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"Watch His Conscience"

Aliens for Their Faith

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by [Robert J. Hendricks III](#)

There is much religious intolerance in this new, twenty-first century. This is the tale of religious intolerance in an obscure country in East Africa called Eritrea. After fighting for its own freedom from Ethiopia for more than 30 years, this Marxist regime has forced a peace-loving community of Christians to become little more than aliens in their own land.

While known the world over as a group of devoted preachers, Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea have been the target of a brutal and protracted government-sponsored campaign of terror. All Witnesses have been stripped of their citizenship and the rights that go with it, apparently with the intent of breaking their faith or of wiping them out as a presence in that country.

While Jehovah's Witnesses are not the only faith under attack in Eritrea, independent human rights observers say the persecution of this group is particularly intense, extending over the better part of two decades. "Muslims and especially Jehovah's Witnesses have suffered persecution as a consequence of their refusal to take part in compulsory military service. Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses is particularly pronounced given their refusal to vote in the independence referendum," says the 2008 edition of the book *Religious Freedom in the World*, edited by Paul Marshall and published by the Hudson Institute, a Washington think tank that reports on human rights violations around the globe.

"The government views not participating in military service as a threat to the state," says Alan Gallina, a human rights specialist with the Jehovah's Witnesses, who are headquartered in Brooklyn, New York, and have more than 7 million members in 235 lands across the world. "But if that's the case, why are there 2- and 3-year-olds in prison right now? Why are there 75-year-olds in prison? How can they be a threat?"

A country of about 5 million people on what's known as the Horn of Africa, Eritrea shares borders with Sudan to the west, Ethiopia to the south, Djibouti to the southeast, and the Red Sea to the east. As of September 2009, 60 Eritrean Jehovah's Witnesses were known to be imprisoned for reasons ranging from conscientious objection to military service, to participation in religious activity such as preaching, to meeting in a Bible study group. More than half of the arrests have had nothing to do with participation in military service. Three of the prisoners have been held since September 1994, spending the better part of their lives in prison.

On June 28, 2009, 23 members of one congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the capital of Asmara were peacefully meeting together for Bible study in a private home when Eritrean authorities raided the meeting and imprisoned Witnesses and interested persons alike. Three children ranging in ages from 2 to 4 years were among the group, which also included a child of 8, a woman over 70, and another over 80. The majority of these arrests were of women, since the government had long since arrested their husbands and sons. Most remain in prison today. This is the latest in a pattern of persecution extending back to 1994.

"There is a misunderstanding about who we are," says Philip Brumley, general counsel for Jehovah's Witnesses, in an interview from his office in Patterson, New York. "If the government would understand who we are, we are confident that this mistreatment will end."

Yet, governmental officials have rebuffed most efforts by the religious group to foster any understanding beyond what's



already known by them. And the little that the government knows, they don't like.

Jehovah's Witnesses began showing up on the government's radar in April 1993, when more than a million Eritreans voted for independence from Ethiopia in a U.N.-supervised referendum. That vote was the culmination of a battle between the two countries spanning some three decades and led by a man who would become president of the newly formed government. The referendum marked the embryonic stages of severe and protracted persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses—who, for conscientious reasons, elected not to participate in the referendum.

Their reasons for not voting are rooted in their stand of strict neutrality in political and governmental issues. This has been a tenet of the Jehovah's Witnesses' faith for nearly 100 years, bringing them in harmony, they say, with both Jesus' teachings and the model set forth by the first-century Christian congregation. They cite the words of Jesus Christ to Pontius Pilate as recorded in John 18:36: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."* Like Jesus, they obey the governmental authorities when the laws promulgated do not interfere with their obligations as set forth in the Bible.

This has put them at odds with Eritrean officials, who seem to believe the state is sovereign in people's lives—even over God. Jonah Fisher, a former BBC correspondent based in Asmara, writes that the repression of religion is a result of the government being "afraid that people who consider their highest allegiance to be God, at some point may not be patriotic and follow the state's instructions," according to his September 17, 2004, report published by the BBC.

If the Witnesses' nonparticipation in the referendum put them on the government's radar, however, their firm stand against military service landed them right in the government's crosshairs as its main target against conscientious objectors.

After 30 years of war it was no surprise that Eritrea's new leaders maintained a war mentality. Once Eritrea achieved independence, it became what Paul Marshall of the Hudson Institute calls a "militarily mobilized national security state." This militarized state seemed bent on making an example of Jehovah's Witnesses for their conscientious objection to military service.

But the stand taken in Eritrea is not new for Jehovah's Witnesses, who have steadfastly refused to serve in any military organization of any nation. Their stand is well known in the United States and Europe, where they have exercised their conscientious objection even in the face of death at the hands of totalitarian regimes such as the Nazis during World War II.

"We are not subversive; we are not anti-Eritrean," says Brumley. "History confirms that Jehovah's Witnesses will not perform military service. This is not a country-specific position. It is a trait of Jehovah's Witnesses." He adds, "Just the fact that Jesus said the world would recognize us by the love we show among ourselves, it is inconceivable that Witnesses would allow themselves to be divided by national barriers." The scriptural basis for this teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses is found in John 13:35, where Jesus said the identifying characteristic of His followers would be their collective "love for one another."

From left to right: Paulos Eyassy, Isaac Mogos, and Negede Teklemariam, imprisoned since September 24, 1994, for their conscientious objection to serving in the Eritrean military.

Notwithstanding the Jehovah's Witnesses' long-established stand, Eritrean officials were intent on establishing their own legacy. On September 24, 1994, three young Jehovah's Witness men were imprisoned, ostensibly for their refusal to join the military. Paulos Eyassu, Negede Teklemariam, and Isaac Mogos have been imprisoned for the past 15 years—isolated from families and community—despite the fact that the maximum penalty for conscientious objection under Eritrean law is three years.



"The families were deeply grieved at first. Every day since then, worry is added to their grief," said friends of the family in a report published by Jehovah's Witnesses on the tenth anniversary of their imprisonment. "They are afraid to speak about it or share what little they do know, for fear of adverse consequences on the men in prison."

One month after the arrests—almost to the day—the government took an even stronger stand. On October 25, 1994, Eritrean president Isaias Afworki issued the following presidential declaration:

“A group calling themselves ‘Jehovah’ [sic], who are Eritreans by birth, but who have revoked their Eritrean citizenship by their refusal to take part in the referendum, have now reconfirmed their position by refusing to take part in the National Service, thus deciding to revoke their citizenship.”

The immediate result of this decree was swift and decisive. All Jehovah’s Witnesses in Eritrea were stripped of their basic civil rights and barred from working in any governmental employment. Additionally, their business licenses, identity cards, and travel documents were summarily revoked, refused, and/or taken from them. The result has caused tremendous economic hardship in a country already among the poorest in the world. Worse, the decree marked the beginning of a dark period for Eritrean Jehovah’s Witnesses, whose families have been torn apart and disenfranchised by the merciless persecution and imprisonment of children as young as 2 and men as old as 90.

The first communities of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Eritrea date back to the 1940s. But since 1995, at least 250 Jehovah’s Witness families have fled Eritrea and sought asylum outside the country because of the hardships. More than 100 Witnesses lost their employment because of their religion, affecting their immediate family and others who relied on their support. At least 38 Jehovah’s Witnesses were denied business licenses and 37 families have been expelled from their homes, with little prospects for renting a home because of the climate of hate and discrimination.

“The detention of individuals solely because of their religious beliefs is part of the general denial of the rights to freedom of expression and association in Eritrea, as well as other grave violations of basic human rights,” states a December 2005 report by Amnesty International on religious persecution in Eritrea. “These violations of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion are contrary to international law, as well as the Constitution of Eritrea.”

