornography, homosexuality, and rampant corruption in business and political life. With this in mind, for the fundamentalist, religious liberty and political democracy become of little importance—nonessential luxuries.

Jonathan Gallagher, Editor,
Fides et Libertas

Although we might agree with some of the fundamentalist critique, I believe that their "medicine" is worse than the "sickness." There is, as already indicated, an element of mythology and historical blindness in the fundamentalist thinking and solution. While its adherents are basically against change, they do favor one selected change: going back to the "golden age" of tradition and perfection. This "going back" can vary a great deal: fundamentalist Muslims want to go back about a thousand years; for Christians, "going back" can vary greatly—to the nineteenth century, to the so-called united Christendom of the Middle Ages, to the time of the Church Fathers, or to the first century. Some fundamentalist Jews dream of the past theocratic period and temple.

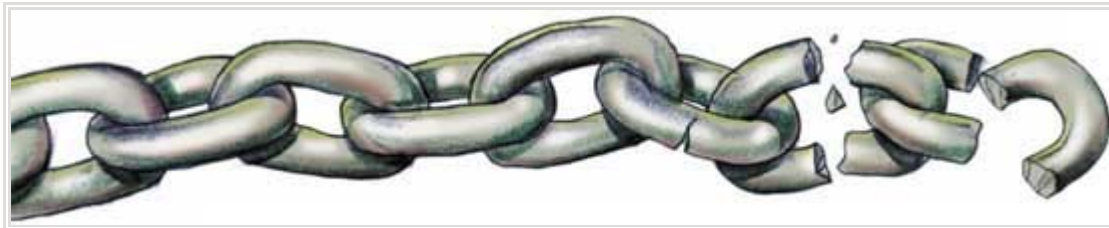
Fundamentalists seek in their own various ways to "traditionalize," to go back to the past—the theology of the pioneers, the legendary heroism of the Teutonic knights, the fortitude of the Voortrekkers in South Africa, the firmness and rectitude of the Puritans in North America.

Many fundamentalists seek one major reactive change: they want to place their religious views at the center of life in the home, government, courts, media, schools, even the military—in short, everywhere. Thus, religious fundamentalists today have *both backward-looking worldviews and a present mind-set*.

There seems to be in religious fundamentalism an almost inevitable progression (though probably "regression" might be a more accurate term) toward religious extremism, disregard of human rights and religious liberty, and ending up in totalitarian alliance of religion and state.

Fundamentalism does have its complexities and paradoxes. Fundamentalists can very well hate and fight other fundamentalists. That is part of the picture.

While many believers may share with fundamentalists a "high view" of scripture, most do not share their tendency to quote their scripture selectively—be it the Torah, the Bible, or the Koran. Fundamentalists often use an out-of-context proof-text approach. Many devout fundamentalists, without much reflection, take passages and apply them simplistically, without seeing the entire perspective, to very different present-day situations. Some fundamentalists even rationalize extreme interpretations of their scriptures in order to justify the suppression of other opinions, to support violence and terror, and proclaim the "glory of suicide martyrdom" that kills innocent people.



From a Christian perspective, God inspired His prophets, not in order to provide support for intolerance and rigid, implacable dogmatism leading to persecution, but rather to give spiritual inspiration, hope, the gift of love, and reasoned guidance. The truth that comes from God through His chosen messengers leads to salvation, and, in the words of Jesus, "makes you free indeed." Yes, humanity is involved in a "cosmic war," where salvation and eternal life are at stake, but there is no physical war—no conquest, no jihad, no crusade, no poisoning of people's minds with hate, no extermination struggle between believer and infidel. It is a spiritual contention between truth and error. There is no place for obstinate, merciless, violent intransigence, and harsh punishments. All such human-to-human conflicts are ultimately counterfeit controversies, distractions from the spiritual struggle for hearts and minds.

The fundamentalist mind-set is, finally, unacceptable because it is in conflict with the dignity of the human person, a free moral agent with the right to be committed to his or her beliefs and convictions. There is often in fundamentalism a built-in resistance to freedom, reason, learning, and creativity. It forgets that God gave us all these gifts. Fundamentalism, wherever found, reveals its taste for bigotry, fanaticism, rigidity, and exclusiveness at a time when the world is crying out for bridge-builders and peacemakers. It revels in control, and justifies its refusal to dialogue and learn by its suspicions of other opinions and other faiths. I must reject religious fundamentalism because it feeds religious hatred and starves religious freedom.

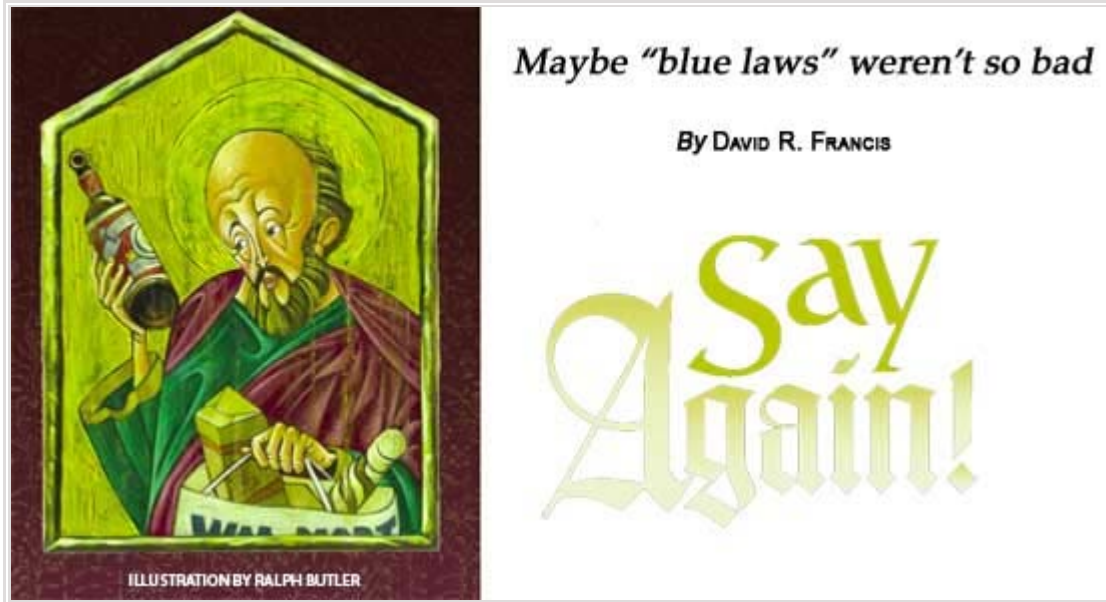
Dr. B.B. Beach is secretary-general emeritus of the International Religious Liberty Association. This article is based on a speech he gave in February 2007 at a world conference in Cape Town, South Africa. Elements of that same speech also appeared as articles in the Adventist Review and Fides et Libertas (see accompanying feature in this issue).



JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2008

Say Again!

