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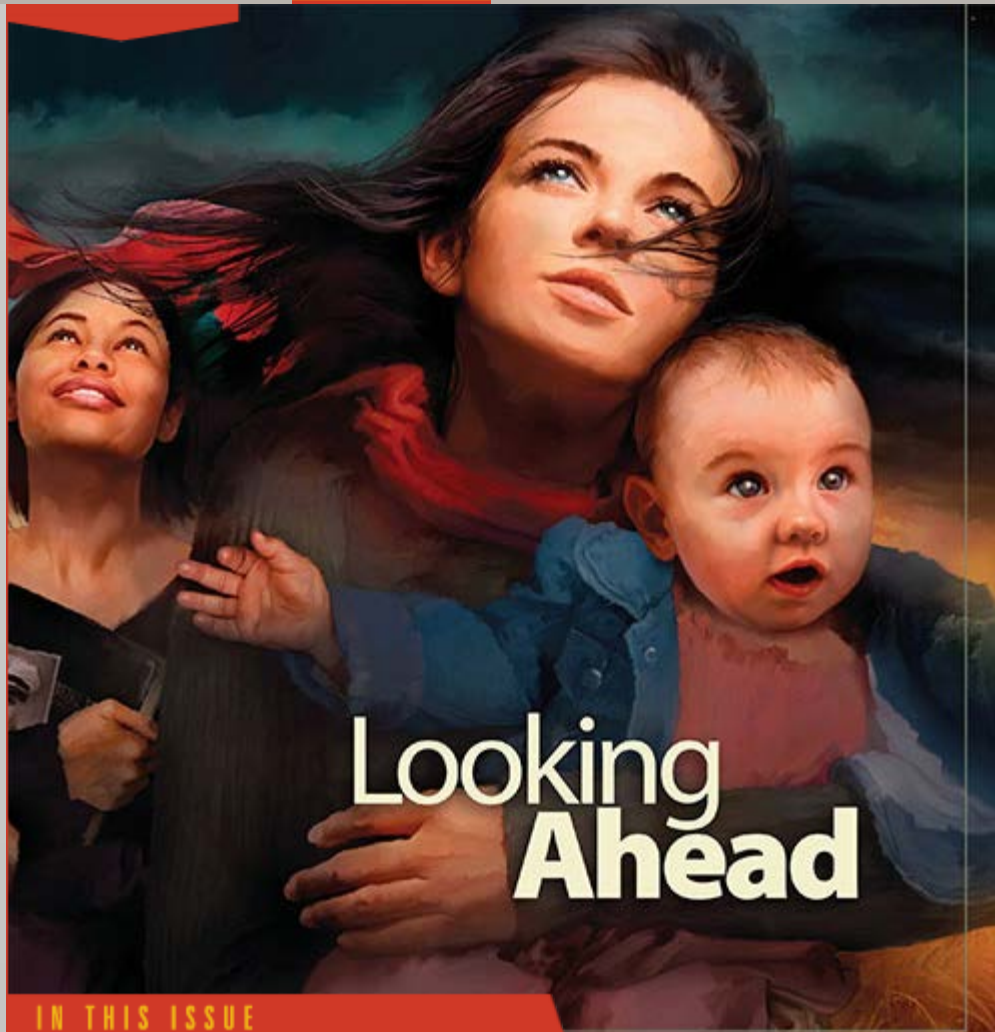
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# Looking Ahead

BY: LINCOLN E. STEED

Another year; but hardly business as usual. The world ended on December 21 last year, or so they were telling us right up to the day. Those pesky Mayans—who knew that they had it so wrong about the apocalypse! Of course a certain Family Radio speaker had backdated the event to a few months earlier; but is equally silent now about what happened, or didn't happen. Someone once said that "making predictions is very difficult, especially about the future." It's usually said that the tumble-tongued Yogi Berra made the comment; but there are many other attributions—Mark Twain being more plausible and Confucius likely to claim first use.



We had an election at year's end, and I had thought this editorial could comment on the surge of optimism that we'd be riding by now. I can hardly remember as flat a reelection moment. (Although Clinton with an impeachment looming and Nixon with smoking tapes do come to mind.) Certainly the reelected president has made no overweening comments about wanting to use political capital. Maybe that's bad—at least a number of Web prognosticators have characterized the strategy as "stand back and let it happen." But is that fair! Not even a president controls reality.

Bruce Springsteen in "Tonight in Jungleland" veers toward the Simon and Garfunkel imagery of "the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls," when he sings "Outside the street's on fire in a real death waltz between what's flesh and what's fantasy. And the poets down here don't write nothing at all. They just stand back and let it all be." Ignoring the Beatles allusion, I have to say the imagery is apt: outside our own shaky neighborhood, the streets of the world are increasingly on fire—literally. And let's not kid ourselves; there is the smell of smoke and more than the odd crackle on our own increasingly unquiet streets. I recently watched a relatively evenhanded documentary about the abortion wars in the United States: it was titled "Lake of Fire." And I wonder; What is our culture about to be thrown into?

So often in the past we have called upon the "guardians" of the American experiment for their advice on what they meant by such things as democracy, freedom, and religious liberty. It's become de rigeur for religionists enamored of the Christian nation model to quote the more godly statements, even as they ignore the contrary ones and, even worse, things that show deist views, Masonic confabulations and, worse still, outright support of the French terror. I was impressed by a late 2012 PBS special on religious freedom that handled all of this in a way that was uplifting and respectful of the international wonder that these men wrought. Yet they feared pure majoritarian democracy and expected the people to easily and at some point revert to the excesses that led to the revolution in the first place. It is amazing to read the late life correspondence between Adams and Jefferson, and to come across Jefferson's opinion that Christianity would not survive in the United States. Obviously he was wrong on that count—but how's a mere mortal to know? Unless one is reading Bible prophecy, of course!

Could these men have seen us heading so deliberately off the fiscal cliff? Maybe Hamilton, I guess.

Could these men have seen economic crash and meltdown in our future? Well, they had seen the South Sea Bubble burst in Europe! But I doubt they ever had intimations of a debt that is expressed in trillions or multiples of the gross national product. You've got to go to Revelation to pick up on a global scenario in which all the merchants lament because "in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste," (chapter 18, verse 17). Sometime up ahead that will happen, even though 2008 gave us a little taste of how it happens.

After the crash of 2008 we wait to see what will happen next time. After the Arab spring we wait to see what a seemingly unstoppable cycle of revolution will bring to the Middle East and Middle Earth. And the bright star over the Sea of Japan this near Christmas brought little hope for that region. Help! What next?

Lewis Carroll, of the *Alice in Wonderland*, fantasy, but actually an accomplished mathematician, wrote that "if you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there." Too many of the roads up ahead signal trouble. We need to know where we are going—not necessarily whether the world will end one day. I often tell seminar attendees that I can stake my life on one prediction: the

world as we know it is about to pass away. Beyond this present world construct is likely a time of runaway technological control and dislocation. Beyond is sure to be a time of declining resources and more wars for access. It will be a time of more natural disasters caused by such things as unnatural global warming. And, I can already sense, a paradoxical swing toward mass faith expression, even as many will come to regard minority faith views as a luxury that species survival cannot afford.

More than 100 years ago the people who eventually began this magazine got into quite a debate about how religious liberty should be projected to the nation's thought leaders. Some wanted to keep the argument to historical and legal points. Another group insisted on the necessity of giving those arguments together with a biblical framework. They insisted that religious freedom in the United States must be linked to biblical faith and eschatology. And in particular they mentioned the Bible Sabbath (a matter of much debate within Christendom) and the second coming of Jesus Christ (a central teaching of Jesus, without which one would have little more than the wise sayings that Jefferson redacted from the Gospels).