The violations go well beyond economic hardship and community ostracism, however. According to the book *Religious Freedom in the World*, there are few places on earth where religious discrimination is so egregious and human rights are so often ignored. By all accounts, Eritrean incarceration can be compared only to concentration camps. Marshall writes: “With grueling work and little food, prisoners are often placed in overcrowded makeshift corrugated tin housing, which exacerbates both the intense heat of the day and the cold of the night. In such an environment, disease spreads quickly, and medical facilities are often either lacking or deliberately withheld. Frequent reports have emerged of confinement in underground cells or metal shipping containers, both of which serve as especially severe punishment.” “Life in detention centers is extremely harsh since it occurs in some of the hottest places on earth. . . . In such conditions, people have died or gone insane.”

In the 2004 BBC report by Fisher, Fisher quotes a journalist who had seen firsthand the human rights violations in Eritrea. “All of these things are just happening repeatedly over and over from people of all different Christian denominations and the Jehovah’s Witnesses,” wrote Fisher, quoting the reporter. “I’ve seen the scars on people’s legs, I’ve seen their tears and it’s very real and they live under a lot of fear.”

It goes without saying that these government-sanctioned actions violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the pledge Eritrea made when it joined the United Nations. Incredibly, Eritrea is violating its own constitution, which was ratified in 1997 but never enacted. Article 19 of the document provides for freedom of conscience, religion, movement, assembly, organization, and expression of opinion. “In reality, however, the government quashes any freedoms perceived to diminish national security or unity,” writes Marshall.

Against this flood of persecution, Jehovah’s Witnesses in Eritrea are not giving in or giving up. “I interviewed a few young brothers and sisters and, by and large . . . their faith is intact and they are strong,” says Gallina. “In fact, their faith has been made stronger.”

“I’ve seen the scars on people’s legs, I’ve seen their tears and it’s very real and they live under a lot of fear.”



Gallina says that the Witnesses are still attempting to send a delegation to meet with President Afworki or his key people. “We almost always find that meeting with officials helps mitigate problems,” he said, adding that any efforts made toward resolving these issues are done “rather cautiously because we are concerned how this will affect our brothers and sisters.”

One of the potential remedies available to both sides is the adoption of a system of civilian national service under the oversight of a nonmilitary branch of government. Such a system of alternative service is made available to Jehovah’s Witnesses and other conscientious objectors in countries such as Cuba, Denmark, Germany, Colombia, Taiwan, among others, according to Brumley.

“Generally speaking, most Jehovah’s Witnesses do not object to performing national service,” said Brumley. “Of course, it cannot be under military supervision, and whether or not one accepts to perform such service is up to the individual’s conscience.” He adds, “If the government needs help to build schools, improve roads, and if there was national service that is civilian, very likely many young Witnesses would be there to help out. . . . Right now, however, they are taking young men and instead of using them to build bridges or schools, they have them sitting in prison.”

Witness officials stress that patience is a must, even after years of severe treatment. “In spite of the chronic mistreatment of Jehovah’s Witnesses, we are nevertheless hopeful that through dialogue these misunderstandings can be resolved and peace established,” says Brumley. “In spite of the way we have been treated, we still want to sit down and talk with the government so that the persecution will end.”

It has been said that Eritrean parents will quote an old Eritrean proverb to their children: *Kwakolo kus bekus bougru yehahid*, which means when translated, “Little by little an egg will walk.” This refers to the process by which an egg is hatched, a chick emerges, and it gradually grows into an adult, teaching a child to reach a goal by working at it day by day. Jehovah’s Witnesses are hoping this proverb holds true in their dealings with the Eritrean government—that little by little, day by day, their efforts will one day help deliver their fellow worshippers from this crucible of persecution.

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At Least We Have Prayer

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by [Lincoln E. Steed](#)

Götterdämmerung or *Morte d'Arthur*? Pardon my German and French—the significance is in the works of art they represent, not the languages. But first let me remark on the incredible events of May 6, 2010.

We have been living in a financial house of cards since September 2008. We have become used to increasing unemployment, foreclosure signs, and shuttered businesses. We have even come to believe that gyrating stock markets work in our favor, so long as the trend is upward. May 6 was a great wake-up call, as the Dow Jones plummeted 1,000 points during that day—eventually closing down only 347 points. Procter and Gamble stocks actually lost 37 percent of their value. What happened?

To be sure, no leader today is truly master of the world's economic trajectory. But some must know more than they say. Federal Reserve Chairman Bernanke is an expert in the Great Depression. He must surely know that after the initial collapse there was a long period of economic “sitzkrieg” and market gyrations before the real collapse took hold. I don't blame him for his silence. Financially, at least, we must wonder whether the world will end with a whimper or a bang.

We are being reminded of the limits to technology—or perhaps of the risks from technology. There is, after all, some fear of runaway auto trading. Science and technology, which have become gods of sorts to a modern state of logic, have begun to betray us. It is not too hard to hear behind the fearful hush of Wall Street and the bubble of oil from the sea floor a swelling chord or two of *Götterdämmerung*, Wagner's opera based on legends of the fall of the gods in a battle with evil forces. “Twilight” time for life as we know it, perhaps.

Famed Victorian poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson, was very taken with the Arthurian legends that gave a mythic grandeur to the emergence of an imperial Britain. (I well remember the parallel moment in modern U.S. leadership when Washington was Camelot. Or was it the Reagan era?) In his poem *Morte d'Arthur*, Tennyson spoke to the possible end of the heroic ruler and a holy nation.

The poem is concerned with just a few hours in the afternoon after the great battle that left Arthur mortally wounded and all the knights of the Round Table dead except Sir Bedivere. There is an elegiac quality to the verse as Arthur struggles to come to grips with the change in national fortune and attempts to link again with the forces that gave him Excalibur (a constitution?) and the promise of refuge in Avalon—a sort of promised land.

Bedivere laments the fact that “the true old times are dead . . . The whole round table is dissolved which was an image of the mighty world.” He sees only “new men, strange faces, other minds.” This is precisely the mood sweeping over “the world's last superpower” as we are buffeted by calamities within and without.

On May 6 this year the United States observed a National Day of Prayer. It had been proclaimed by President Obama, following statute and custom, but almost in defiance of a lower court ruling that it is an unconstitutional establishment of religion. One can easily see in the challenge brought by the Freedom From Religion Foundation an opportunistic sense that *this* president might forgo the occasion. They were wrong! We may not be, and hopefully never will be, the Christian nation of mandated creed and government-structured religion; but a day of prayer reminds us that we are not quite lords



of the earth. It reminds us that our greatest needs can be salved only by the Spirit.

It reminds me of Arthur's reply to Bedivere's lament. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new," he agreed. His advice? The advice of a ruler all too aware of his limitations. "Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice rise like a fountain for me night and day. For what are men better than sheep or goats that nourish a blind life within the brain, if, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer both for themselves and those who call them friend? For so the whole round earth is every way bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

Separation of church and state was intended and is important. But I do not think many of America's founders would have wanted a separation of church and society—a freedom from religion. The Supreme Court has many times tried to parse the history of what even presidents stumbled toward—especially as they declared these days of prayer—and called it ceremonial deism. It works legally, but I am afraid it misrepresents the intent of such things as the day of prayer. It should not be ceremonial; it should be heartfelt and diverse—and not compelled or structured by rulers. It should be open to all who raise voice or hand to a Higher Power.