BY: DAVID R. FRANCIS



*Liberty is long on record as opposing so-called "blue laws." With varying amounts of cover these are laws with a religious basis. Invariably they uphold a particular view of faith and use the force of law to demand compliance. This article, like many of late, looks at blue laws through the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia for a lost Eden. But the article chooses to ignore the reasonable theological debate over what is the biblical Sabbath (even the Vatican, in the document *Dies Domini*, freely acknowledges that the biblical Sabbath is Saturday), it slides past the advisability of state support for a religious practice, and falls for the fallacy of thinking that because some good might derive from the situation it is justified. See the article on religious faith and well-being for statistical proof of the value in a life of faith. However, the Constitution is very plain that the government is not to restrict free exercise of religion, which rather perversely blue laws do.—Editor.*

Recall the political storms in the United States over lifting bans on opening stores on Sundays—the so-called "blue laws."

Christian ministers would point to God's fourth commandment: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Owners of mom-and-pop retail shops would plead to keep a legal "day of rest" that prevented big stores from luring away business by staying open on Sundays.

But growing numbers of women worked outside the home and found it difficult to shop during the week. States hoped Sunday store hours would boost tax revenues.

Today, the battle is largely over. In most parts of the country, one can easily find stores open on Sunday. Over the past two or three decades, state blue laws limiting retailing on that day have been repealed or weakened.

What have been the consequences?

It may be no surprise that families took advantage of the changes to scoot to the mall on Sundays. Faced with such secular competition, attendance and donations at churches have fallen.

But there was unanticipated fallout as well. New research finds that many youths who had been classified as "religious" because of their church attendance succumbed to temptation after blue laws were replaced. They drank more alcohol and used other drugs.

Apparently, "religion truly affects behavior," says Daniel Hungerman, an economist at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana, and an author of the study. "It really matters."

If teens and young adults attend church services or Sunday school, they will be less likely to drink heavily or use other drugs, he says.

Professor Hungerman and his coauthor, Jonathan Gruber, an economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, have taken what may be the first look at the impact on churches and young people of the erosion of Sunday retail-closing laws.

"We have said for many years that a common day of rest has a whole array of positive social values," says the Diane Kessler, executive director of the Massachusetts Council of Churches. Since church attendance tends to be a family affair, she's "not surprised" to see a correlation between fewer blue laws and more risky behavior among youths.

In recent decades, economists have used their statistical skills to examine not only economic affairs, but also social issues, including religion.

For example, another recent paper by Professor Gruber finds that when there is greater "market density" in religion—that is, more people sharing a religion in an area—religious participation tends to be higher. Further, he finds these areas have higher levels of education, income, and marriage, and lower levels of welfare, disability payments, and divorce.

The Gruber-Hungerman paper—titled "The Church vs. the Mall: What Happens When Religion Faces Increased Secular Competition?"—finds that after blue laws are repealed by a state:

-Religious attendance drops about 5 percent overall on average.

-About 15 percent of those who had been attending religious services weekly no longer attend so regularly.

"Individuals are not dropping out of churchgoing altogether, but rather . . . they are simply going less frequently," the authors write.

-Religious contributions decline 13 percent, or about \$109 per person per year. Spending by religious institutions falls by about 6.3 percent.

-Drinking rates by young people go up. Before repeal, about 40 percent of nonreligious youths (those in their late teens and 20s) reported having had six or more drinks at one sitting sometime in the past month. About 30 percent of youths defined as "religious" because of their church attendance reported such episodes of heavy drinking.

After repeal, that 10 percent gap closed by about half—the religious drank more.

-Marijuana use goes up. Prior to repeal, 18 percent of nonreligious youths reported smoking marijuana in the past 30 days. Only 9 percent of religious youths used pot. After repeal, the gap disappeared, the study finds.

-Similarly, the gap between the nonreligious and the religious taking cocaine (3 percent vs. 1.5 percent) closed entirely.

Key data for these findings come from the huge National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, started in 1979 and repeated in several subsequent years.

David Laband, an economist at Auburn University in Alabama and author of a 1987 book on the history of blue laws, says the Gruber-Hungerman findings on religious attendance and contributions after repeal are new, but comparable to noting that "water runs downhill." He's skeptical of the findings on alcohol and recreational drug use, however, especially since drug use is still illegal. "Some of it does not add up to me," he says.

Regardless, the study raises an old issue: To what extent should government interfere in activities of its citizens, even when that interference may be helpful?

"Who am I to say that people shouldn't go shopping on Sunday?" Hungerman says.



David R. Francis, author, The Christian Science Monitor, September 11, 2006, Boston, Massachusetts.

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2000

An Interview With Roger Williams

BY: BRIAN D. JONES

Roger Williams' passionate belief in keeping church and state separate is a puzzle to many evangelical minds. With intellectual roots firmly planted in the nourishing soil of the Old and New Testaments, he never strayed into the rocky fields of humanistic or pagan philosophy. Williams' authorities were Moses, Paul, and Jesus—not Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, or even Reformation theologians. Possessing the moral firmness and valor of an Amos or an Elijah, he challenged the waves of puritanic intolerance that strove to overwhelm him for his views on liberty of conscience. He was praised by some as a paragon of religio-political enlightenment. He was damned by others as a pestiferous radical, a demented heresiarch ("carrying a windmill in his head"). It is only fair to hear Williams' fundamental views on religious liberty and separation of church and state in his own words.¹ Though Roger Williams has long departed this life, his works live after him and his words stand imperishably on record. From these words we have drawn this hypothetical interview, allowing us to present his cardinal ideas.

Liberty: You are an ordained Baptist minister, with a mastery of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, as well as several American Indian languages. You were also the royally appointed governor of the Rhode Island colony. So, with your permission, I will call you Governor Williams.

Williams: Yea, thou mayest so do, as that was the office I held for a longer period than I was a pastor.

Liberty: Governor Williams, what is the scope of civil government's proper authority?

Williams: Civil government is an ordinance of God, to conserve the civil peace of a people, so far as concerns their bodies and goods.²

Liberty: You say that civil government is an "ordinance of God." Does this mean that all governments have the divine right to operate as they will without the consent or redress of the governed?

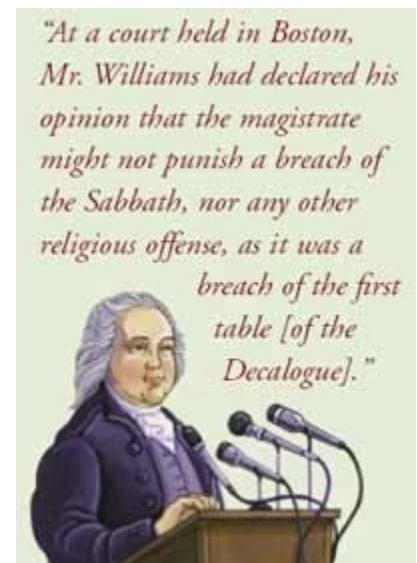
Williams: Kings and magistrates are invested with no more power than the people entrust to them. The sovereign power of all civil authority is founded in the consent of the people.³

Liberty: To what extent, Governor, does the Christian church have the right or obligation to inflict punishments on the ungodly or heretical?

Williams: The Christian church [in its true identity] does not persecute; any more than a lily scratches the thorns, or a lamb pursues and tears the wolves, or a turtledove hunts the hawks and eagles, or a chaste and modest virgin fights and scratches like whores and harlots. The Christian religion may not be propagated by the civil sword.⁴

Liberty: But, Governor, do you see any grounds for an avowedly Christian government to penalize citizens who dissent from the established religion?