This magazine has continued that second approach. We know that the second coming of Jesus Christ is the only perfect solution to all that ails the world and our nation. And we sense that it may be soon. But as the apostle Paul wrote, "That day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed" (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

There might come a day when the basic tenets of the Constitution are practically put aside: that certainly will be a time of crisis for religious freedom (but we defend it because that day can be pushed back). There may be uncertain times ahead for social cohesion. There may be stormy days more blustery than any mega-storm yet seen on the East Coast. But keep an eye on the horizon. Poet Gerald Manley Hopkins wrote how at such a time "morning; at the brown brink eastwards, springs." We must be watchers for that event. We must not be easily daunted by ill-informed end of the world prognosticators and, worse, their solutions. Keep freedom alive in your heart and in your actions.

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**Lincoln E. Steed is the editor of *Liberty*.**



# An Edict

Remember A.D. 313?

BY: JOHN GRAZ

The year A.D. 313 is an important date in the history of religious freedom.

That date brought into a positive focus some very significant developments in “Christendom” and the Roman world of that time.

The new emperor of the Western Roman Empire, Constantine the Great, signed an agreement with Licinius Augustus, the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire. By this edict Constantine agreed to protect the Christians who had endured years of persecution. This document, called the Edict of Milan, became the first edict in favor of religious freedom for all people living in the Roman Empire.

In return for agreeing to the signing of the edict, Licinius received, as a gift, Constantia, Constantine’s half sister, to be his wife. Women’s rights issues aside, this was a huge political and dynastic concession. On April 30, 311, Emperor Galerius had issued an edict of toleration. This was the first step. Christians were at least tolerated. The Edict of Milan was about the recognition of their rights.

After centuries of persecution and nearly 10 dramatic, fearful years under the emperor Diocletian, the Christians were finally free to worship God, and the pagans were also free to worship as they chose.

Unfortunately, Constantine also gave privileges to the Christian bishops. He was not neutral, and he became more and more involved in the life of the church. He played a preponderant role at the Council of Nicea, which is accepted as establishing the foundation of the Christian Creed. And he opened the door to the alliance between state and church.

## What Happened?

A few decades later, under Theodosius in 391, the Christian church became the state church; and pagans, dissidents, and heretics began to be persecuted. The unity of the empire was now premised on one God, one emperor, and one religion. It was a tragic alliance for the Christian church, which became, for centuries, one of the worst persecutors in history.

If the Roman Empire had actually respected the Edict of Milan, the history of the Western world and the history of the world in general would have been totally different. The history of the church would have been preserved from the dark stains of persecution. Millions of lives would have been saved from torture and execution.

As we are encouraged to celebrate—or at least commemorate—the Edict of Milan in 2013, we must not forget what happened later on, and we must reaffirm our commitment to religious freedom for all people everywhere.




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# A Model For Freedom Of Religion

BY: JOHN LI



John Locke was a pioneer for toleration. Today we know that toleration can be only a halfway house to real religious freedom. Yet his views were central to establishing a hitherto-unknown religious freedom. His mature view on toleration in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* was written at the end of a century or more of religious conflict. Having experienced both intolerance as well as tolerance through his own exile in Holland and through his friendships with French Protestant refugees he met there, and his observation of Catholics, Calvinists, and Lutherans coexisting peacefully in Cleves, Locke came to see tolerance as the solution to political strife caused by religious differences.

Locke argued that no one was more certain or infallible than anybody else, and therefore it is safest to leave religion to individual conscience. Locke argued that we all believe our opinions to be correct, and we all know that other people believe the same about their opinions. We do not want opinions we do not agree with to be forced upon us, and therefore we should not force our opinions upon others. Furthermore, Locke distinguished the church from the state by their respective roles.

The state, according to Locke, was only to serve civil interests, including life, liberty, health, and indolence of body, money, land, and so on; civil authorities can exercise their power because they have the power to impose penalties, but penalties cannot convince the mind that which is essential for genuine religious belief.

The state, according to Locke, was only to serve civil interests, including life, liberty, health, and indolence of body, money, land, and so on; civil authorities can exercise their power because they have the power to impose penalties, but penalties cannot convince the mind that which is essential for genuine religious belief.

A church, on the other hand, according to Locke, is a voluntary society of people for the purpose of public worship of God, in a manner as they judge acceptable to God, and effectual to the salvation of their souls. Because of the inherent nature of religion, faith is required, but faith cannot be compelled by force, coerced worship is therefore ineffectual, because it "obliges men to dissemble, and tell lies both to God and man."

Despite Locke's support for toleration, he also set limits on how far toleration can go. He treated conduct, whether religious or not, indiscriminately, measured against the law. If certain nonreligious conducts are permitted by law, then it should not be punished by law if it were motivated by religion. Locke's theory of toleration has affected much over the centuries; however most people have only observed its impact on governments. Churches have also learned what it is to be tolerable.

Jefferson's ideas were shaped by Locke's writings, as shown in his taking extensive notes on Locke's *Letter on Toleration* in 1776. While Locke sought to reduce greatly the influence of religion in political affairs, he did not wish to establish completely secular political systems. Instead he thought that free societies require widespread religious belief in order to foster moral values. Jefferson's argument for establishing religious freedom and the separation between church and state is similar to Locke's arguments, and he too believed that the establishment of religious freedom and the separation of church and state are essential to the founding and perpetuation of free governments.

For both Jefferson and Locke, political power comes from the people rather than from God, and earthly governments are to protect temporal interests, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness or estate. Clergy who have assumed dominion over the faith of others have not served the cause of faith, but have established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world and through all time. In contrast to Locke, however, Jefferson did not believe that religion was the prerequisite for morality. The impact of Locke and Jefferson can be seen in today's interactions between the state and the church in America.

A question arises, though: Is America really secular? That is a meaningful question especially when America is compared with Europe. The state and the church are two separate institutions, and no formal dominance or relationship exists between them. The constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion has allowed a maximum level of toleration of religion in America. This forms a huge contrast to Europe in the Middle Ages, when religious persecution was the norm, during which a single form of religion could exert

institutional power over all other religions. Therefore, despite the high degree of religious involvement by its citizens, America is a secular state, and it is America's secularism that has contributed to the expansion of religion. Furthermore, in the 1950s, tertiary-educated Americans were more likely to be involved with organized religions; but since the 1970s the same demographics became less likely to be involved with organized religions, except that evangelical Protestantism expanded among tertiary-educated Americans during the same period.

There have also been claims that religion in America has become trivialized, and "made into a hobby," and that it has exited the public square. However, such claims cannot be substantiated. The rise of the Religious Right in the 1970s through to the recent electoral success of the Tea Party has illustrated that although religion has no institutional role in the public square, it exerts great influence. It is a product of the largely laissez-faire religious free market that is based upon toleration. There is no compulsion for people to be religious, neither is there compulsion for people to be irreligious, and America's secularism allows people to express their religion publicly.

The situation in America can be compared to that in France. The dichotomy between America and France can be explained by discussing two forms of secularism: state-directed assertive secularism, and laissez-faire, passive secularism. France has adopted the former, and America has adopted the latter. Both America and France ban public prayers in public schools, but their reasons are different. In France the ban is because of its commitment to the principle of secularism; whereas in America it is because school prayer implies a "psychological coercion" over students with minority religious beliefs. America does not fund religious schools, but France does, provided that they accept some degree of state control. Passive secularism requires the secular state to play a passive role in avoiding the establishment of any religion, and allows for the public visibility of religion. Assertive secularism means the state excludes religion from the public sphere and plays an assertive role as the agent of a social engineering project that confines religion to the private domain.