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Watch His Conscience

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by [Michael D. Peabody](#)

The date was June 5, 1917, the first day of the draft. Sousa's Band struck up "Stars and Stripes Forever" and the 6,000 in attendance at the American Medical Association Convention in New York City rose to their feet as former president Theodore Roosevelt walked across the stage.

The United States had tried to avoid war, but the German U-boats kept a relentless attack on American interests at sea. In a complicated scenario the British were fearful that the anticolonialist Americans would enter on the side of the Central Powers, and there were rumors that Germany would enlist Mexico to join Japan in fighting the United States in return for Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

President Wilson, who won the presidency on the promise of keeping America out of the war, quietly began arming some American merchant ships, and Germany sunk several, an act that former president Roosevelt denounced as piracy. Roosevelt insisted on war, and on April 6, 1917, Congress declared war.

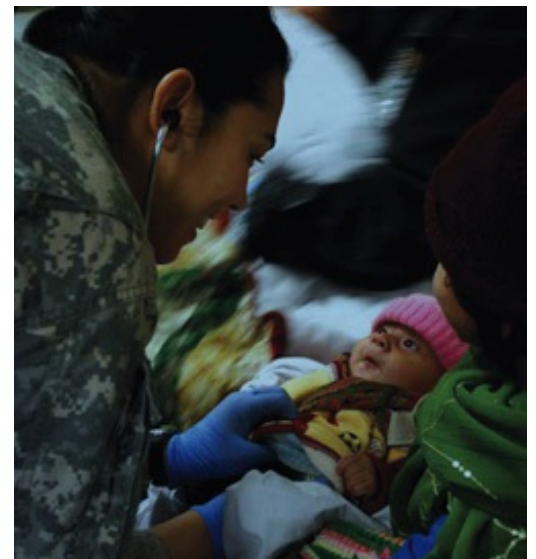
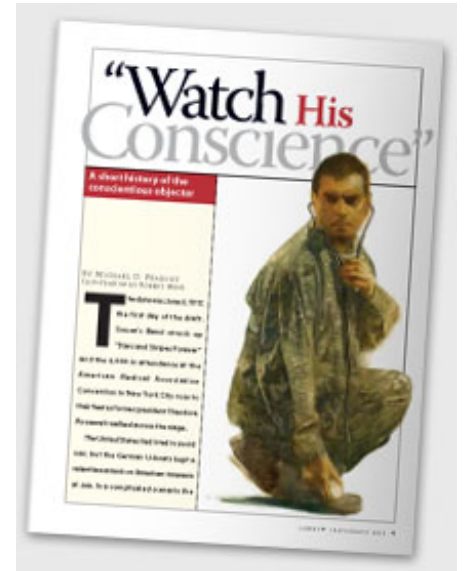
Once at the podium, Roosevelt ripped into those who did not support the draft for moral reasons. "The conscientious objector," he said, "curtains his cowardice behind the statement that he objects to placing himself in a position where he might take part in killing someone. I'd guard his conscience. I'd send him to the front, but I wouldn't give him a gun. I'd put him to digging kitchen sinks and trenches so that good men could rest until the time came for them to kill someone. Then I'd watch his conscience to see what it would do."

In war, the conscientious objector is both praised and vilified. Some admire the morality of the noncombatant stance, while others view objectors as slackers unworthy of the freedom bought by the blood of others. History has drawn distinctions between those who served in noncombatant roles and those who refused to serve in the military at all.

The pronounced reasons for war in the Western world have changed over the centuries from financial contests for resources and land at the behest of an all-powerful king to fights for national righteousness and personal freedom in democracies. Motivating people who enjoy freedom to join a larger fight is more difficult than simply forcing them to do so at the tip of a sword. The loyalty of subjects has been replaced by patriotism and nationalism, and there is an expectation that citizens will take up the fight against the Other.

There is a formula for this rhetoric. The Other has made plans to harm our interests and will carry them out unless these plans are stopped and the Other is symbolically decapitated politically, militarily, or financially. The Other has an evil philosophy that runs counter to the American civil religion. We must join the fight, God is on our side, and because we are right we will prevail. Failure to raise up arms against the Other is an offense to your fellow citizens, your history, and God, who has already secured our victory.

In 1917 Roosevelt wrote a brief message in a "Pocket Testament" Bible distributed to the troops. Based loosely around Micah 6:8, Roosevelt called on the troops to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Under "Do justice," Roosevelt wrote, "and therefore fight valiantly against the armies of Germany and Turkey, for these nations in this crisis stand for the reign of Moloch and Beelzebub on this earth."



Superimposing a divine mandate on a military action while demonizing the enemy (in Roosevelt's case quite literally) can convince millions to pick up arms when they would otherwise feel revulsion toward slaughtering an enemy.

The history of those who refused to bear arms, not because of political disagreements or cowardice, but because of a philosophical, ethical, or faith-based objection to taking human life goes back millennia.

Many early Christians, in what historian Edward Gibbon considered an "excess of virtue" because they "exposed themselves to the reproaches of the pagans, by their obstinate refusal to take an active part in the . . . military defense of the empire,"¹ conscientiously objected to warfare. These Christians were adherents to an apocalyptic faith, living in anticipation of the day of the Lord, and they felt that temporal warfare was a distraction from the higher transcendent causes of evangelism and preparation.

On March 12, 295, the Roman army drafted 21-year-old Maximilian of Tebessa. He refused the badge, claiming that he already wore the badge of Christ. The proconsul told him, "Then I will send you to your Christ," and ordered his execution.

On October 29, 298, Marcellus of Tangiers, a Roman centurion who was also a Christian, likewise found himself at the wrong end of a sword after he threw down his weapons and insignia at a party in honor of the emperor's birthday and proclaimed that he would worship only Jesus Christ. He was executed for deserting the military.

Both Maximilian and Marcellus were later canonized by the church. Although they are regarded as conscientious objectors, others would argue that they simply disagreed with the religious implications of service to Roman armies that fought under the banner of pagan deities. Yet, the religious fervor of civil religion still plays a central role in much of today's warfare.

Christian conscientious objection goes back to Jesus' own admonishment to Peter. When Peter drew his sword in defense, slicing off the ear of the servant of the high priest, Jesus reattached the ear and warned Peter that those who fight by the sword will perish by the sword.² The healing of a hostile individual represented the spiritual embodiment of the teaching to "turn the other cheek." This spiritual kingdom was one of peace, not of war, and it would operate on a different level.

But changes in Christian attitudes toward military service were on the way. Just before he consolidated his rule over the Roman Empire by beating his brother-in-law, Maxentius, at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge on October 28, 312, Constantine ordered his soldiers to mark their shields with a symbol he said he had seen in a dream of a cross and the sun. Under this sign, they would conquer.

He then converted his army to Christianity, and although this conversion was presumably predicated upon a solar talisman rather than a theological transformation, this did not bother the majority of Christians, who were weary of centuries of persecution and longing for official recognition and toleration. Under Constantine, Christians enjoyed new freedoms, and the church rode on to unrivaled primacy in 391 under Theodosius the Great.

Pagan wars, which under the Romans had to be justified but unrestrained once initiated, now needed to be Christianized. In 426 Augustine of Hippo, writing in *The City of God*, muted the cognitive dissonance between the peacefulness of Christ and the Holy Roman Empire's need to suppress military enemies when he proposed the "just war theory."

This theory held that armed conflict is abhorrent but can meet the needs of justice under two criteria—the first, *jus ad bellum*, being the right to go to war, and the second, *jus in bello*, added the necessity of proper conduct once war began. Later, in the Middle Ages, Roman Christianity added the tradition of *bellum Romanium*, which gave Christians justification for holy war waged by God's people for the "righteous" purpose of expanding Christianity.