Williams: It is only the Lord who is able to give [unbelievers] repentance and recover them out of Satan's snare. To recover souls from Satan by repentance, and bring them from anti-Christian doctrine and worship to Christian doctrine or worship, in any measure of true submission, is the work only of an all-powerful God, which He performs by the sword of the Spirit in the hands of His spiritual officers. It is true, however, that the sword of steel may make a whole nation of hypocrites [yielding feigned submission to the dominant religion]. What woeful proof of this have the nations of earth given in all ages! Consider England. Within a few score years how many unsettling changes in religion has the whole kingdom made, according to the change of its rulers, in the various religions which they embraced. Henry VII finds and leaves the kingdom absolutely popish. Henry VIII casts it into a mould half-popish, half-Protestant. Edward VI brings forth an edition all Protestant. Queen Mary within a few years defaces Edward's work and renders the kingdom (after her grandfather Henry the VII's pattern) all popish. Mary's short life and religion end together, and Elizabeth revives her brother Edward's model, all Protestant. And some eminent witnesses of God's truth believe that before the downfall of Antichrist [which virtually all Reformers construed to be Romanism], England must once again bow down her fair neck to his proud usurping yoke and foot. It has been England's sinful shame to fashion and change its garments and religions with wondrous ease and



lightness, as a higher power, a stronger sword has prevailed; after the ancient pattern of Nebuchadnezzar's bowing the whole world in one most solemn uniformity to his golden image. See Daniel chapter 3.⁵



Liberty: Commenting on Romans 13:1-6,⁶ John Cotton, your chief opponent in questions of church-state relations, wrote: "If the sword of the judge or magistrate be the sword of the Lord, why may it not be drawn forth, as well to defend His subjects in true religion, as in civil peace?" Do you agree with his reasoning?

Williams: Master Cotton will never prove from any of the books and institutions of the New Testament that unto those spiritual remedies appointed by Jesus Christ against spiritual maladies, He added the help of the carnal sword.⁷ The magistrates of whom Paul wrote were natural, ungodly, persecuting, and yet lawful magistrates, to be obeyed in all lawful civil things. This scripture [Romans 13:1-6] is wrested from the scope of God's Spirit, and the nature of the place, and cannot truly be interpreted to mean that the power of the civil magistrate may be exercised in spiritual or soul matters.⁸ Master Cotton knows that Jesus Christ commanded a sword to be put up when it was drawn in the cause of Christ, and added a dreadful threatening: that all who take the sword (that is, the carnal sword for His cause), shall perish by it.⁹ Accordingly, I affirm that there was never civil state in the world that ever did nor ever shall make good work of it with a civil sword in spiritual matters.¹⁰

Liberty: Some assert, however, that Christian leaders in government have an obligation to enforce the spiritual laws of the Bible, to "take the land back for God" as it were, and thus have a kind of theocratic government. They say that this is especially true of the United States, on the alleged grounds that it was established to be a Christian nation.

Williams: It is the will and command of God that since the coming of His Son, the Lord Jesus, a permission of the most paganish or anti-Christian consciences, or worships, be granted to all men and all nations and countries; and that errors in religion may be fought against with the only weapon that is able to conquer in matters of the soul—the sword of God's Spirit, His Word.¹¹ Further, if the civil magistrate be a Christian, a disciple or follower of the meek Lamb of God, he is bound to be far from destroying the bodies of men for refusing to receive the Lord Jesus Christ: for otherwise he would be ignorant of the sweet end of Christ's coming, which was to save the bodies and souls of men. Even if the civil magistrate is so gifted as to prophesy in the church, yet in the sphere of his civil duties he is forbidden to call down fire from heaven, that is, to procure or inflict any corporal punishment upon offenders in religious doctrine or practice, remembering Christ's admonition that He came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.¹²

Liberty: History records your vigorous, even vituperative disagreement with the religion of the Quakers. And yet the colony over which you governed received and protected Quakers without any civil or religious curtailment of their liberties. Would you care to comment on this policy?

Williams: Against the Quakers I leveled nothing but the spiritual sword of God's Word, but, consistent with my doctrine of soul-freedom for each to worship in accordance with his own conscience, would not inflict civil encumbrances or penalties upon them.¹³ Conformable to our petition to Charles II, Rhode Island's royal charter reads, in part: "No person within the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be anywise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question for any differences of opinion in matters of religion, and do not actually disturb the civil peace of our said colony."¹⁴ While I deplored and denounced the incivilities of Quakerism in my day (such as the going naked in public by some at sundry times), my position regarding their religious views was, "They will answer to God, at their own peril, in the great day approaching [that is, the day of divine judgment]."¹⁵

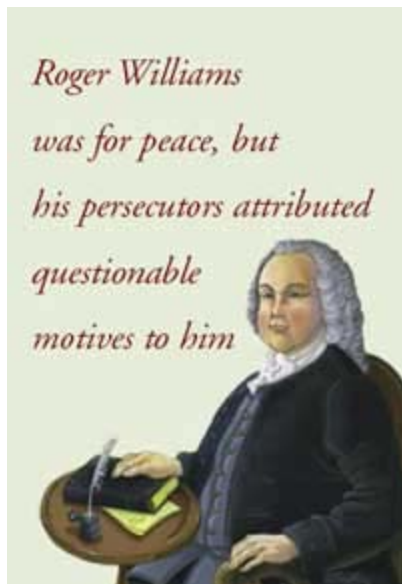
Liberty: Many of your religious contemporaries accused you of sowing the seeds of anarchy and civil disorder by your doctrine of soul-liberty. What is your answer to that charge?

Williams: I gave my answer to this question in a letter addressed to the town of Providence in January 1655. Here is the text: That I should ever speak or write a tittle that tends to such an infinite liberty of conscience is a mistake, which I have ever disclaimed and abhorred. To prevent such mistakes, I shall at present only propose this case: There goes many a ship to sea, with many hundred souls in one ship, whose weal and woe is common, and is a true picture of a commonwealth or a human combination or society. It hath fallen out sometimes that Papists, Protestants, Jews, and Turks may be embarked in one ship; upon which supposal I affirm that all the liberty of conscience that ever I pleaded for turns upon these two hinges: that none of the Papists, Protestants, Jews, or Turks be forced to come to the ships prayers or worship, nor be compelled [restrained] from their own particular prayers or worship, if they practice any. I further add that I never denied that, notwithstanding this liberty, the commander of this ship ought to command the ship's course, yea, and also command that justice, peace, and sobriety be kept and practiced, both among the seamen and all the passengers. If any of the seamen refuse to perform their services, or passengers to pay their freight; if any refuse to help in person or purse, toward the common charges or defense; if any refuse to obey the common laws and orders of the ship concerning their common peace or preservation; if any shall mutiny or rise up against their commanders and officers; if any should preach or write that there should be no commanders or officers because all are equal in Christ, therefore no master or officers, no laws nor orders, nor corrections nor punishments—I say I never denied that in such cases, the commander may judge, resist, compel, and punish such transgressors according to their deserts and merits.¹⁶

Liberty: Is it possible for non-Christians and nonreligious people to be upright, law-abiding citizens and good civil servants?