America never had a dominant national church that exercised great power and provoked great reaction, and no single church there "has ever occupied anything like the place of the Catholic Church in France". The founding secular rationalists were influenced by the Enlightenment, while the evangelicals were affected by the Great Awakening. The former were not antireligion, and the latter were open to church-state separation. They also had a common ground based on Locke's liberalism and the thoughts of some Protestant thinkers such as Roger Williams, John Witherspoon, and Isaac Backus, who favored church-state separation. That consensus led the dominance of passive secularism in America.

Tolerance also means the equal status of different religious persuasions in America, where a free market of religious persuasions exists, and religion is largely unrestricted, thus forming a secular state that also has a highly religious society. Under America's passive secularism, religion thrives, whereas under France's assertive secularism, religion is often kept out of the public square. Toleration has contributed to a passive secularism, in which the state and the church are not dependent upon each other, and it could aid the growth of religion.

However, toleration seems less compatible with assertive secularism, because religion is seen as something to be tamed. Although both America and France are secular states, their paths to secularization and secularism, as displayed in the two countries, have been vastly different, as a result of their different history and philosophical foundations upon which their secularization developed.

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# By What Authority?

BY: KEVIN D. PAULSON

Since the emergence of the Religious Right on the American political scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s, cooperation between Protestants and Catholics for political purposes has been both open and active. Such religio-political alliances have existed before, of course, in the context of liberal causes (e.g., civil rights, the Vietnam War). The corporate nature of these and similar moral issues made the religious involvement less problematic for those concerned about maintaining the separation of church and state. Within the context of the Religious Right movement, many trace events back to the 1994 document "Evangelicals and Catholics Together."<sup>1</sup> That document proclaimed a new Christian unity relative to both theological and political goals. The document was prepared and endorsed by such prominent Catholic thought leaders as Richard John Neuhaus and George Weigel, and by such Protestant luminaries as former Nixon aide Charles Colson and televangelist Pat Robertson.<sup>2</sup>

What I have chosen to call the "new ecumenism" is significant because of its differences from the old ecumenism. When many conservative Christians think of the ecumenical movement, they think of such organizations as the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, or of meetings at which doctrinal compromises are crafted for the sake of denominational mergers—often by theological liberals with nontranscendent views of biblical authority. For this reason, the very phrase "ecumenical movement" has long evoked negative responses from the conservative wing of Protestantism. And yet with the rise of the Religious Right, it has been these very conservative Protestants who have been most proactive in forging unity with Roman Catholics for political purposes. Rather than seeking unity through some doctrinal "middle ground," achieved through the give and take of dialogue and negotiation, the new ecumenism simply ignores doctrinal differences—even major ones—for the sake of a united front against what is held to be a permissive, morally bankrupt culture.

## The Problem

But expedient unity of this sort carries with it a major problem.

Adherence to moral absolutes is a cornerstone of conservative Christianity. For Protestants, historically, this has meant holding to the Bible as the exclusive guide to faith and practice—*sola scriptura*, as the Reformers said. On this basis, conservative evangelicals condemn fornication, adultery, homosexual practice, the production and viewing of pornography, and other practices considered to be immoral.

The challenge arises when the same Bible that condemns practices generally viewed by conservative Christians as immoral is also found to condemn beliefs and religious practices held dear by a large segment of the "moral majority" thus built. This problem, when considered, poses some serious questions for those with a high view of biblical authority. If the Bible is the source of the moral convictions by which one measures society, on what basis does one refuse to apply the biblical standard to political allies whose teachings or religious practices contradict the Bible? If one chooses simply to ignore such contradictions, what is to be made of the biblical command not to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14)?

In short, what happens when biblical absolutes become politically inconvenient?

If the Bible is truly God's infallible Word, shouldn't its adherents stand by all of its teachings, even if others call such teachings bigoted? This, at the bottom line, is why politics is such a dangerous means by which to advance the church's mission, and offers yet another reason the separation of church and state is an imperative for the church as well as the government.

In the world of politics success is defined by 50 percent plus one. In the biblical worldview, by contrast, success is defined exclusively by faithfulness to the divine Word, regardless of how inconvenient or unpopular such faithfulness might be. When the so-called Moral Majority first came on the American scene, many Christians (as well as others) found the name unsettling. After all, the Bible never promises that God's true followers will ever comprise a majority, even among professing Christians. Jesus Himself declared: "Narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:14). According to the Bible, only eight





people got on board Noah's ark (Genesis 7:7; 1 Peter 3:20), only three stood unmoved when the rest of the world bowed before Nebuchadnezzar's image (Daniel 3:12). And at the end of human history, according to the Bible, those found faithful are described not as a majority, but as a "remnant" (Revelation 12:17).

According to Scripture, the Christian's duty is to adhere to the counsel of God, even if the result is revilement and ridicule by the rest of society. Biblical teachings cover more than sexuality issues. They place in the crosshairs of scrutiny a wide range of cherished beliefs and practices, including many held dear by conservative Christians. Something is very wrong with the spiritual integrity of church members who are prepared to sacrifice biblical teachings for the sake of political objectives. Such dilemmas, however, become inevitable when Christians seek to blend the church's agenda with that of the state. Majority opinion is the guiding force in representative government, and when the biblical message is subjected to such a standard, much of it will be lost: and with it, the most basic authority of the Christian faith itself.

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**Kevin Paulson is a minister of religion and longtime editor who writes from New York, New York.**

1 "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," *First Things*, May 1994, pp. 15-22.

2 *Ibid.*

# In The Whirlwind: Robert A. Burt, Harvard University Press, 2012

## Book Review

BY: LEON WEISTLER



Most folks who grew up in that rapidly decreasing institution of a two-parent home learned pretty quickly that you obeyed Father. How many kids, when told by Dad to do (or not to do) such and such, answered, "What gives you the authority to tell me what to do?" Though a few might have answered like that (a few times at least, till consequences appeared), most kids know, implicitly, that Father has the authority, and that he is to be obeyed.

That's fine with our earthly father. But what about our heavenly Father? In most Western religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—there is an inherent if perhaps unspoken assumption that God is to be obeyed because, well, He is God and we are humans, and humans are to obey God. Period!

And in the Scriptures, at least in a Jewish and Christian context (which is the context of this book), that assumption is heartily presented. Right from the opening pages of the Bible, from the Creation onward, up until the events that lead to apocalypse, it's pretty much understood that God is boss, and that we humans are to obey Him. Period.

Not so fast! At least that's the opening premise of the book *In the Whirlwind*, by Robert A. Burt, the Alexander M. Bickel professor of law at Yale. Burt asks numerous questions about the authority of God as presented in the Bible. While it might seem overtly blasphemous to most religionists to even ask such questions, Burt does. He starts his book with these lines: "No authority, whether divine or secular, deserves automatic obedience." While most folks would have no problem with the question of secular authority—dare this mere flesh-and-blood mortal (even though he's a Yale law professor) presume to question whether we owe God absolute, unquestioning loyalty and obedience?

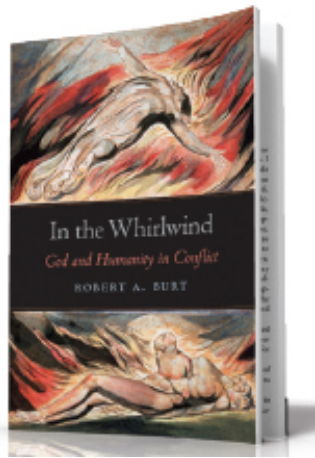
Yes, he does, and the premise of his book is that, contrary to the common notion that God demands unquestioning obedience, the Bible, he asserts, isn't quite as clear-cut and dry on that matter. In fact, Burt claims that the Scriptures are actually a kind of primer, or guidebook, on how to confront authority—both secular and divine.