That Christianity now recognized the existence of standards of conflict did not so much prevent war as it justified the march of religiously motivated armies, imbued not only with political necessity and military skill, but a spiritual imperative.

There were some theoretical limitations on war. The principle of *jus ad bellum* required that force can only be used as a last resort to support a just cause, and that it must be proportionate

to the amount of wrongdoing by the other. Augustine's "just war theory" still holds sway in the West, and is evident as recently as President Bush's 2003 State of the Union Address, in which he described the coming war in Iraq: "If war is forced upon us, we will fight in a just cause and by just means, sparing, in every way we can, the innocent."

Although Augustine's counsel would seem to have mitigated the ferociousness of war, on the ancient battlefield Christian soldiers fought non-Christians without restraint and only applied the "just war theory" to conflicts with fellow Christians. In the late 700s Charlemagne brutally fought against the pagan Saxons, and massacred, enslaved, and plundered civilians en masse. After 30 years of warfare many Saxons consented to Christian baptism. When the Saxons backslid into paganism, Charlemagne ordered the massacre of 4,500 of the apostates.

In contrast, the emerging Protestant Reformation highlighted the concept of the individual standing before God. Although many Reformers faced the military might of the church and some even instigated their own warfare, the concept of the individual conscience began to replace the power of the national or church prerogative.

Those who opposed participation in warfare regardless of its justification or methodology began to form pacifist groups. The American colonies, which recognized individual rights of conscience, allowed certain exemptions to military participation for members of the Mennonites and Brethren and the Society of Friends. No colony forced religious objectors to bear arms if they were willing to pay for the exemption. At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, General George Washington issued a draft that called for "all young men of suitable age to be drafted, except those with conscientious scruples against war."

By the time the Bill of Rights was being drafted, this recognition of conscientious objection was so entrenched in the American philosophy that James Madison's original proposal included the following language: "No person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms shall be compelled to render military service in person." The clause was excluded because the Founders did not foresee the necessity of a standing army.

During the Civil War, individuals from both sides were able to pay a fixed fee to avoid military service.

However, in the ensuing years, the rights of conscience began to retract. By the time of World War I, some people felt that it was too easy to categorize oneself as a conscientious objector and thus avoid conflict. They argued that the nation was going to war to protect the freedom of all, including the objector. A new compromise emerged between the buyout plan of the Civil War and forced combat.

During World War I, conscientious objectors were still conscripted but could serve in noncombatant military roles. Those who refused the draft were imprisoned.

President Harry Truman pins the Medal of Honor on Desmond Doss, the first conscientious objector to receive the nation's highest honor for bravery. He was a medic serving in Okinawa.

By World War II, a process was developed to screen the sincerity of objectors. The DSS 47 form asked draftees who identified themselves as conscientious objectors to clarify the basis of their belief, how long they had held this belief, and whether they had previously given "public expression, written or oral," to these views.

Objectors were given the opportunity to serve in noncombatant roles, including as medics. Those who refused to participate in the military were able to serve in the Civilian Public Service (CPS), in which they did forestry work and erosion prevention in remote locations where they could not spread their pacifist viewpoints.

Alternatives to armed service were also available to draftees during the wars in Korea and Vietnam.

In today's all-volunteer American military, individuals who decide to identify themselves as conscientious objectors must stand before a panel of psychiatrists, military chaplains, and officers who evaluate their sincerity. In Switzerland a similar panel is all civilian, and in Germany a panel meets only if a written request is unconvincing.



In short, it is not easy for a volunteer enlistee to establish bona fides as a conscientious objector. With the United States approaching 10 years of war since 9/11, if the war continues in Afghanistan and Iraq with military human resources being limited and enlistment seeming less attractive, it is not inconceivable that conscription could be reintroduced. If this happens, and draft boards are again called to evaluate the sincerity of conscientious objectors, it would be helpful for them to have evidence of their bona fides in advance of a draft.

In the United States, when a young man registers as required with the Selective Service at the age of 18, or decides to become a conscientious objector, he should be able to submit a declaration of this status to the Selective Service, or perhaps an independent registry, along with other evidence such as a letter from a member of the clergy, a personal statement, and other evidence of a commitment to peace. This documentation could then be available to present to draft boards as *prima facie* evidence of the sincerity of a conscientious objector.

Because the issue of conscientious objection becomes more controversial during drafts, it is important to plan ahead to repair and protect the rights of America's conscientious objectors.

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1 Edward Gibbon, *The Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon, Esq.: With Memoirs of His Life and Writings* (London: B. Blake, 1837), p. 757.

2 Matthew 26:52.

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Faith in World's Newest State

 libertymagazine.org/article/faith-in-worlds-newest-state

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by [Lincoln E. Steed](#)

This country belongs to all of us,” affirmed President José Ramos-Horta of East Timor, adding with a smile, “Heaven, of course, may be divided up.” It was a lighthearted way of pointing out that there is full religious freedom under the constitution, and all religions are free to pursue their faith goals.

East Timor has the distinction of being the first new sovereign state of the twenty-first century. How it attained that status is a tale of invasion, violence, and religious forces in conflict.

In early March 2010 religious liberty leaders Dr. John Graz, Jonathan Catolico, and Lincoln Steed visited East Timor to determine the state of religious affairs in the new republic. Dr. Graz is director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty at the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland. He is also secretary-general of the Christian World Communion and director of the International Religious Liberty Association. Jonathan Catolico heads up religious liberty work for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Southern Asia-Pacific region. Lincoln Steed is editor of *Liberty* magazine, a journal of religious freedom that is now in its second century of recommending full religious freedom for all and the value of a separation of church and state to political leaders and public figures. Their meeting with President Ramos-Horta, an internationally known Nobel Peace Prize winner, was just part of a wide-ranging series of meetings and contacts to evaluate the state of religious freedom in East Timor.

Dr. John Graz discusses religious freedom with President Jose Ramos-Horta.

The president conveyed the mood of a government committed to full rights and liberties. But he knows the challenges. Two years earlier he had been severely wounded in a coup attempt. In fact, the courts handed down sentences for the plotters only the day after the meetings with the religious liberty team.

So it was even more significant that next day when National Parliament Deputy for Human Rights Fernanda Borges assured them that the government was fully committed to implementing its legal guarantees of religious liberty. Dr. Graz, Editor Steed, and Pastor Catolico brought with them a number of local church representatives from East Timor. When Seventh-day Adventist mission president Ronaldo Pereira, originally from Portugal, and local pastor Inaciu da Kosta reported on the community harassment and at times violence they face, she listened intently. “Yes, we know there are social tensions,” she sympathized in a heavy Australian accent gained during her years there as a refugee and university student. She said that the government must do more to ensure that local authorities uphold the laws.

When the Portuguese withdrew in 1975 they left some Roman Catholic influence. But it was largely in protest at the ensuing invasion by largely Muslim Indonesia that the population en masse adopted a Roman Catholic identity—even as animism continues to exert a strong hold on their society. Today Protestant missionaries encounter severe restriction



in local communities and operate on the margins.

Liberty editor Lincoln E. Steed and one of the presidential guard in ceremonial dress.

When the delegation told Deputy Borges that Adventist young people were often expelled from government schools and were being severely downgraded because of their refusal to attend school on Saturday, she reacted promptly. Turning to other parliamentarians in the room, she directed that they look to changing such religiously oppressive requirements. It is obvious that while there is a problem, the young nation of East Timor has a resolution to establish a religious safe haven.