Williams: Yea. There is a moral virtue, a moral fidelity, ability and honesty, which other men, besides church members, are, by good nature and education, by good laws and good examples nourished and trained up in; so that civil places and trust and credit need not be monopolized into the hands of church members (who sometimes are not fitted for public office), while all others are deprived and despoiled of their natural and civil rights and liberties.¹⁷

Liberty: What if a zealous Christian or a coalition of Christians declares that they feel conscience-bound to denounce and penalize the irreligious or those whose religious views and practices seem corrupt? Should conscience be their guide in this matter?



Williams: Such zealots may well ask themselves the questions that I urged Endecott, the persecuting governor of Massachusetts, to ask himself: "Is it possible that since I hunt, I may be hunting for the life of my Savior and the blood of the Lamb of God? I have fought against many differing sorts of conscience. Is it beyond all possibility and hazard that I have not fought against God, and that I have not persecuted Jesus in some of them?" Further, I told Endecott and his associates in government, "It is impossible for any man or men to maintain their Christ by their sword, and to worship a true Christ as they fight against all consciences opposite to theirs. For in this they fight against God and hunt after the precious life of the true Lord Jesus Christ. O remember whither your principles and consciences must in time and opportunity force you! 'Tis but worldly policy and compliance with men and times (God's mercy overruling) that holds your hands from the murdering of thousands and ten thousands, were your power and command as great as the bloody Roman emperors' formerly was. "Reflect upon your own spirit, and believe Him that said it to His overzealous disciples, 'You know not what spirit you are of.' Pray that no sleep may seize upon your eyes, nor slumber upon your eyelids until your thoughts have seriously, calmly, and unchangably fixed. "First, on a moderation toward the spirits and consciences of all mankind merely differing from or opposing yours with only religious and spiritual opposition; "Secondly, a deep and cordial resolution (in these wonderful searching, disputing, and dissenting times) to search, to listen, to pray, to fast, and more fearfully, more tremblingly inquire what the pleasure and mysteries of the Most Holy are."¹⁸

Liberty: Is the religious zealot therefore prohibited from expressing his passionate convictions in doctrinal and ecclesiastical questions? Likewise, is the political thinker to be restrained from the expression of his views?

Williams: Nay. In these reforming days we have begun to see an overthrow of the false notion that the two most dangerous enemies are (1) dissenting and nonconforming worshippers, and (2) liberty of free—really free—debates, disputes, writing, printing, etc. The Most High has granted a taste of these two dainties in some parts and will continue to advance them as the twin gods of ecclesiastical intolerance and carnal tradition are famished.¹⁹

Liberty: Shortly after you had arrived in Massachusetts, Governor Winthrop wrote in the first volume of his journal (1631), "At a court held in Boston, Mr. Williams had declared his opinion that the magistrate might not punish a breach of the Sabbath, nor any other religious offense, as it was a breach of the first table [of the Decalogue]." What is your response to his comment?

Williams: In June 1670 I wrote to Major John Mason and Governor Thomas Prentice: "You know that all England itself, after the formality and superstition of morning and evening prayer, play away their Sabbath [Sunday]. You know yourselves that you do not keep the Bible Sabbath, which is the seventh day. You also know that the Romanists confess that there is no express Scripture for infant baptism or abolishing the seventh day and instituting the eighth day of worship, but that it is at the church's pleasure."²⁰ But besides decrying enforced days of worship or any other religious observance, my aim is to lay bare and proclaim the crying and horrible guilt of the bloody doctrine of persecution as one of the most seditious, destructive, blasphemous, and bloodiest in any or all the nations of the world, notwithstanding the many fine veils, pretenses, and colors of not persecuting Christ Jesus, but heretics; not God's truth or servants, but blasphemers and seducers; not persecuting men for their conscience, but for sinning against their conscience; and like specious reasonings to justify the cruelty of intolerance.²¹ It is less hurtful to compel a man to marry someone whom he does not love than to follow a religion in which he does not believe.²²

Liberty: How do you answer the contention that a false religion is inimical to society, and may be suppressed if it seduces people from a knowledge of the truth?

Williams: First, a false religion out of the church will not hurt the church, any more than weeds in the wilderness hurt an enclosed garden, or poisons hurt the body when they are not taken, and antidotes are received against them. Secondly, a false worship will not hurt the civil state if the worshipper breaks no civil law. As for those who would persecute others and exempt themselves from persecution . . . notwithstanding their confidence in the truth of their own way, yet the experience of our fathers' errors, our own mistakes and ignorance, the sense of our own weaknesses and blindness in the depths of the prophecies and mysteries in the Kingdom of Christ, and the great professed expectation of light to come which we are not now able to comprehend, may abate the edge, yea, sheath up the sword of persecution toward any.²³

Liberty: What do you see as the greatest danger confronting organized Christian religion?

Williams: Invented devotions to the God of heaven; also violence and opposition toward the sons of men (especially if His sons) for dissenting.²⁴

Liberty: Do you see any indications in Bible prophecy that the spirit of persecution among Christians and other religious groups will continue far beyond your day?

Williams: I am sure of two things: First, it is but little of the world yet that hath heard the lost estate of mankind and of a Savior, Christ Jesus; and as yet the fullness of the gentiles has not come, and probably shall not until the downfall of the Papacy. Secondly, the ministry or service of prophets and witnesses, mourning and prophesying in sackcloth, God has directly commissioned and upheld all during the reign of the beast and antichrist of Rome. This witness is probably near finished, and the bloody storm of slaughter is yet to be expected and prepared for. But this, and the time, and many passages in Revelation 13, are controversial, and something like that of Christ's personal appearance, the state of the New Jerusalem, and the new heavens and earth, etc. Meanwhile, all who are entrusted with spiritual and temporal talents must lay them out for the Lord and Master's advantage. I do not condone hostility toward any church simply to vent personal malice or umbrage. No man ever did, or ever shall, truly go forth to convert the nations, nor to prophesy in the present state of witness against antichrist, but by the gracious inspiration and instigation of the Holy Spirit of God. And when He send, His messengers will go, His prophets will prophesy, though all the world should forbid them. Howbeit, whatever tumults and strifes await God's witnesses, it remains clear that the doctrine of persecution for the sake of conscience is most evidently and lamentably contrary to the doctrine of Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace.²⁵

Liberty: It is evident from your writings that you have viewed the church of Rome in a critical, even condemning, light. Does your belief in freedom of religion extend even to the Catholic Church whose doctrines and policies you so blatantly disapproved in the 1600s?


Williams: In my plea for freedom to all consciences in matters merely of worship, I have impartially pleaded for freedom of the consciences of the Papists themselves, the greatest enemies and persecutors in Europe of the saints and truths of Jesus; yet I have pleaded for no more than is their due and right. Whatever else shall be the consequence of this plea, it shall stand for a monument and testimony against them and be an aggravation of their former, present, and future cruelties against Christ Jesus the Head, and all that uprightly love Him, His true disciples and followers.²⁶

Liberty: Clearly you are a fervent believer in the Bible and a committed Christian. Describe your concept of the Christian church in its purity.