Again, it's the "divine" part that is most interesting in his thesis—and most troubling. From the Abolitionists in America to the liberation theologians south of the border, the Bible has been used to foment challenges to authority, both secular and even religious (i.e., the church). That's no big deal. (Some of us might even remember those posters from Latin America, done in the rather gauche style of Soviet realism, depicting Jesus as a Marxist worker!) But Burt asserts that we have grounds for questioning the authority of God Himself. While that, in and of itself, isn't so revolutionary, he asserts that we can find the grounds for this questioning in the Bible itself.

No further than the first page, he wrote: "I believe that this conventional view [God demands implicit obedience] is based on a misreading of the biblical texts. It ignores the fact that God's specific claims to absolute authority are regularly, if for the most part indirectly, denied in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles themselves."

That's quite a thesis, one that he then purports to back up by referring to various stories in the biblical account, from the Creation, up through the patriarchal era and into New Testament times, including the death of Jesus on the cross. In these and other stories Burt draws some interesting conclusions about the power of God and what could be perceived as the limitation of that power.

For instance, in the famous Job account, God allows Job to be tormented beyond belief by the devil, all of which gets Job to



seriously question the goodness and fairness of the God whom he had, up until that point, so faithfully worshipped. Of course, even after the calamities struck, Job bowed and worshipped, uttering the famous words "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). That expression of worship, however, didn't mean that Job wasn't seriously questioning the fairness of God in all that happened to him, and only near the end of the book do some issues (but not all) get resolved.

For Burt, however, this means "that the book of Job expresses the most visible challenge by a human being to the legitimacy of God's authority in the Hebrew Bible." For Burt—whether from the fall in Eden to the death of Jesus on the cross, where Jesus' cry revealed a sense of Him being abandoned by God—these accounts reveal that this idea of utter, unquestioned submission to God's authority isn't as clear-cut and simple as traditionally presented.

And in a sense he's right, even if he misses the grander background behind these apparent challenges to God's authority. Burt notices, and rightly so, lack of outward coercion by God in the Bible. But God not forcing people to obey Him is not the same thing as Him not demanding absolute obedience. One can't read the Bible for very long without seeing that God does tell people what to do; He over and over (think of the book of Deuteronomy) commands them to obey Him. But there's a crucial difference between demanding that people obey you and *forcing them to*.

Demand is not the same as coercion, and that is a crucial motif all through the Bible, a point that Burt picks up on but seems to misunderstand. He seems to read that lack of coercion as somehow inherently implying that God is not worthy to be obeyed.

The issue is, really, not whether God demands absolute obedience. He does. What He doesn't do, however, is force it. And in an absolute sense. He can't force love. Love, to be love, has to be freely given, or it's not love at all. The God of the Bible can force every creature in the universe to fear Him, to obey Him, and to worship Him. But He can't force anyone to love Him. The moment love is forced, it's not love, and hence, whatever else the Bible teaches about the relationship between humans and God, freedom, human freedom, is a foundational motif out of which so much of the drama flows.

Thus, a great deal of the counterplay in these stories, many of which have left Burt as baffled as the rest of us, unfolds against the background of inherent human freedom, which means folks just don't always worship and obey God as He wants. There is an element of God needing, in a sense, to "prove" His worthiness to them. After all, just because a God exists doesn't mean He's worthy of worship.

All this, to some degree, Burt wrestles with, even if he doesn't seem to grasp the larger implication behind it: the cosmic struggle between good and evil, sometimes called the great controversy, which many see as the ubermetaphysic of the Bible.

Now, Burt is a law professor, and he goes from the question of obeying God to the question of obeying secular authority, not necessarily a seamless transition. Indeed, a profound difference exists, because while God's government works by love (we obey because we love Him), not force, secular governments work by force, not love. As Machiavelli said, it's better for the prince to be feared than loved. Though Burt draws some parallels between obedience to the Divine and obedience to the secular, he doesn't push them too far, and rightly so.

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**Reviewed by Leon Weistler.**

# When Religious Liberty Issues Aren't

BY: CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN

Unlike my immediate predecessor, Roland Hegstad, who edited *Liberty* for 34 years, or my immediate successor, Lincoln Steed, who has been at the helm about 14 years and counting, my stint as *Liberty* editor was short: only seven.



In that time, though, I faced a rather interesting phenomenon. Because *Liberty* is a church publication defending religious freedom, every now and then I'd hear from an irate church member who wanted us to come to his or her defense. Why? The reasons varied, but were, generally, of the following nature: Their favorite dissident speaker was denied the pulpit by the church board. Or they were "unfairly" denied a church office. Or the pastor was preaching "error." Or this person should have been ordained and wasn't. Or they didn't like the church's position on some social issue.

However valid (or not) their complaint, I always tried to explain that our department wasn't the right place to come with their grievance. Sure, their issue dealt with religion and involved a dispute, but those two factors alone didn't necessarily make it a religious freedom issue any more than a Muslim arguing with a Christian over the identity of Jesus would necessitate calling in Homeland Security.

What, then, is or is not a bona fide religious liberty question?

## Free Associations

Back in the mid-1980s, while writing for *Liberty*, I did an article about a dispute within the Roman Catholic Church regarding 97 dissident Catholics, including 24 nuns, who had run afoul of then-Pope John Paul II's wrath. They had signed a manifesto in defense of abortion and thus faced disciplinary measures. The question arose about whether or not the church could discipline the nuns, and even throw them out of their orders, and if so, could or should the nuns take legal action. In the end I basically sided with the pope, not on the question of abortion (which was another matter), but on the right of a church to discipline its own members, or, in this case, to discipline those who took orders. I quoted a couple of well-known U.S. Supreme Court cases in which the High Court basically said it was not the business of the secular authorities to interfere with internal church issues.

This concept gets to the heart of religious liberty and church-state separation. In essence, people who join churches do so voluntarily. They are there of their own free will. They are not forced to join, and certainly not by the state. By joining a church, one publicly associates oneself, to some degree, with the teachings, mission, and goals of that church. What makes that membership meaningful is, however, the *free* association with that body. That association, and the public proclamation that comes merely by linking oneself to the name of the church, has potency only because one has freely chosen it. Forced membership would all but denude that proclamation of any public witness, of any testimony, public or private, regarding your convictions. You would be there because you had to be, not because you necessarily believed in what the church stood for.

John Locke, one of the patriarchs of religious freedom, wrote in 1698, in the context of religious liberty, that "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 I distrust, and by a Worship that I abhor."

## Biblical Freedom

Locke touched on a crucial point: Only a faith, or by extension one's affiliation with a church, freely entered into, is of value; which explains why the principle of religious freedom is found all through the Bible, even in the Old Testament. In Eden, for instance, Adam and Eve were given free choice whether or not to obey. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16, 17). Though eating of the tree would come with consequences, they weren't forced to



obey the command.

After all, why would the Lord have commanded Adam not to do something unless Adam had the potential to do it? The command itself presupposes Adam's freedom; otherwise, why give the order to begin with? Thus, amid the luxuries of the Garden Paradise, God gave Adam and Eve a simple test, which makes no sense for nonfree beings, wired only to obey and do what is right. Adam was free, an autonomous moral being with the capacity to choose right and wrong. It had to be that way, because forced obedience would be as meaningless as adhering to "a Religion I distrust, and by a Worship that I abhor."