The delegation met with representatives of various Protestant groups as well as the bishop of Dili, Antonio Ricardo. They met the deputy minister of education, the vice prime minister, and the leader of the opposition Fretilin Party. They met with top U.S. Embassy officials and with Juan Carlos Rey, ambassador for the European Union. All affirmed that East Timor has crushing problems, a difficult history, but a firm commitment to rebuild and protect any faith expression.

In the years covering Indonesian invasion, annexation, U.N. referendum for independence, and then civil war, this tiny nation lost as much as a quarter of its population. Today its capital, Dili, is a hodgepodge of poverty and foreign aid projects. Its streets are still patrolled by white U.N. vehicles. There is still a sense of unfinished business. It would seem that full religious freedom and interreligious harmony offer a solid base for future harmony.

After the 1975 invasion Indonesia installed a huge statue of Christ on a headland just outside Dili. It was a gift from a Muslim society, intended to placate the new Christian conquest. After the withdrawal, locals trashed the monument and the surrounding park. Of late the government has spent much time and money restoring the monument. It is a good beginning.

Lincoln E. Steed is author of *Liberty* magazine.

Author: [Lincoln E. Steed](#)

Editor, *Liberty* Magazine

Lincoln E. Steed is the editor of *Liberty* magazine, a 200,000 circulation religious liberty journal which is distributed to political leaders, judiciary, lawyers and other thought leaders in North America. He is additionally the host of the weekly [3ABN](#) television show "The Liberty Insider," and the radio program "Lifequest Liberty."



The European Holy Wars

 libertymagazine.org/article/the-european-holy-wars

Published in the [July/August 2010 Magazine](#)
by [David J. B. Trim](#)

The second part of this five-part series on Europe's wars of religion told the story of how, from the 1520s until approximately 1650, the greatest nations in Christendom—France, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Sweden, the Dutch Republic, and Britain—were all caught up in wars that were, either in part or in whole, the result of the divisions engendered by the Reformation. In this third article in the series, we consider certain obvious questions: Why did the wars last so long? Why were they so bitterly contested? And what were the effects on relations between people of different Christian confessions?

Ideology

First, parties to holy war were reluctant to concede victory to ideological enemies. They frequently fought on when, humanly speaking, there was no point. This was partly because of a natural dislike for making peace with (depending on the point of view) bloody persecutors, idolatrous agents of antichrist, or blasphemous heretics who had evoked the wrath of God. It was also because zealous Christians believed that God could and would intervene in human affairs. This was particularly, although not only, true of Calvinists.

At various points in the first, third, fourth, fifth, and eighth wars of religion in France, the position of the Huguenots (French Calvinists) seemed hopeless. Had these wars been only the efforts of discontented or over-mighty nobles to obtain concessions from the monarchy, the sensible thing would have been to cut one's losses and negotiate. Instead, the Huguenots each time assumed that God could work a miracle—and, fortified by their inner confidence, and by military assistance, especially from England, they fought on and obtained peace settlements that included substantial concessions to the Huguenot minority.

In 1574 the Dutch Revolt seemed over, confined to a few towns and islands in just two of the 17 provinces of the Low Countries. The leader of the revolt, William of Orange, who had joined the Reformed, but was more Lutheran in his own religious views, wrote in May that year to his younger brother John in the aftermath of a disastrous defeat in which two more of their brothers had been killed. William was, as he wrote, so "perplexed," both by "grief and melancholy" and by "the state of affairs," that "I hardly know what I do"—but, he concluded, "since this has been the will of God, we have to bear it patiently." He reminded John of telling him "some time ago, that we could defend this country against all the forces of the king of Spain for two years." But, he went on, this would be to "speak in human terms," and he drew "hope that the Lord God whose arm stretches far, may use His power and pity on us." He concluded that "we always have to conform to the will of God and respect His divine providence and trust, that He who spilled the blood of His only Son to maintain His church, will do only what will redound to the progress of His glory and maintenance of His church, though it seems impossible. And even if all of us should die . . . God will never forsake His flock."¹

Almost identical sentiments inspired Roman Catholic sovereigns. As the historian I.A.A. Thompson eloquently writes of Philip II of Spain: "Whatever the outcome, Philip had to go on. The heretics must not be allowed to believe that it was God's will that they go unpunished. The obstacles that sprang up on every side were sent to try him for God's greater glory, maybe to punish him for his sins. If vengeance was to be the Lord's, he yet had an obligation to serve God in accordance with his conscience, if need be to sacrifice himself."²

The holy Roman emperor, Ferdinand II, who began the Thirty Years' War, also shared this "God can do" attitude, and



hence attempted to reverse the results of almost a hundred years of history with the sword.

With God, all things were possible. He who had swept the Egyptians into the Red Sea and put an entire Assyrian army to the sword in a single night could work what He willed in the world—if only His followers were faithful.

Thus, compromise was rarely an option. Where it was, often, as in the French wars of religion, it was for both sides only a tactic to gain time to rest and regroup. Equally, there was rarely, in this period, a willingness to tolerate dissent. Nevertheless, at times military exigency might dictate confessional cohabitation—the Dutch, for example, for all the leading role played by the Reformed Church, never were able to create a Calvinist polity because victory over the Spanish required a coalition of members of different religions and confessions. Even then, however, the Reformed only ever allowed liberty of conscience, not liberty of public worship, and only begrudgingly conceded even limited religious freedom.

Dehumanizing Enemies

Second, ideology meant there was a tendency to dehumanize enemies: whether seeing them as agents of antichrist or Satan, or as sources of heretical pollution that provoked the judgment of God. Even otherwise liberal and progressive thinkers held such views. For example, the Spanish writer Diego de Saavedra y Fajardo (1584–1648), who was a kinsman of Cervantes (author of the great satirical novel *Don Quixote*), and, like him, expressed skepticism about traditional values and argued (unusually in Renaissance Spain) that peace was to be preferred to war, nevertheless had no doubt that “war was often necessary in the defence of true religion.” He argued that actions that in normal warfare would be illegitimate were acceptable in a war of religion, so for him “the cross of crusade sanctioned all.”³

People from all confessions, but especially Calvinists, embraced Old Testament texts that seemed to justify seeking not just military victory over confessional opponents, but their extermination. For example, Edward VI (who succeeded his father, Henry VIII, while still a boy, then presided over Protestant reform in England) was hailed by English Protestants as “a new Josiah”—the original Josiah was a youthful Old Testament king who came to the throne of Judah by providence and proceeded to purge idolatrous and impure religion. Edward VI died before he could live up to his “promise” (as it seemed to English Protestants) and take England into the European wars of religion. While such Old Testament referencing is often regarded as typically Calvinist, it was also Catholic: thus, the cardinal of Lorraine also cited the example of Josiah in an address to Charles IX at the palace of Fontainebleau on May 28, 1573. Charles, like Josiah (and Edward), had come to the throne as a minor; and the cardinal urged him to follow the example of the Israelite, who had gathered the priests, lords, and people of Judah to destroy the idols of Baal, *and* the actual unfaithful themselves —“heretics,” as the cardinal pointedly (but unscripturally) calls them—thereby destroying “all other Religions than the true one.” Charles was urged to be the Josiah of France and so achieve a “rebirth” of “the faith and Catholic Religion.”⁴

All this meant that, at the tactical level, religious warfare was often waged with few restraints. To take but a few examples: the French crown killed or sent to the galleys prisoners taken at Rouen in 1562; the Spanish massacred at least 2,000 prisoners after the surrender of Haarlem in 1573; the English slaughtered about 600 Spanish and Italian prisoners at Smerwick, in Ireland, in 1580. The Thirty Years’ War is notorious for its atrocities, sometimes on a massive scale, and although Cromwell’s campaign in Ireland was not as vicious as it has usually been depicted, it was brutal enough.