Williams: I believe and profess that the following blessed characters will be found written on the foreheads of those persons and churches which have come nearest to Christ: First, contentment with a poor and low condition in worldly things; Second, a holy cleansing from the filthiness of false worship and worldly conversations [ways of life]; Third, a humble and constant endeavor to attain (in their simplicity and purity) to the ordinances and appointments of Christ Jesus; Fourth, so far from smiting, killing, and wounding the opposites of their profession and worship, they resolve themselves patiently to bear and carry the cross and galls of their Lord and Master, and patiently to suffer with Him. In the number of such poor servants of Christ, desires to be your unfeigned, though unworthiest of all His followers, Roger Williams.²⁷

Liberty: Were you to make an open appeal to modern man, reflecting your most cherished values, what would it be?

Williams: How frequent, how constant ought we to be, like Christ Jesus our example, in doing good, especially to the souls of men and especially to the household of faith (yea, even to our enemies), when we remember that this is our seed time, of which every minute is precious, and that as our sowing is, so shall be our eternal harvest. For, so saith the Spirit by Paul to the Galatians: "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:8).²⁸

Liberty: Thank you, Governor Williams. 

Dear Reader: It is noteworthy that on a number of occasions after his banishment, Williams interceded on behalf of the Massachusetts Bay Colony with local Indian tribes which had determined to annihilate the colonists because of their mistreatment of the Indians, to whom they felt highly superior. Williams was never the target of the Indians' wrath because he always treated them with consideration, respect, and complete honesty. For this reason he was able to serve effectively as a peacemaker, though his negotiations were often intricate, precarious, and long. The Massachusetts colonists were at best grudgingly appreciative of his voluntary efforts, which had often saved their lives. Such is the churlish ingratitude of self-righteousness. Roger Williams was for peace, but his persecutors attributed questionable motives to him, and the most noble motives to their own malice and bellicosity. What a lesson in history! How apropos of our own day in which many a self-righteous moralist regards an opposing view as a form of pernicious heresy to be eradicated by all politically exploitable means.

Brian Jones, or "Liberty," as he is known for this article, is actually a very modern man, a church pastor and much-published author, living in Chloe, West Virginia.

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2008

The Dinosaur Of Fundamentalism

BY: LINCOLN E. STEED

The Dinosaur of Fundamentalism

A few days ago I went with my two children on a school outing to the Science Museum at the Baltimore Inner Harbor. Kids love science—or at least the apparent mystery that goes along with the topic. For example, the spinning wheel with black dashes on a white face that appears to be two other colors when spun clockwise, and two entirely different colors when spun anticlockwise. Christopher and Kristen were literally wide-eyed with wonder at that one. The museum guide explained part of the principle of cone receptors in the eyes; and concluded by admitting there is no explanation for the directional color shift (letters please!). That's science. Always in pursuit of knowledge.

As anyone who knows children would expect, mine spent most of their time in the dinosaur exhibit. It was hard to ignore, with its full-sized models of Tyrannosaurus Rex and the other huge long necked one that ate grass and was eaten by T-Rex! I tried listening to my i-Pod at one point, and found that the ever-present dinosaur sounds neatly overpowered it with pipe organ overtones. I was forced to pay attention to the exhibit, and watch my children as they brushed away soil to uncover fossilized bones, sat in plaster cast imprint holes of dino footprints, and handled dinosaur eggs in nest like patterns.



It was about then that it occurred to me how much of the exhibit was more Disney than Mr. Science. I read about the color of dinosaurs. I heard their sounds-calls. I noted the narrative in one area about how some of them may have been feathered. I was much taken by the developing hypothesis that dinosaurs may have been caring and nurturing parents (like crocodiles, I guess)—unlike the real monitor lizard which lay more immobile in its cage than the nearby dinosaur exhibits. And after awhile it struck me that we know almost nothing about them, other than what we have extrapolated from our present reality.

About then I fell into conversation with one of the museum guides.

She noted how the exhibit is easily the most popular part of the museum. I remarked with some intended irony how there is such extensive knowledge of dinosaurs—even of color, nests and sounds, etc. She rose to the bait nicely.

"Yes," she said, "it is pretty overwhelming. But do you know we get people in here who refuse to believe it. Who only believe in creation." She hunted my eyes for a flicker of agreement. "Still it's good to know what the opposition is thinking." Time for me to respond.

"Well," I answered, "it is pretty certain that these things existed sometime. But I do believe in the Bible and creation. Maybe sometimes faith is needed to accept any view we take." I was thinking of the leaps of faith required to take bones turned to stone and present them as fleshed out, social creatures one can hear and empathize with. Unfortunately I may have revealed myself as the enemy. I did so want to discuss why there need not automatically be a presumed break between faith and reason. I had even hoped to discuss what God might have meant by "leviathan" in His dialog with Job.

"Them" and "us" has always been a poor way to discuss faith and reason. As though they are two distinct things. History shows otherwise, of course.

Right now we are in a global conflict, as some have put it, between progressive, rational modernity and religious fundamentalism. (Read the article "Religious Freedom or Religious Fundamentalism" on page 18.) Fear of terrorism has made it an "either with us or against us" scenario. But if you pause for a minute and think rationally on it, things are not quite that simple.

I get a lot of letters. Some you see in the letters column each issue. Others I answer privately. Some of course get easily filed. Others trouble me.

Got a letter the other day from Malcolm Dillard, on the city council of Dillard, Georgia. He wants to cancel *Liberty* "Because I do not share any of its views in regards to separation of church and state." Shot across the bow, obviously. It is true *Liberty* has always been jealous to keep the separation of church and state operative—it's constitutional, it's biblical and it's historically arguable as protective of both church and state.

Mr. Dillard stated correctly that "Our government is not trying to force religion on anyone." And somewhat incorrectly that "Our nation was founded on Christian principles." He then blamed the chipping away of the rights of Christians on "organizations like yours." That hurts. That had better not be true.

To be historically candid, I would be personally more reassured if I could equate the founding of America with a Christian intent. It's not to be found in any of the issues that led to the war with England. It might be deduced from the general Protestantism of the population; although I find an unfortunate Masonic theme to be more intrusive than a Christian one. What is certain is that the framers and their society intended to protect the faith baby in the bathwater of their society.

Continuing, Mr. Dillard writes that "God is just and will judge our nation if we continue this downward path." Well, yes, I agree with that wholeheartedly. But what has caused our downward path? Has government mandate ever shown an ability to create true faith? To be sure those states of the Middle Ages that came under church control tried mightily to force their citizens to obey church dicta, and punished those who resisted. And even today in America we have the shadowy "Blue Laws" still lurking on the statute books as a reminder of how hard died that medieval mentality. What Mr. Dillard seems not to notice in our current model is the willingness of religious leaders to take control of political power and use it to advance their cause. To this the Constitution says a big No. This is the way of the fundamentalism that we decry worldwide.

I signed off on our fundamentalist article already alluded to. Author Bert Beach makes many good points. What needs clarifying is the term "fundamentalist" itself. Today it has become a proxy for an array of religious behaviors we find either ridiculous or dangerous.