No one better revealed this truth than did Jesus, who, though having the right to force obedience, never did. As God, as the Creator (Colossians 1:16), as the great "I am" (John 8:58; Exodus 3:14), He is the source of everything created (John 1:1-3). All that we are, or ever could be, comes from the One in whom "we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). As such, He alone deserves our worship and our obeisance. Yet if He didn't force either, what gives any human authority the right to? God didn't create humans free only to come thousands of years later and trample upon that freedom Himself, or use the state to do it for Him. On the contrary, it was the state, and the power of the state, under the instigation of religious authorities, that led to Christ's death. Right there in the story of Jesus, then, we have an archetype of just how dangerous the melding of church and state can be.

Hence, Thomas Jefferson knew exactly what he was talking about when he wrote that God, though "being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it [religion] by coercions on either, as was in His Almighty power to do." Though God has the power, and perhaps the right, to force us to obey, He doesn't, and so neither should humans. To do so, Jefferson said, would be "a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion." In short, a religion that is forced is not just useless but is contrary to the very principles of God's government itself.

### **The Power of the State**

Now, God might not use force, but Caesar does. Caesar is supposed to use force; that's his job. Sure, it would be nice if all citizens obeyed the laws—traffic laws, tax laws, environmental laws, and every other law—out of the goodness of their hearts. But the fact is, most people don't; they have to be forced, threatened by civil or criminal penalties for violation of those laws. This is the essence of a state: It has not just the power to punish, but also the prerogative to do so.

Of course, the laws it enforces, and the punishments it metes out in enforcing those laws, can be unfair, cruel, and arbitrary. But that's not the point. The point is that the state, to function as the state, to even be a state, has to use the threat of force, and even force itself. It wouldn't be a state otherwise.

Faith must not, and cannot, come by force, and because the essence of the state is force, we arrive at the genius behind the whole concept of church-state separation. One realm, the spiritual, by its very nature, must not use coercion; the other realm, the state, by its very nature, must. Thus, the safest course is to keep both realms as separate as possible.

### **Church Battles**

All this leads to the gist of what constitutes true religious freedom issues, and why I would, as *Liberty* editor, often tell those church members who wanted to drag us into their church disputes, "Sorry, wrong department."

Why? Because as already stated, at the most fundamental level, church affiliation is voluntary. You freely choose to be part of that body. The state, and the power of force it wields, has nothing to do with your membership. If something happens that you deem unfair, you are as free to leave that church body, just as you were to join. As long as no state coercion is involved, it's not a religious liberty issue in the classic sense.

However legitimate your complaint, it's not like the Amish, who decades ago faced state coercion over how they educated their children. It's not like Jehovah's Witnesses, who felt the power of state in regard to saluting the American flag. It's not like the Santeria cult in Florida, who faced the state trying to restrict their free exercise of religion. It's not like some Baptists, who felt state wrath in regard to where they worshipped. It's not like some Seventh-day Adventists, who felt state wrath over Sunday blue laws. In short, maybe a person has a legitimate gripe and has been unfairly treated, but most likely when he or she calls the Religious Liberty Department about an internal church squabble, they won't get much help from the Religious Liberty Department (in our church, there are other avenues, though).

### **Gray Areas**

Of course, as with most things in life, especially church-state things, the issues are not always so clear-cut. Though the courts have been reluctant to allow the power of the state to get involved in internal church disputes, they occasionally do. One of the first articles I edited as *Liberty* editor dealt with the distribution of assets after a church split. In cases in which property is involved, or a crime has been alleged (such as child abuse), the state will get involved because—unlike the pastor's "heresy," or one's favorite dissident being denied the pulpit—these are legal issues and, hence, often fall under the purview of the state and its coercive

power. Also, in matters of employment, especially when people are fired, the issue can get much more complicated, and the state might get involved. Finally, despite Paul's clear-cut counsel against Christians taking one another to court (1 Corinthians 6), in our hyperlitigious society Christians are constantly suing each other or their churches over just about everything, thus often having (contra Paul) "unbelievers" (verse 6), with the power of the state, settle these disputes.

It's been many years since I left the *Liberty* editorship, so I haven't been privy to the myriad issues that always arise in the complicated area of church-state separation since then. But if the past is precursor, I've no doubt that my worthy successor, Lincoln Steed, has received many phone calls from irate church members claiming their religious liberty has been violated by the church and thus demanding that he do something about it. I don't know what he says, but I'm sure it's something similar to what I'd reply, which was "Sorry; wrong department."

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**Clifford Goldstein writes from Sykesville, Maryland. He now edits Bible study lessons for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and continues to write extensively for *Liberty* and other publications.**

# History Of Sunday Laws

## A Liberty Retrospective

BY: MELVIN BELLI

The history of Sunday legislation in the United States shows a mass of contrary, inconsistent, and illogical cases and distinctions. The following instances help to prove this:

In *State of Nebraska v. Tim O'Rourke*, 35 Nebr. 614,

1892, an indictment for playing baseball on Sunday, the court said: "No trial can be had on Sunday. The only trials which a lawyer can then lawfully be subjected to are those which he undergoes in listening to the clergy who make him a frequent object of reproach. The only permissible court on that day is such as lovers, according to immemorial custom, pay to the object of their adoration."

### Fined for Upholding Sunday Law

In Massachusetts in 1816 it cost Officer John Atwood just \$500 for upholding the Sunday law that made illegal either riding or traveling done on the Lord's day.

One Jonathan Dwight was shocked to see George Pearce riding on Sunday "against the peace and the dignity of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts." He rushed to the nearest magistrate, and a warrant was issued on his complaint. The warrant was given to Officer Atwood to serve on Pearce, and the officer, seeing his duty, took the lawbreaking criminal into custody that same Sunday. In fact, he locked him in the local jail from Sunday noon until Monday morning.

But Monday morning Pearce became plaintiff, not defendant, and sued the officer for false arrest. First, he explained to the court that the local magistrate had jurisdiction to order the arrest of only those of his own county who rode on Sunday. He was from another county.

Next he showed the court another statute that prevented any work or business on Sunday except "works of charity or necessity." Since the arrest was certainly not a work of charity, and since Pearce was well known and would have been available for arrest the following day, his incarceration was not a work of necessity.

Damages to the amount of \$500 were awarded against the perplexed officer. (*13 Mass. 324.*)

### Church Loses a Donation

The Methodist Episcopal Church of Sweetster Station, Indiana, had favored Sunday legislation until the Supreme Court of Indiana in 1878 was called upon to interpret a Sunday law, with that church as plaintiff.

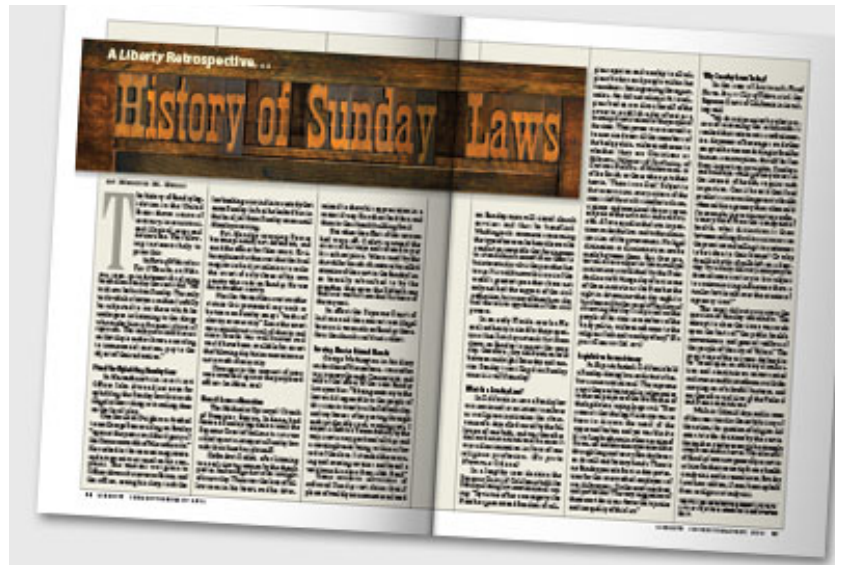
Defendant Catlett, after listening to a soul-stirring sermon by the church pastor, had emerged into the sunlight of a new day. There was the love of fellow man in his heart, and he determined to show his appreciation in a material way. He subscribed then and there to the church building fund.