The bitterness engendered by such methods helped to make the resolution of conflict more difficult, as, too, did the knowledge that victory by one’s enemies could mean death for one’s families, regardless of whether or not they were in a war zone. The divisions between Catholic and Protestant were so entrenched that peacemaking was often very difficult.

Internationalization

Third, because of the ideological component to wars between Protestant and Catholic—and ideology was present and important even when not the sole cause of conflict—wars were internationalized. The “Protestant Cause” motivated sovereigns as diverse as Queen Elizabeth I of England; King Frederick II of Denmark and Norway; Frederick III, elector palatine; Frederick Henry, prince of Orange; and King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden to send armies and fleets to aid foreign Protestants. It also motivated many Protestants to fight for coreligionists or donate money to help them, even when sovereigns did not act.

Catholic solidarity moved Philip II of Spain to aid the kings of France in the 1560s and 1570s, and helped produce a coordinated offensive by Spain and the Austrian Habsburgs in the 1620s. It also motivated numerous Irish and Scottish volunteers to serve in the armies of Catholic sovereigns: the kings of Spain and France and the Holy Roman Emperor.

Calvinists in particular mobilized transnationally and did so with, without, or in parallel to state action, to aid their brethren. After the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572), in which 3,000 French Calvinists were killed in Paris in a single night, a prominent English Puritan wrote to Queen Elizabeth: "We be embarked all in one ship, shall we lie still, while they strive against this common tempest? Or if they make a wreck, may we be safe? Your highness may see Flushing [and] the Flemings in good labor and [the Huguenot stronghold of] La Rochelle and the persecuted Frenchmen at hard point . . . we be made up with them in one band together."⁵

His proposals for dispatching a combined naval and military expedition to La Rochelle were translated into an actual joint Anglo-Huguenot relief expedition that helped to save the city from capture by the armies of the Catholic king.

Ratification of the Peace of Westphalia (1648)
in Munster

Conclusion

This international dimension to national wars was the chief reason that the Peace of Westphalia (1648) established a policy of nonintervention as a necessary concomitant to the principle of national sovereignty. It was only practically possible because, by 1648, after nearly a century of very bitter fighting, ideological attachment had inevitably been somewhat diluted.

Hatred between different confessions could only be maintained at white-hot level for so long. One of the chief effects of the European wars of religion was actually to diminish religious faith and fervor; across Europe, many thoughtful people concluded that if traditional Christianity resulted in so much appalling brutality and cruelty and such terrible bloodshed, then they wanted nothing to do with it. The zeal and passion that led Christians of various types to wage war against each other, in the hopes of purging their national church of heterodox elements, and even of waging war to attempt to reunify Christendom itself, ultimately was an important factor, along with the scientific revolution, in giving rise to the dispassionate and detached religious views of the deists and the so-called Age of Reason.

More conclusions will be drawn in the fifth and last article in this series; the fourth article will examine the wars between Christians and Muslims in central and southern Europe that were contemporaneous with the wars between Catholics and Protestants. The final article will show how the era of wars of religion came to an end in Europe and consider what lessons can be drawn for debates about freedom of belief.

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1 E. H. Kossmann and A. F. Mellink, eds., *Texts Concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands* (Cambridge University Press, 1974), doc. 19, pp. 113-115.

2 I.A.A. Thompson, "The Appointment of the Duke of Medina Sidonia to the Command of the Spanish Armada," *The Historical Journal* 12 (1969): 203.

3 See R. A. Stradling, *Spain's Struggle for Europe, 1598–1668* (London & Rio Grande, Ohio: Hambledon Press, 1994), pp. xv, xvi.

4 Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris, MS 188, ff. 348-350.

5 The British Library, London, Lansdowne MSS, vol. 15, ff. 199v (spelling modernized).

Author: David J. B. Trim

“Give Us This Prayer”

libertymagazine.org/article/give-us-this-prayer

Published in the July/August 2010 Magazine
by Clifford R. Goldstein

It wasn't supposed to work like this.

An atheist organization filed a lawsuit earlier in the year challenging the National Day of Prayer as a violation of the establishment clause. The hope was that, if the organization won, the suit wouldn't be challenged by the Obama administration. After all, a liberal democratic president (a “socialist,” “communist,” and “closet Muslim”) certainly would not, as would have his “devout and godly man of the Lord” predecessor, George W. Bush, fight a ruling that used the power of government to encourage people to pray. The atheists were sure that, had they prevailed in the court, Obama would have stood right alongside them, defending the Republic against such an egregious violation of the Constitution as a nonbinding proclamation to encourage prayer. It was, as one aficionado called it, a “vulnerable time” to make their move.

That was the plan, anyway.

Well, in accordance with statute 36 U.S.C. § 119, which states that “the President shall issue each year a proclamation designating the first Thursday in May as a National Day of Prayer on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups, and as individuals,” the president did just that, “designating the first Thursday in May as a National Day of Prayer on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups, and as individuals.”

At first, it looked very good for those who wanted to see the National Day of Prayer declared unconstitutional. The suit was filed; Judge Barbara Brandriff Crabb of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin ruled on April 15, 2010, that the 1988 law requiring the annual proclamation of the National Day of Prayer by the president violated the establishment clause. In *Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., v. Obama*, she wrote that the law violates the Constitution because the event's “sole purpose is to encourage all citizens to engage in prayer, an inherently religious exercise that serves no secular function in this context.”

Right after the district court's ruling, Obama Attorney General Eric Holder's Justice Department announced that it would appeal the district court's decision. Which means, then, that the National Day of Prayer can continue until the legal process is exhausted, which could take years.

“I would have expected something better from a legal scholar [meaning President Obama],” said Annie Laurie Gaylor, copresident of the Freedom From Religion Foundation [FFRF], a Wisconsin-based “association of freethinkers: atheists, agnostics and skeptics of any pedigree,” as well as the organization that filed the suit. FFRF now plans an online offensive, asking Obama, the principal defendant in the lawsuit, to “leave days of prayer to individuals, private groups and churches, synagogues, mosques and temples.”

Atheists suing Barack Hussein Obama because, supposedly, he's using the power of the federal government to get people to pray? If you stuck the name George W. Bush in that sentence instead of Barack Hussein Obama, it might not seem as surreal as it now does.



A Little History

Whatever the ultimate outcome, this case highlights the fact that, even after more than 200 years of the American experiment with religious freedom and—for its time (the late eighteenth-century)—the radical idea of the nonestablishment of religion, the nation is still grappling with how the religion clauses of the First Amendment should be interpreted and applied. After hundreds of cases, many of them climaxing in the U.S. Supreme Court, what *Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., v. Obama* shows is that, even on the most basic issues, the results of this experiment, much less the hypothesis and presuppositions behind it, are still up for grabs.

In one sense, it's unfortunate that an organization calling itself the *Freedom From Religion Foundation* would be the one initiating the lawsuit. Unfortunate, because it gives the idea that only atheists, and those opposed to religion in general, are the ones who have been the traditional and long-standing proponents of a strict interpretation of the establishment clause. When the First Amendment says that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," for them, it means just that "no law," not even statute 36 U.S.C. § 119, a nonbinding proclamation urging folks, under no compulsion of the law, to pray.

Historically, though, it was religious groups who were the staunchest defenders of the establishment clause. In most early American colonies, for instance, Baptists were jailed, fined, exiled, beaten, and mobbed, most often for refusal to obtain a license to preach, for refusal to attend established churches, or for refusal to pay taxes to the state established religious body, whatever it was.