Islamic fundamentalism holds that religion and religious forces should control the state. Afghan Taliban and Iranian Mullah rule have shown the world an actual repression of individual faith. Violent Islamic fundamentalism is self righteous enough to want to kill everyone to save the village. Both in the Islamic and Christian worlds there are nativist religious groups who would trample on others beliefs to ensure that theirs are dominant. And coloring our view of such negative religiosity is the fact that in traditional cultures it is the under-educated masses that most support the predominant faith. Their retrograde worldview has become shorthand for describing "fundamentalism."

We risk forgetting the origin of the term, and the opprobrium once accorded it.

At the dawning of Christianity, to profess faith in Jesus put one at odds with society's norms and under the scrutiny of a state that suspected a Christian of disloyalty. A Christian had to be convicted of the "fundamentals" of faith. These had to be identified and were worth dying for—as many early Christians did. What a great irony that today those who kill for faith are confused with the great fundamentalists through the ages: heroes and martyrs who were inflexible on the vital matters of faith. The ones who led national revivals, started religious reformations and prepared the spiritual soil in a new land for a republic that respected faith.

Lincoln E. Steed
Editor,

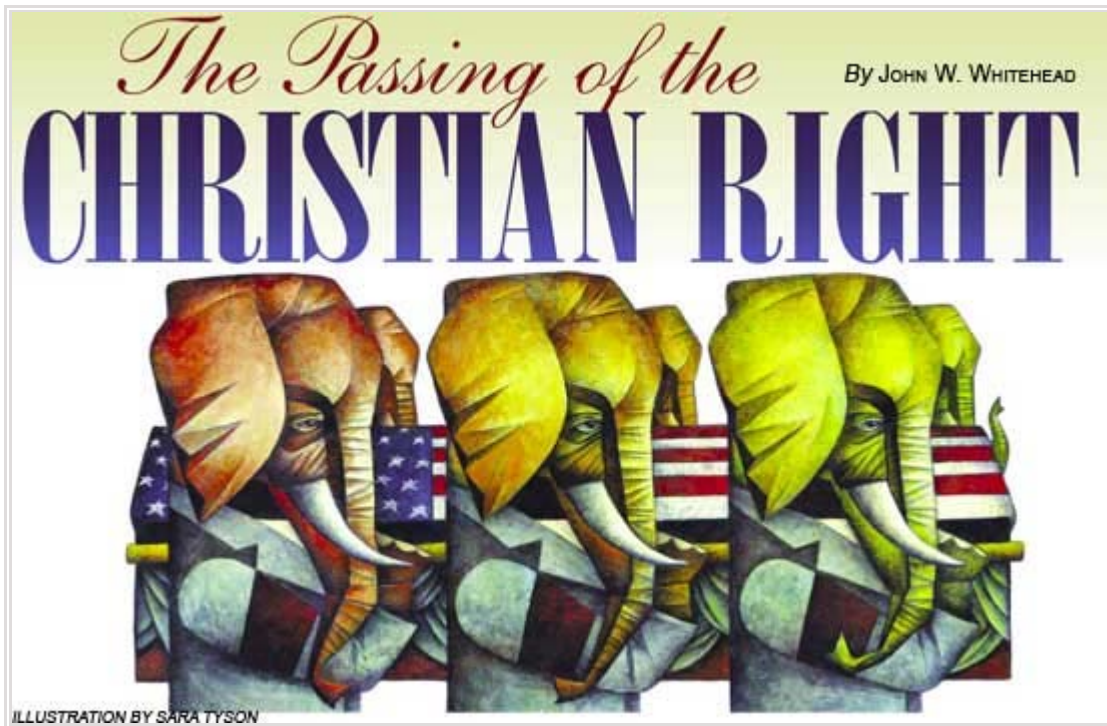


Liberty
Magazine

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2008

The Passing Of The Christian Right

BY: JOHN W. WHITEHEAD



"Nearly 30 years after religious conservatives decided to reenter the political arena—after abandoning it as 'dirty' and leading to compromise—what do they have to show for it? The country remains sharply divided and the reconciling message they used to preach has been obscured by the crass pursuit of the golden ring of political power. In the end, they got neither the power, nor the Kingdom; only the glory, and even that is now fading as these older leaders pass from the scene."

—Cal Thomas, former vice president of the Moral Majority

We are witnessing the end of an era. The deaths of Jerry Falwell (May 15, 2007) and Dr. D. James Kennedy (September 5, 2007) augured a decided downward shift in the Christian Right's steady march to power. Yet long before these men were laid to rest, the movement they helped energize had begun its steady decline.

In the early 1980s, an emergent generation of evangelists lit up television screens, appeared on university campuses, and infiltrated syndicated radio waves. Among these leaders were Falwell, Kennedy, James Dobson, and Pat Robertson, evangelical figures who both predicted and embodied the formation of a new political religion that has transformed the national political scene.

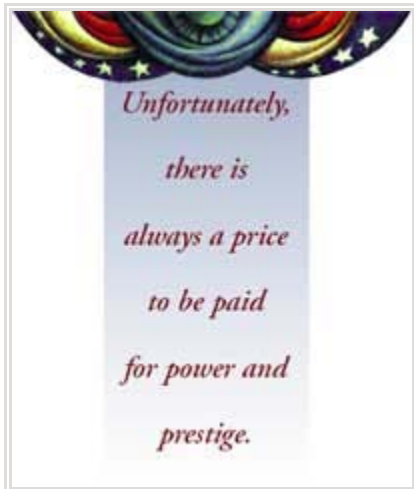
While this marriage between the Religious Right and the political right has been in the making for nearly three decades, the union was consummated with George W. Bush's rise to power and resulted in the Christian Right's enjoyment of unprecedented political influence. As Falwell remarked in 2004: "For conservative people of faith, voting for principle this year means voting for the re-election of George W. Bush. . . . I believe it is the responsibility of every political conservative, every evangelical Christian, every pro-life Catholic, every traditional Jew, every Reagan Democrat, and everyone in between to get serious about re-electing President Bush."

In fact, those of the Christian Right have made no effort to hide their intentions to impact the political scene in the halls of Congress. Falwell, Dobson, and others laid great store on their contacts inside the Bush White House. As Falwell once remarked, "Everyone takes our calls." However, the Christian Right's claim of political influence may be supercilious. David Kuo, in his book *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction* (2006), argues that Christian Right leaders are nothing more than politically inept tools used by politicians to advance their own agendas.

Kuo, who served as Special Assistant to President George W. Bush, noted that evangelical leaders were often invited to White House

functions in an effort to curry their favor and garner their support. Conference calls were held in the White House to update Christian leaders. According to Kuo, talking points were distributed and advice was solicited from these Christian leaders and others. But "that advice rarely went much further than the conference call." And "the true purpose of these calls was to keep prominent social conservatives and their groups or audiences happy." As Kuo recognized, the political establishment just wanted access to the evangelical voting base.

Unfortunately, there is always a price to be paid for power and prestige. In the process of seeking policy outcomes and funding for faith-based initiatives, Christian activists were seduced by political power to such an extent that the gospel of Jesus Christ has been held hostage to a political agenda. Whereas Christianity was once synonymous with charity, compassion, and love for one's neighbor, today it is more often equated with partisan politics, anti-homosexual rhetoric, affluent megachurches, and moralistic finger-pointing.