But when the effect of the sermon had worn off, Catlett resumed the errors of his ways and refused to pay his subscription. When sued by the church for breach of contract, he called attention of the court to the Sunday law, so heartily subscribed to by the preacher, that upon the Sabbath one shall not work or conduct business of the any sort.

In effect the Supreme Court of Indiana said the contract was illegal because it was made on Sunday; therefore, the church could not collect.

### Forcing Men to Attend Church

George Washington, in his diary under date of November 8, 1789, refers to a journey through Connecticut, and tells of the effect of



the state Sunday law upon him: "It being contrary to the law and disagreeable to the people of this state to travel on the Sabbath day, and my horses, after passing through such intolerable road, wanting rest, I stayed at Perkin's Tavern (which, by the way, is not a very good one) all day; and a meetinghouse being within a few rods of the door, I attended the morning and evening services and heard a very lame discourse from a Mr. Bond."

Some modern advocates of enforced Sunday rest claim that if places of worldly amusement are closed on Sunday, men will attend church services and thus be benefited. Washington's comment concerning the type of sermon he heard leaves the conclusion inevitable that forcing men to attend church cannot force them to be interested in what the preacher has to say. It is well known that most of the world's greatest preachers have not only not had the support of the civil authorities, but many of them have also had the active opposition of the civil powers.

In an early Florida case (*10 Fla. 558*), authority is cited for the proposition that Sunday extends but from dawn on Sunday to sunset the same day; therefore, jury deliberation held between midnight Saturday and sunrise Sunday is not illegal on Sunday, since it is still Saturday!

### What Is a Sunday Law?

In California in 1858 a Sunday law was construed as an intent to enforce as a religious institution the observance of a day called sacred by the followers of one faith, and was therefore declared unconstitutional because it was a discrimination in favor of one religious profession. (*Ex parte Newman, 9 Cal. 502.*)

In a lengthy 1882 decision the Supreme Court of California held the Sunday-closing law constitutional, saying, "By virtue of her sovereignty, the State has guaranteed freedom of religious opinion and worship to all religious bodies and people within her boundaries. But in granting those guaranties, she did not relinquish to religious bodies, nor divest herself of the power to establish a day of rest as a municipal institution for the people of the state. That power was reserved to be exercised over all the members of the body politic, without reference to whether they are Christians or Hebrews, followers of Confucius, of Gautama Buddha, of Muhammad, or of Joe Smith; or those who say in their hearts, 'There is no God.' Subject to that reservation, every citizen of the state is left free to his intellectual convictions and emotional fervors upon subjects of the unknown and unknowable. All are equal in the laws, in positions under the law, and in the administration of the government. No legal distinction or discrimination can be made between them. But, thus protected, all are subject to the municipal institutions established by the State. And in establishing a day of rest as one of those institutions, the State has the right to determine what day ought to be observed by the people. The duty of observing the day is imposed on the people of the state as members of the body politic, without reference to the religious faith and worship of any." (*Ex parte Koser 60 Cal. 177.*)

### Legislative Inconsistency

In *Ex parte Jentsch*, California held a Sunday-closing law, exclusive to barbers, unconstitutional. The supreme court there substituted its judgment as to the real purpose of the law for that of the legislative, saying (page 474), "How comes it that the legislative eye was so keen to discern the need of the oppressed barber, and yet was blind to his toiling brethren in other vocations? Steam-car and streetcar operatives labor through long and weary Sunday hours; so do mill and factory hands. There is no Sunday period of rest and no protection for the overworked employees of our daily papers. Do these not need rest and protection? The very suggestion of these considerations shows the injustice and inequality of this law."

### Why Sunday Laws Today?

In the case of *Justensen's Food Stores, Inc., v. City of Tulare et al.*, the Supreme Court of California in its ruling said:

"We do not perceive by what process of reasoning the conclusion is reached that restaurants, confectioneries, dispenser of beverages, and other excepted businesses dealing in food for human consumption, should be free from inspection on nights, Sundays, and holidays, while grocery stores, in the interest of health, require such inspection. Can it be said that food products are more dangerous to health when sold in a grocery than when sold, for example, in a restaurant or confectionery store? From the standpoint of health, what distinction is there between selling food to customers on the premises and selling it to customers to be taken to their homes? Or why should a bottle of milk left on a doorstep by a dairy delivery company be deemed more sanitary or less subject to contaminating influences than a similar bottle sold over the counter of a grocery store?"

The court did not pass upon the question of Sunday sacredness. The attempt to close the stores was made upon the basis of "the public health, convenience, and general welfare of the people of the city of Tulare." The provisions of the act were declared to be "based upon an arbitrary classification and constitute an unwarranted and unreasonable interference with the carrying on of a lawful business, and are therefore violative of the Federal and State constitutions."

While in Colonial days, and in some of the cases tried in the early history of the nation, the question of religion did enter into the decisions by the courts, the tendency today seems to be strongly away from such a course. The advocates of Sunday laws now



generally resort to a claim for their necessity from a health standpoint, and in recent times, Sunday laws have seldom, if ever, been upheld from a religious standpoint.

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**Written by Melvin M. Belli, this article appeared in *Liberty* during the fourth quarter of 1939, a time of economic malaise and international conflict.**

# Racism And The Golden Rule

BY: HAVEN BRADFORD GOW

Historian Steven Lawson, in his contribution to *Freedom Rights* (University Press of Kentucky), points out that Martin Luther King, Jr., did not create the civil rights movement but "rather, the movement thrust him into a position he did not covet. . . . That said, King's charismatic leadership gave a unique character to the movement from 1954 to 1968. . . . King's philosophy and tactics of nonviolent direct action, the campaigns he launched, and his distinct and inspirational voice shaped the popular perception of the movement for both blacks and whites."



In his contribution to *Searching for Your Soul* (Schocken/Random House), King wrote about the suffering and persecution he and his family had to endure for his courageous efforts to combat the injustices of racism and help his people achieve equal rights and protection under the law: "I have been arrested five times and put in Alabama jails. My home has been bombed twice. A day seldom passes that my family and I are not the recipients of threats of death. I have been the victim of a near-fatal stabbing."

According to James Toney, a Baptist scholar/clergyman in Eudora, Arkansas, racism results from idolatry; it is elevating one race (for example, the White race) into a false god over all other races.

Well-known evangelist Billy Graham, author of *Peace with God and Death and the Life After* (Word), has been a longtime and courageous foe of racial bigotry and discrimination. Long before civil rights legislation was enacted, Graham insisted that his evangelistic services be open to people of all races.

For Graham, racism can be traced to sinful pride: "Racism is a sin in the eyes of God. All human beings are made in the image of God, and all are valuable in His sight. How can we look at others in a different way than God looks at them? 'From one man he made every nation of men.' Acts 17:26."