The problem was particularly acute in Virginia, where the Baptists, under constant harassment from the established church (Anglican), decided to fight back. As a result, American constitutional history was made, and, in a real sense, their fight helped shape the America we have today.

The bottom line was simple: the Baptists said that unless the new federal Constitution, just recently hammered out in Philadelphia in 1787, had a Bill of Rights that guaranteed religious protection, they simply weren't going to support its ratification, which could have stopped the Constitution in its tracks. If such a large and influential state like Virginia refused ratification, other states could have followed suit, the Constitution would not have become the law of the land, and one can leave it to the reader's imagination to envision how different our world would be than it is today. (Plus, too, congressional elections were coming, and the Baptists—previously enthusiastic supporters of James Madison—were threatening to support his opponent, James Monroe, for the seat if Madison didn't support a Bill of Rights for the new Constitution.) Thus, the much-loved First Amendment religion clauses resulted not only from some self-serving politicking by James Madison, but also from the lobbying efforts of a Christian group looking out for number one.

The Genius of the Establishment Clause

Of course, the America of today is a radically different place than in the days of eighteenth-century Virginia, and First Amendment jurisprudence has greatly evolved (for starters, it was never meant to apply to the states, but only to the federal government; and it wasn't until the twentieth century that, through the vehicle of the Fourteenth Amendment, it was "selectively incorporated" to the states).

Nevertheless, the principle behind it remains the same: government, by virtue of being government, works by force, the force of law, which includes threats of fines, jail, or even worse, depending upon the offense. In contrast, religion (at least as we understand it in the West) is predicated upon free choice. Coerced religious practices, particularly coerced by the threat of law, are worthless. To quote John Locke, who heavily influenced the thinking of Thomas Jefferson: "The care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, because his power consists only in outward force; but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God. And such is the nature of the understanding, that it cannot be compelled to the belief of anything by outward force." He continued: "I may grow rich by an art that I take not delight in; I may be cured of some disease by remedies that I have not faith in; but I cannot be saved by a religion that I distrust, and by a worship that I abhor."

The Founding Fathers understood this principle. Hence, the idea behind the establishment clause: if the government doesn't establish religion, then religious practices won't have the force of law behind them, which is the way it should be in any society that deems itself free.

However lofty the principle, implementing it in a large and complex country like the United States, where morals, religion,

and politics by their very nature are often inextricably combined, has been the challenge our nation has faced since inception. *Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., v. Obama* is, simply, one of the latest manifestations of that challenge.

The National Day of Prayer

From the earliest days of the Republic, some leaders have issued nonbinding decrees of some sort or another invoking the Deity; others, citing church-state concerns, haven't. Jefferson refused, saying in 1808: "Fasting and prayer are religious exercises; the enjoining them an act of discipline. Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the time for these exercises, and the objects proper for them, according to their own particular tenets; and this right can never be safer than in their own hands, where the Constitution has deposited it."

Though the National Day of Prayer has its roots in the 1950s, when a law was passed allowing each president to pick a day for national prayer, the present federal statute, the one struck down in the recent decision, was signed in 1988 by Ronald Reagan, had said: "On our National Day of Prayer, then, we join together as people of many faiths to petition God to show us His mercy and His love, to heal our weariness and uphold our hope, that we might live ever mindful of His justice and thankful for His blessing."

Is this legal proclamation, a law of the land, a violation of the establishment clause, especially when it's nonbinding. Though the courts have long ruled that "nonbinding" religious exercises such as prayer, in certain public venues, such as schools, where children by law are forced to attend, are a violation, what about something as broad-based and innocuous as this law, which most Americans, even the religious ones, probably don't even pay attention to anyway?

One could argue, technically, as Judge Crabb did, that nonbinding or not, the law is still a government endorsement of some form of theism, and in principle does violate previous establishment clause jurisprudence: This law, she wrote, "is not an accommodation under Supreme Court precedent; it is taking sides on a matter of religious belief. Because supporters of the National Day of Prayer have no need for the machinery of the State to affirm their beliefs, the government's sponsorship of that day in § 119 is most reasonably understood as an official endorsement of religion and, in this instance, of theistic religion." She said, too, that the law "goes beyond mere 'acknowledgment' of religion because its sole purpose is to encourage all citizens to engage in prayer, an inherently religious exercise that serves no secular function in this context. In this instance, the government has taken sides on a matter that must be left to individual conscience. When the government associates one set of religious beliefs with the state and identifies nonadherents as outsiders, it encroaches upon the individual's decision about whether and how to worship."

However much Americans have, at least historically, revered the idea of the "wall of separation" between church and state, it's not easy to build a wall between two entities that are so intricately entwined. Church-state separation was meant to protect religious freedom of all people; the establishment clause is a crucial component of that protection. But the clause itself was never meant to push religion out of public life altogether. The challenge for lawmakers and courts is, as one U.S. Supreme Court justice wrote, a matter of "line-drawing." Where to draw the line? When does an attempt to keep the government out of religion actually become something that restricts the free exercise of religion, the other part of the religion clauses of the First Amendment? That's been the struggle the nation has been facing for the past 200 years and, as *Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., v. Obama* shows, we still don't know just what the precise answer is.

The situation can get sticky for churches, such as it was with the Baptists in the 1800s, who advocate for church-state separation. Even today, religious bodies—the very people the establishment clause was originally written to protect—can be seen as hostile to religious liberty by their strong defense of the nonestablishment of religion.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, for instance, a staunch supporter of the separationist principle (and also the publisher of *Liberty* magazine), has struggled with the issue. In the late 1800s, a law was proposed to have the King James Bible read in public schools (*could you imagine something like that today?*); some leaders in the church wanted to fight the law on church-state separation grounds. Another leader, Ellen White, while admitting that she did "not see the justice nor right in enforcing by law the bringing the Bible to be read in the public schools," didn't want to see the church placed in a position where its stance could easily be misconstrued.

That's been a problem that any church—or any organization for that matter, religious or secular, which understands the importance of the establishment clause—faces. Again, where do you draw the line? Not everyone wants it drawn in the same place, and it's easy to be suspicious of those who draw it where you don't think it belongs.

How this case will play out in the long run, who knows? What we can be sure of, though, is that it will be a *long run*. Until then, the National Day of Prayer remains—arguably for better, not for worse.

Clifford Goldstein writes from Sykesville, Maryland.

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Liberty | No Modern Inquisition

libertymagazine.org/article/no-modern-inquisition

Liberty: A Magazine of Religious Freedom



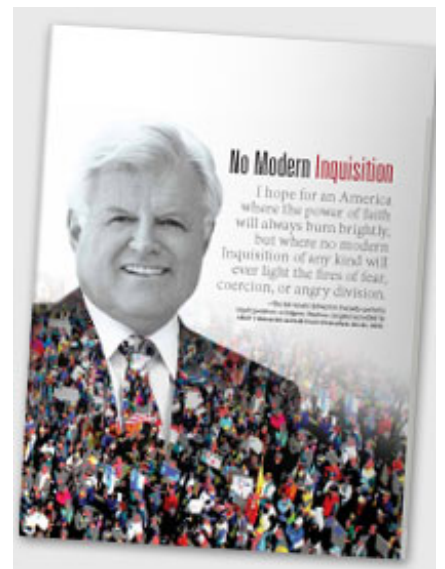
No Modern Inquisition

Published in the [July/August 2010](#) Magazine
by [Edward M. Kennedy](#)

I hope for an America where the power of faith will always burn brightly, but where no modern Inquisition of any kind will ever light the fires of fear, coercion, or angry division.