In fact, the Christian Right has been painted as the "American Taliban." In his book *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (2006), Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and former war correspondent Chris Hedges contends that today's Christian Right resembles the early fascist movements in Italy and Germany that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. And no wonder he makes such a comment! The Christian Right has used religion like a sledgehammer to beat down its opponents. For example, shortly following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Jerry Falwell appeared on televangelist Pat Robertson's television show, *The 700 Club*. The attacks, Falwell said, were evidence that God was angry at America for its cultural immorality and the nation was paying the price for it. Falwell laid the blame on certain individuals and groups such as the ACLU for "throwing God out successfully with the help of the federal court system, throwing God out of the public square, out of the schools," as well as pagans, abortionists, feminists, gays, and lesbians.

The answer proffered is to take control of the government. In fact, Gary Potter, president of Catholics for Christian Political Action, advocates: "After the Christian majority takes control, pluralism will be seen as immoral and evil and the state will not permit anybody the right to practice evil." Such rhetoric has contributed to a genuine but growing backlash against the Christian Right that can be seen in the popularity of Chris Hitchens' book *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2007).

Indeed, as President Bush's political star has waned, the Religious Right's legacy and its ability to positively impact the nation are increasingly being called into question. Critics contend that the evangelical movement has been largely reduced to political impotence and moral irrelevance.

By many indications, since the rise of the Christian Right in the early 1980s, the moral condition of the country has worsened. Several years ago, a Barna Group study found that the American adults surveyed found the following, among other things, "morally acceptable": gambling (61 percent), cohabitation (60 percent), and sexual fantasies (59 percent). Nearly half of the adult population felt that two other behaviors were morally acceptable: having an abortion (45 percent) and having a sexual relationship with someone of the opposite sex other than their spouse (42 percent). And the younger the age group surveyed, the more these types of activities were deemed morally acceptable.

As the study concludes, "The generational data patterns make a compelling case for this ongoing slide. Even most people associated with the Christian faith do not seem to have embraced biblical moral standards. Things are likely to get worse before they get better—and they are not likely to get better unless strong and appealing moral leadership emerges to challenge and redirect people's thoughts and behavior. At the moment, such leadership is absent."

The high-profile scandal in the fall of 2006 involving Ted Haggard, who at the time was president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), underscores the crisis in modern Christianity. For example, Haggard used his position as head of NAE to advocate various Christian Right platforms in condemning homosexuality and campaigning for amendments banning same sex marriage. However, he was forced to resign as pastor of his megachurch and president of NAE when it was discovered that he was involved in sexual immorality with a homosexual.

The real tragedy of the Ted Haggard debacle was not that Haggard had been leading a double life. As David Kuo remarked to the Associated Press, "It's tragedy enough if a pastor fails, but this is not about a pastor failing. This is about a politician failing, and the politician is bringing Jesus down with him."

Yet all is not lost. There is a growing sense among many Christians that politics cannot provide the fulfillment they are seeking. After all, by its very nature, politics is driven toward division, compromise, deceit, and, inevitably, corruption. Perhaps people are finally starting to wake up to this truth. According to Kuo, while evangelicals aren't flocking to the Democratic Party, they are perhaps turning away from

politics as a means of moral engagement and fulfillment. His prediction is sustained by one post-election online survey of more than 2,000 people, which revealed that "nearly 40 percent of evangelicals support the idea of a two-year Christian 'fast' from intense political activism."

D. James Kennedy was, perhaps, keen to this shift. As a leading figure in the Christian Right and Republican Party politics, Kennedy's televised messages had strayed from traditional preaching to focusing primarily on politics and social issues. However, in April 2007, shortly before his death, Kennedy announced that he was shutting down the Center for Reclaiming America and his Center for Christian Statesmanship in Washington, D.C. He intended to return to his ministerial roots.

The Christian Right should follow suit. Unlike many Christians today, Christ did not engage in politics, identify with the government, or attempt to push an agenda through government channels. In fact, for Christians to be stridently aligned with conservative politics is to miss the point of their religion. "One of the greatest injustices we do to our young people is to ask them to be conservative," theologian Francis Schaeffer wrote. Conservatism, as such, means promoting a political agenda and, thus, maintaining the flow of the status quo. True Christians, however, should be revolutionaries against a status quo dedicated to materialism and the survival of the fittest. Indeed, Christians should stand outside the status quo. This includes politics. We often forget that Christ spoke truth to power and made it abundantly clear that His kingdom was not of this world.

Unfortunately, all too often Christians wrap their religion in the flag, so to speak. For the Christian, country and faith are never synonymous, and they are not two equal loyalties. As Francis Schaeffer noted, "It must be taught that patriotic loyalty must not be identified with Christianity." As Christians in past regimes have found, identifying with the establishment, as much of modern evangelicalism is doing, can present a grave danger—the establishment can and often has become the church's enemy.

Not only is it perilous to identify with the established powers, it also negates the true mission of the church. The church is not to identify with power but to speak truth to power—even at great costs. Martyrs, past and present, testify to this.

Thus, if Christianity is to serve as the moral compass of society, Christians must remain clear of the constraints and compromises entailed in political affiliation. The most appropriate role of religion in politics lies in its ability to define moral issues and speak truth to power. The voice of moral authority, enabled and enhanced by its spiritual roots and raised without dependence upon the legitimacy of the state, will always be the highest expression of true freedom. Such a voice denies the ultimate authority of the government to create or define right or wrong by its own power.

All this does not mean that the church has to be silent. This is definitely not a day for a sleeping church. While Christians should avoid politicizing their religion, this does not mean that pastors or individuals should not address the pressing social and moral issues of the day. Just the opposite is true. Christians need to be clear in what they say and stand by it.

Most of all, there is a dire need for a compassionate Christianity. Like the early church, the modern church needs to cut across all lines and reach out to every segment of society. If not, irrelevance will become its epitaph.

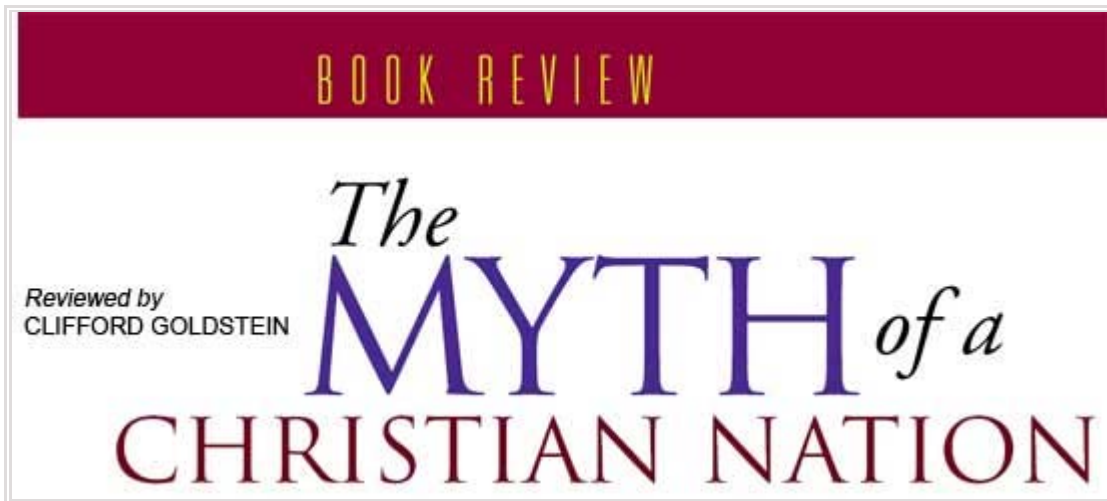


John W. Whitehead is president of the Rutherford Institute, based in Charlottesville, Virginia.