In my view, it may very well be the children of our nation who will lead the way toward racial understanding and harmony. I base this judgment on some beautiful and inspiring encounters I have experienced with lovely children at the Hodding Carter YMCA, at Greenville, Mississippi.

When I first started playing basketball with the children involved in the YMCA after school program, they would separate according to race and simply play and socialize with children of their own race. I befriended the children—Black and White—and encouraged them to play basketball and become friends with one another; it was beautiful and inspiring to see the Black and White children learning to play and study together and become friends.

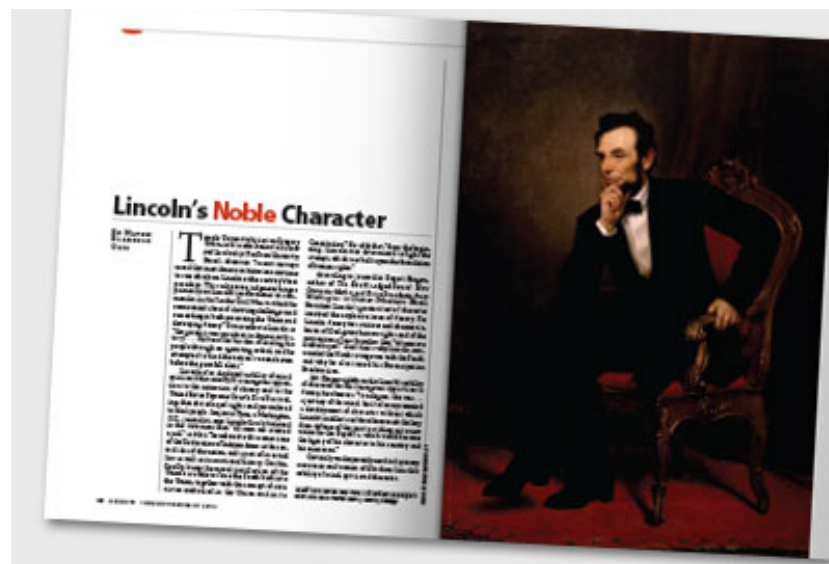
My late father, Joseph W. Gow, was right: The best way to overcome racial bigotry and promote racial understanding and harmony is to practice the golden rule, that is, "Do unto others what you would have them do unto you."

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Haven Bradford Gow is a frequent contributor to *Liberty*.

# Lincoln's Noble Character

BY: HAVEN BRADFORD GOW



Temple University historian Gregory Urwin, in his contribution to *Lincoln and Leadership* (Fordham University Press), observes: "recent surveys reveal that most American historians continue to rate Abraham Lincoln as the country's best president. This subjective judgment hinges primarily on Lincoln's performance as commander in chief in the Civil War, in which he surmounted a host of daunting challenges and succeeding in both preserving the Union and destroying slavery." Urwin refers to Lincoln as "the greatest war president in American history. . . . He bore the burden of leading his people through an agonizing ordeal, and he attempted to bind the nation's wounds even before the guns fell silent."

Lincoln also displayed nobility of mind, spirit, and character by his courageous opposition to the extension of slavery and to the United States Supreme Court's *Dred Scott* ruling, that denied equal rights and personhood to Black people. Benjamin Tyree, a Washington, D.C., journalist, says Lincoln firmly believed in the statement that "all men are created equal," and that "he referred to this cornerstone of the Declaration of Independence as the central idea of the nation, and a part of its actual law as well as its emotional history. On this, finally, hung the moral justification of the Union's crusade to force the South back into the Union, together with the concept of civic virtue embodied in the Union and in its Constitution." He adds that "from the beginning, Lincoln was determined to fight the attempt, which was built upon the foundation of human rights."

According to journalist Rogert Shogan, author of *The Double-edged Sword: How Character Makes and Ruins Presidents, from Washington to Clinton* (Westview Press), President Lincoln's greatest test of character involved the explosive issue of slavery. For Lincoln, slavery was a vicious and obscene violation of God-given human rights and of the proposition of our founders that "all men are created equal." And that is why Lincoln commanded the North to wage war with the South, and why he also issued his Emancipation Proclamation.

Mr. Shogan rightly credits Lincoln's nobility of character for his courageous opposition to slavery; he observes: "to a degree, this was . . . a journey of the mind. But it also represented a development of character without which Lincoln's intellect could not have made the leap from defense of the past to staking out a new vision for the Republic, which would become the legacy of his character to his country and his successors."

Certainly we desperately need today many more men and women of Abraham Lincoln's nobility of mind, spirit, and character.

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

# Defenseless Minorities In Constant Fear

BY: SHAMSHAD A. NASIR

Restlessness is spreading worldwide and increasing daily in Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and America. In fact, the entire world is experiencing great unrest as a result of a lack of peace, increased violence, and religious intolerance. Political and economic

restlessness is increasingly common and increasingly connected to religious persecution. In this regard one cannot ignore the atrocities committed against millions of defenseless minorities in Pakistan—be they Christians, Hindus, or Muslims.

Recently an 11-year-old Christian girl, Rimsha Masih, suffering from Down's syndrome, was charged and incarcerated for blasphemy. It is alleged that she burned pages of the Koran. Burning texts of the Koran is considered blasphemy by Pakistani law, and that can mean the death penalty or life in prison.



Security officials surrounding Rimsha Masih, a Christian girl accused of blasphemy, move her to a helicopter after her September 8, 2012, release from jail.

reports confirm that Hindu families are seeking asylum to India because of growing radical Islamic movements in Pakistan—expressed through abduction and forcible conversions.

Shias, who form a minority Muslim group in Pakistan, have not been spared such atrocities either. In two separate incidents during the past six months some 37 Shia passengers were martyred on their way to Gilgit.

Another minority group—the Ahmadi Muslims—suffer torture and threats to their lives on account of their beliefs, some of which are different from those of mainstream Islam.

On August 20, 2012, Ahmadis living in Rawalpindi, were not allowed to offer Eid prayer at their main place of worship. The spokesperson of the Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan said that the government and local administration has violated Article 20 of the constitution after stopping Ahmadis from congregating for Eid prayers. Article 20 ensures every citizen to freely perform religious duties.

In 1974 Pakistan's parliament adopted a law declaring Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. In 1984 military ruler General Zia-ul-Haq issued Ordinance XX, which forbids Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslim or to "pose as Muslims." They are not allowed to





profess the Islamic creed publicly or call their places of worship mosques. They are barred by law from worshipping in non-Ahmadi mosques or public prayer rooms, performing the Muslim call to prayer, using the traditional Islamic greeting in public, publicly quoting from the Koran, preaching in public, seeking converts, or producing, publishing, and disseminating their religious materials. These acts are punishable by imprisonment of up to three years.

These laws serve as permission to the masses to persecute Ahmadis in Pakistan. Their mosques have been defaced—the Kalima (Islamic creed) and minarets have been forcibly removed from them, and many Ahmadis have been imprisoned for blasphemy.

The majority of Islamic schools in Pakistan teach their pupils that Ahmadis are wajib-ul-qatal (worthy of being killed), which translates into legal killing of Ahmadis throughout Pakistan.

On May 28, 2010, during the Friday worship services in two mosques in Lahore, 95 Ahmadi Muslim men were shot dead and more than 100 injured. Scores of other Ahmadis have been martyred on account of their faith.

Pakistani Muslims must follow the example of the prophet of Islam, who, upon persecution, sought refuge for his followers in the Christian state of Abyssinia, now called Ethiopia, then ruled by a Christian king, who welcomed the Muslims with open arms. Muhammad instructed all Muslims to help protect the people of other faiths, their places of worship and their religious symbols from attackers.

Pakistan needs to adopt a civil attitude to the way minorities are treated. In Western countries laws protect all society, including all people of faith, and they are free to practice their religion. When these laws are trampled upon, the perpetrators are brought to justice. When people are unjustly treated, there is support from every corner of the civilized world, protesting the injustice.

When seven people were killed and scores injured by a lone gunman at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin not long ago, the first lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, spent nearly 90 minutes visiting the surviving families, expressing her sympathies and offering her support. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the United States also made a press release strongly condemning the “senseless shooting” of the Sikh worshippers.

Pakistan, on the other hand, widely supports such individuals as A.Q. Khan, who is “renowned” for selling his country’s strategic scientific secrets. Khan recently took center stage on a religious TV show in Pakistan taking potshots at the Ahmadi community.

Pakistan needs to change its attitude toward the defenseless minorities. I therefore call upon all Muslims and the international community to protest the blasphemy laws, demand freedom for those imprisoned because of their faith, and offer protection for members of all religious communities. The blasphemy laws in Pakistan must be repealed. The legal framework of Pakistan requires an overhaul. More fundamentally, the masses need to be educated to respect human rights and freedom of expression, especially in religion. Only when its citizens can be persuaded that civic responsibility begins with tolerance will Pakistan step out of the Dark Ages and strive for the dignity all of its diverse people deserve. May God grant the families and friends of all those affected steadfastness and patience, and may their distress turn into peace.



Supporters of Islamic parties hold party flags as they demand punishment for Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy.

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**Shamshad A. Nasir, is Imam of the Baitul Hamid Ahmadiyya Mosque in Chino, California.**

# Arab Spring, Democracy, And Antichrist

## Opinion

BY: STEPHEN ALLRED



As the Arab Spring continues to unfold and degrade across the Middle East, Christians in Syria find themselves watching with a wary eye to see how their freedoms will be affected by the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's regime. Some Syrian Christians believe that Assad has been their friend, since he has provided protection to them as well as to other minority religious groups in a country with a majority Muslim population. Other Christians have sided with the Syrian opposition in the uprising.

In Syria the Assad regime is mostly composed of Alawites, a minority branch of Islam. The opposition in the uprising is led mostly by Sunni Muslims, an Islamic sect to which the vast majority of Muslims adhere. Under Assad's government, Christians, comprising about 10 percent of the Syrian population, have been tolerated and protected. Many Christians in Syria worry that this could change with the current uprising, and they fear persecution under a Sunni-led government. They are apprehensive, not knowing how a government led by the opposition would ultimately treat them.<sup>1</sup> Populist democracy, it seems, is not always the friend of minority faiths, nor is autocratic rule necessarily a direct foe—especially in a religiously saturated state, such as Syria.

### Spreading American Democracy

Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, when U.S. President George W. Bush announced his intention to topple Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime and spread American democracy to the Middle East, many American Christians have bought into the vision, reminiscent of old-time colonialism, that it is America's mission to impose our version of freedom on the rest of the world.

But while the autocratic regimes of Assad, Hussein, and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt all undoubtedly perpetrated their share of brutality and horror, they did at least provide some measure of stability, tolerance, and protection to the minority Christian population within their borders. Democracy, on the other hand, brings with it the fickle will of "we the people" and, often, majoritarian rule without sufficient protection for minorities.

In Iraq, prior to the U.S. invasion in 2003, the Christian presence in the country was close to eight percent of the total population. Saddam's regime was tolerant of Christians and helped to protect them from violence. However, after the Americans effected regime change, Iraqi Christians were targeted, and violence against them skyrocketed. It is estimated that half of the Iraqi Christian population fled the country in the years following the overthrow of Saddam's regime.<sup>2</sup>

Not far away in Egypt, the Coptic Christian churches have had a long and proud history dating back to the evangelist Mark. Christians currently comprise about 10 percent of the Egyptian population. After the fall of Mubarak's dictatorship, the first truly democratic elections in recent Egyptian history were held. The Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic political movement, gained power, and reports of persecution against Christians in the country are on the rise.<sup>3</sup> It remains to be seen whether this trend will continue and how the revolution will affect Egyptian Christians in the long run.

While all this happens, Syrian Christians are waiting and watching to see what democracy will mean for them. For all its virtues, democracy apparently also has its liabilities. Majority rule is a positive thing only if there are checks and balances to safeguard the rights of those in the minority—both political and religious. This is a truth of which many Christians in Islamic states are acutely aware.

### Democracy Sometimes Leads to Persecution

But while many Syrian Christians are fully sensitized to the risks associated with democracy, most American Christians seem to think that democracy, whether in its direct or representative form, is a biblical value. Therefore, for them it only makes sense that America, the land of the free, should export its version of democracy to the world. But for all its virtues, democracy has been

successful in America only because of our constitutional protections and certain long-established cultural norms. Chief among these is the First Amendment's mandate that church and state be separated in the United States. As long as this remains the case, those of minority faiths have a better chance of receiving protection in America.

The exalted view of democracy held by many American Christians has likely influenced their belief that the end-time antichrist described in the Bible will be a one-man atheistic dictator who will force people to worship him. However, a careful reading of the biblical book of Revelation and other passages paints a different picture. Revelation implies that the end-time movement to establish a mixed church-state government, which becomes the end-time superpower, is actually a democratic, populist-driven movement, and one with Christian overtones.

In Revelation 13:14 the Bible states that the second beast, symbolic of an end-time superpower, "deceiveth them that dwell on the earth" and then tells "them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live." That the nation represented here feels it necessary to deceive the people of the earth and command them to make the image (i.e., to set up a government that copies that of the first beast) indicates that the second beast needs the power of the populace to accomplish its goals. As such, this passage indicates that this end-time superpower is a democratic kind of society in which the populace exercises its will through the government.

Additionally, Revelation 13 and 17 clearly portray the end-time church-state coalition assembled by the antichrist as being religious in nature, not an atheistic power. Instead of being a power that is "anti" Christian, the antichrist is a counterfeit religious power symbolized by an adulterous woman (church) that has been unfaithful to her heavenly Spouse. This apostate church forges alliances with the political powers of the earth, and persecution for the true people of God follows.

Contrary to popular speculation in some quarters that Islam is the end-time antichrist, Christians who understand eschatology from a historicist perspective understand that the biblical antichrist power has been in existence since the time of the early church (see 2 Thessalonians 2:7). The apostle Paul understood that the antichrist would be a pseudo-Christian power, arising from within the church after a "falling away" (apostasy), and that this power would sit in the "temple of God" (i.e., the church), deceiving those who would not receive the love of the truth (see verses 3-6). Paul also spoke of a power that would hold back the revealing of the Antichrist power in his day. Perhaps in our day Islam is a power being used of God to hold back the antichrist's final rise to worldwide power after the healing of the deadly wound mentioned in Revelation 13.

### Conclusion

As our Christian brothers and sisters in Syria pray and hope that whatever comes next will bring them peace, we are reminded of both the virtues and liabilities of democracy. To be certain, democracy is a good system of governance if it exists within a framework that provides protection for the minority. Perhaps in some societies, though, democracy is not the most practical approach at all. And then, of course, there is Revelation's reminder that democracy, unchecked, is often detrimental to freedom and can even lead to persecution.

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1 [www.cnn.com/2012/09/20/world/meast/syria-christians/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/20/world/meast/syria-christians/index.html).

2 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7295145.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7295145.stm).

3 [www.catholic.org/international/international\\_story.php?id=47348](http://www.catholic.org/international/international_story.php?id=47348).