—The late Senator Edward M. Kennedy, quoted in *Great Quotations on Religious Freedom*, compiled and edited by Albert J. Menendez and Edd Doerr (Prometheus Books, 2002).

Author: [Edward M. Kennedy](#)



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No Safe Forum

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Published in the [July/August 2010 Magazine](#) by [Terry Mattingly](#)

The way President Barack Obama sees things, Americans should be able to find unity in prayer—even if they disagree on the details of faith and politics. That’s true in the current debates about health care, poverty, and even gay marriage, he said at this year’s National Prayer Breakfast.

“Surely we can agree to find common ground when possible, parting ways when necessary,” said Obama. “But in doing so, let us be guided by our faith and by prayer. For while prayer can buck us up when we are down, keep us calm in a storm, while prayer can stiffen our spines to surmount an obstacle—and I assure you I’m praying a lot these days—prayer can also do something else. It can touch our hearts with humility. . . .

“Through faith, but not through faith alone, we can unite people to serve the common good.”

Abraham Vereide (left), founder of The Fellowship, with President Dwight D. Eisenhower at the 1960 Presidential Prayer Breakfast.

But while the president preached unity, this year’s National Prayer Breakfast was surrounded by controversy. There were signs that this event on the semiofficial Washington, D.C., calendar may no longer be able to serve as a safe forum in which a wide variety of religious and political leaders can unite their voices. The breakfasts began in 1953, and every president since Dwight Eisenhower has taken part.

Before the event, the leaders of the watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington sent a letter to the White House and to congressional leaders calling for a boycott. They also urged C-SPAN not to televise the breakfast. Meanwhile, a coalition of gay-rights activists and religious liberals announced a series of alternative “American Prayer Hour” events in Washington and other cities nationwide.

Both groups focused intense criticism on The Fellowship, the nondenominational Christian organization that sponsors the prayer breakfast and similar networking events in Washington and around the world. The key issue is that numerous Ugandan leaders are active in Fellowship activities in that country, including the politician who introduced anti-gay legislation that includes capital punishment for some offenses.

The ethics group’s letter accused this organization—often called “The Fellowship”—of being a “cult-like secret society with unknown motivations and backing” that preaches an “unconventional brand of Christianity focusing on meeting Jesus ‘man-to-man.’” The American Prayer Hour coalition simply called it a “secretive fundamentalist organization.” The *New York Times* noted that the group has no “identifiable Internet site, no office number and no official spokesman.”

However, some religious conservatives have also expressed doubts about The Fellowship. In an investigation of its property holdings in and around Washington, *World* magazine called attention to The Fellowship’s “muddy theology,” its



“disdain for the established church,” and an emphasis on privacy that “grew into an obsessive culture of secrecy.”

Describing the participants in Fellowship events, Republican senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma told *World*: “Some of them are Muslims. Some of them are Christians. But they meet in the spirit of Jesus, so it’s not a denomination thing, it’s not even a Christian thing, it’s a Jesus thing.”

The ultimate issue is that this organization needs to admit that it exists and talk openly about its activities and goals, said journalist Jeff Sharlet, author of *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. It’s a sign of progress, for example, that many Americans who are active in the organization have rejected the Ugandan legislation and communicated their dismay to their contacts in Uganda.

When it comes to the National Prayer Breakfast, the Fellowship’s leaders “should go completely public,” said Sharlet, by e-mail. They should “acknowledge their existence, the fact that this is their event, make their account of it accountable (it was not Ike’s idea), explain the process by which people are invited and—make explicit that this is about consecrating leadership to Jesus. Everybody is welcome, but it’s about Jesus.”

This kind of transparency might accelerate what already seems to be happening. Some leaders—on the Left and Right—might reject the big-tent approach offered by the National Prayer Breakfast and create their own events, which could focus on more explicit messages about faith and politics.

If The Fellowship’s leaders are truly “serious about what they’re about,” noted Sharlet, this “would be great by their lights. They would lose a lot of clout, but the prayer breakfast movement would at last become an actual movement, of many strands.”

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Eighth Annual Religious Liberty Dinner

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Without freedom of religious expression, no discussion of life's fundamental questions —“What is the meaning of life?” and “What are my rights and obligations?”— is complete, a United States congressman said at this year's Religious Liberty Dinner.

“It is my hope that the ‘marketplace of ideas’ always allows space for faith and religion—not to dominate, not to control, but to have a seat at the table,” said J. Randy Forbes, borrowing a phrase from a U.S. Supreme Court decision on the First Amendment.

Forbes, speaking at the Eighth Annual Religious Liberty Dinner in Washington, D.C., April 13, reminded attendees that the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, which guarantees religious liberty, was never designed to thwart discussion of religion or input from faith communities.

“Rather, it was designed to act as a cruise control to keep the throttle of discussion open so ideas of faith and freedom and liberty could emerge,” Forbes said.

Forbes, a Republican representative from Virginia who founded and chairs the Congressional Prayer Caucus, said he worries that zealous efforts to maintain separation of church and state may effectively block free and full expression of faith.

“Everywhere I look, we are putting up ‘no trespassing’ signs. We’re saying, ‘This is not a place for faith or religion to be discussed,’” he said.

Forbes's comments were received by hundreds of like-minded freedom of belief advocates, who attended the event to celebrate the past year's religious liberty gains and to network with legislators and others who influence policy in the nation's capital.

Richard Land, left, of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission for the Southern Baptist Convention with Peter Kovach of the Office of International Religious Freedom for the U.S. State Department.

The annual event is sponsored by *Liberty* magazine, the International Religious Liberty Association, the North American Religious Liberty Association, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Previous speakers include Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (then a senator from New York), as well as senators John Kerry and John McCain.

Where many find contradictions between the free expression of religious liberty and separation of church and state, one award recipient at the dinner said he sees a balancing act.

“We can have both,” said Dave Hunt, speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives. “We’ve been very clear that public dollars and decisions should not promote one religion over another and yet we have also been clear that people can practice their religion freely without forcing that religion on others.”



Hunt, who received the Religious Liberty Dinner's National Award for spearheading the recently enacted Oregon Workplace Religious Freedom Act, said he hopes the law encourages other states, and eventually the federal government, to pass similar measures.

Citing the Oregon Workplace Religious Freedom Act's strong bipartisan support, Hunt called religious liberty the "common ground" amid national diversity.

"Religious liberty and neutrality are not and should not be partisan issues," he said. "In Oregon we proved that people can come together across party lines, across faith traditions, and do the right thing."

Hunt was among several religious liberty proponents recognized for their efforts during the dinner.

Licinio Branco, left, is the First Secretary for the Timor-Leste Embassy in Washington, D.C. He's joined by *Liberty* editor Lincoln Steed.



Gregory W. Hamilton, president of the Northwest Religious Liberty Association, received the 2010 A. T. Jones Medal. Hamilton was instrumental not only in the passage of Oregon's Workplace Religious Freedom Act, but also in overturning a 1923 ban on the wearing of religious clothing in the state's classrooms.

Samuel Ericsson, founding president and CEO of Advocates International, a network of lawyers, judges, and other leaders who focus on religious liberty issues, received the International Award.

After accepting the recognition Ericsson challenged the attendees not to leave issues of religious liberty up to chance.

"What kind of believer are you? Are you one who goes against the current? Or are you just one who sort of waits and hopes things work out?" he said. "It's your decision whether to take the initiative, be available, demonstrate enthusiasm, recruit others, and invest your time and talents."

Elizabeth Lechleitner writes for Adventist News Network.

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