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The Myth Of A Christian Nation

BY: CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN



Funny that I read *The Myth of a Christian Nation* the week Jerry Falwell died, because Falwell, in his own inimitable way, personified the thesis expounded in Boyd's book.

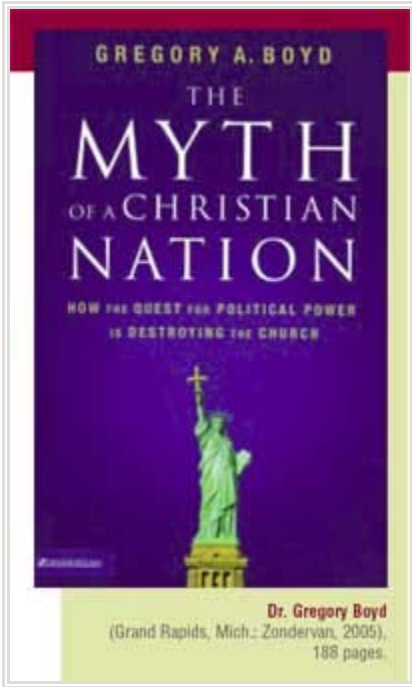
I go back with Jerry Falwell to the early 1980s. I have often stated, somewhat facetiously, that I got my start as a writer by bashing Jerry Falwell. One incident in particular stands out in my mind. I had written an article in *Liberty* (subsequently reprinted in the *Baltimore Jewish Times*) in which I warned that much of the evangelical obsession and support of the Jewish nation was based on an eschatology that, among other things, predicted the death of millions of Jews, with those who survived converting to Christianity (deemed by many Jews as a fate worse than death!). When asked at a press conference about the issues presented in the article, Falwell stood before the group and, without blinking, declared that he knew nothing about any theology that taught that millions of Jews were going to be slaughtered in the end-time while the survivors all accepted Jesus as the Messiah. The only problem was that I got most of the article from a Bible commentary that Jerry Falwell himself had edited!

I don't dredge this up to judge Falwell, his heart, or his motives. I dredge it up because I believe it represents what should be by now painfully obvious, and that is, no matter how sincere and honest their motives, whenever Christians get heavily involved in the political process—all with the desire to make their respective nation more "Christian"—what happens is the reverse. Instead of the nonbelievers becoming more Christian, the Christians wind up acting more like nonbelievers. All through history that has been the case, and—as Jerry Falwell (who seemed to consistently transgress the commandment about bearing false witness) and others have shown—it's no different with the church today.

Hence the theme of Gregory Boyd's book, which presents a biblically based challenge to the take-no-prisoners Christian Right foray into politics. The irony is unmistakable: a Christian minister using the Bible to refute those who claim that the Bible gives them marching orders for "bringing America back to God." It was a stinging rebuke that didn't go unnoticed, either. In fact, when he first preached the sermon that became the germ of this book, 20 percent of his Minnesota congregation (about a thousand people) walked out of his church and never came back.

Boyd's thesis is simple: Nothing in the Bible, especially in the teachings and example of Jesus, calls on Christians to gain political hegemony. This "power over" model, as he calls it, is how earthly kingdoms, all under the dominion of Satan, work. It's the power of compulsion, the power of the sword, the power to force people into conformity. And, after all, that's how any government, even a "good" one, has to function. (I mean, who pays taxes out of love for the government? We pay because the IRS will put us in jail otherwise.) Coercion, even in the most benign governments, is the prevailing paradigm. It's hard to think of any nation that ever worked any other way or that possibly could work any other way.

In contrast, Boyd argues for what he calls the "power under" model as the overarching paradigm for "God's kingdom," the kingdom of Christ, which is formed when Christians, following the "self-sacrificing love" embodied by Jesus, win souls through love, not through the



sword. Using Christ's words in Luke 22, when Jesus contrasts the Gentile rulers—who "exercise dominion" over their people—to His own followers, who were to minister and serve others, Boyd argues that this conservative evangelical foray into "power over" politics amounts to a betrayal of all that being a Christian stands for.

"The kingdom of the world," he writes, "is concerned with preserving law and order by force; the kingdom of God is concerned with establishing the rule of God through love."

He makes a compelling historical case, too, showing that, after the "conversion" of Constantine, the church gained worldly power, the precise kind of power that Christian Rightists of today could only drool over. Was the result, then, a reign of righteousness? Hardly. Instead it began the complete corruption of the church, which led to centuries of persecution, torture, wars, and suffering, all done in the name of Jesus Christ and, ostensibly, for the furtherance of righteousness and holiness.

Of course, as with any polemic, Dr. Boyd makes the distinctions much sharper and unambiguous than they often are, particularly in an area such as politics and faith, which are not always so easy to separate. And though, to his credit, he acknowledges these difficulties, acknowledging them isn't the same as resolving them, which he doesn't really do, no matter how hard he tries to toward the end of his book.

Let's be honest. His all-you-need-is-love paradigm wouldn't have stopped the Nazis or the Soviets, and wouldn't have ended slavery in the South, either. And, if loving Osama bin Laden would neutralize his jihad against the West, even atheist polemicists like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens would be effusively loving, to be sure.

Nevertheless, however simplistic his "power under" contra "power over" distinctions are, he still makes a crucial point. Where in the Great Commission are Christians called to gain political power and use that power to bring about a moral revival in their respective countries? Text and verse, please. The fact is the texts and verses aren't there, because that's not what Christians are called to do. And, besides, it never works anyway.

Indeed, after all the years of being in a position of political power, what has the Christian Right accomplished as far as bringing "America back to God"? Abortion is still legal, states are moving toward approving gay unions, and in many schools government-mandated group prayer is still not allowed. *All this—after exercising political power for the past few decades.* It doesn't seem to be working very well, and, if the past is any precursor to the future, even if the Christian Right gained all the political power it covets, America would be no more closer to God than it was in the "Golden Age" of a few hundred years back, when "Christian America" was butchering Native Americans and enslaving millions of Africans.

No, as has always been the case—Jerry Falwell (may he rest in peace) being the perfect example—the foray into politics changes the church more than the church changes politics. It's nice to have an influential and articulate voice like Dr. Gregory Boyd sounding the trumpet about this "evangelically incorrect" fact. The church he loves would be well-served to listen to him. However, as the exodus from his own congregation shows, it's not what many want to hear.



Clifford Goldstein, a former editor of Liberty, is now editor of the Adult Bible Study Guides, published by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland.