

A MAGAZINE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

HOW TOLERANT IS ISLAM? | THE ORLANDO MASSACRE

LIBERTY

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016



A Peaceful Garden

**Planting the seeds
of freedom in
the wake of ISIS**



EDITORIAL

NO KING BUT JESUS

What a difference a decade and a half and a war on terror have wrought! Was it really only in 1999 that the man who was soon to become U.S. attorney general stood before a conservative Christian college audience and proclaimed that America was founded on the belief that “we have no king but Jesus”? As attorney general, John Ashcroft would go on to authorize, or at the very least acquiesce to, some of the most unchristian and unconstitutional actions—a post-September 11 drift toward extrajudicial justice and a growing disregard for what were once seen as civilized constraints on nations. Maybe it would have been better if Jesus had been declared King of the United States! He once was King to a broader cross section of its society, but out of deference to true freedom and the principles of religious liberty there has never been any test for religious office (see U.S. Constitution, Article V).

Fast forward to 2016 and its fading weeks: the forever presidential campaign is nearly over as I write this, and will be past tense for most of the cover term of this issue—though the story is not really over till mid-January. I’ve lived through a few interesting elections. The Barry Goldwater run of 1964 had us all convinced that a wrong vote or two was all that stood between us and nuclear annihilation. And in 1972 a bizarre campaign turned violent in a Laurel, Maryland, shopping center, when hate-mongering candidate Governor George Wallace of Alabama took a bullet that left him partially paralyzed for life. The winners that year were President Richard Nixon and his running mate Spiro Agnew—both destined for disgrace.

I’m tempted to invoke Ecclesiastes 1:9 (“nothing new under the sun”) for our 2016 elections, but some things are, if not as new as they seem, then remarkable.

I can sum them up in several points.

While corruption reached its apogee in Tammany Hall and its reach into the presidential election of 1928 (and we have even had presidents consorting with mobsters’ molls), there is probably no precedent to the public airing of charges of immorality and malfeasance by both parties.

While the U.S. Constitution remains an aspirational model for much of the world, presidential and governmental actions since 2001 have tested and arguably crossed its limits. How else to explain the rhetoric of the election which if taken at face value imply we are in an imperial era? The talk is not healthy for freedom.

The voter rebellion against party control and indeed against all “government” should be seen as a huge red flag against continued freedom, regardless of how the election turns. The representative government model of the Constitution has since 2000 given way to a public view of majoritarian power that is in the process of morphing into mob rule.

Religious liberty is as precious a commodity as ever, and there has been talk of it this time around. However, it is now a fish of a different feather (!), more akin to religious entitlement and empowerment for a certain religious class. And the degree to which religious figures and political aspirants have been willing to submerge Christian decency en

route to religious “freedom” is reason enough to doubt their sincerity.

We have slowly come to realize that news is progressively morphing into proclamation. The reasons are many, not least the declining budgets of news organizations, which results most often by my own observation to “news” being minimally reworded recycling of the handout sheet available at most public events.

This news fadeback has now given us a self-absorbed political slugfest while ignoring the fact that we are presently closer to all-out war with Russia than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis. “Fiddling while Rome burns” comes rather readily to mind.

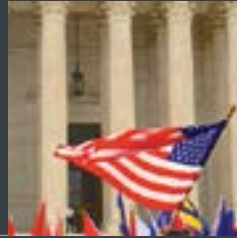
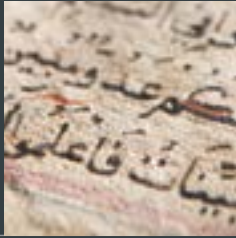
Indulge me in looking to biblical analogy for some insight. First the “no king but Jesus” ideal that must remain with us each on a personal level. It is worth remembering that in the early days of the Hebrew narrative the wanderers then settlers were under theocratic rule: in other words, God directed then by fiery presence, by oracle, by Urim and Thummim, and by a voice like thunder. We, of course, have no such immediacy and do well to question anyone who claims to speak for God directly. But somehow the Hebrews in becoming a nation of Israel took a king to rule over them.

Why did they reject God and seek a king like all the other nations around them? I do not think it was merely perversity toward God. The record in I Samuel is clear. The high priest Eli allowed his two sons to act wickedly and immorally with the worshippers: taking bribes, sleeping with the women who came to worship, and profaning the holy things. When Samuel, the protégé of Eli, became prophet and



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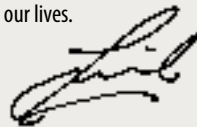
judge over Israel, he repeated this laxity with his sons. The record of them is clear: they “took bribes, and perverted judgment” (1 Samuel 8:3). When the elders came to Samuel asking for a king, they cited his sons’ unworthiness (verse 5). So too, I believe, a society today can be hardened in its rejection of God by corrupt leaders, and in particular can be led astray by cynical religious leaders who pursue unpleasant political alliances in order to gain some imagined advantage for the faith.

The book of Daniel speaks much of empires and affairs of state. In its day the empire of Babylon was the first of the global powers, remembered today for its hanging gardens and less for its ruins, which can be found about 60 miles downstream from modern-day Baghdad. After the greatness and

power of Nebuchadnezzar the empire began to decline and become self-satisfied. Daniel 5 tells of a great party held by King Belshazzar even as the army of the Medes and Persians encamped outside the walls. He sent for the golden vessels stolen from the Temple of God in Jerusalem and called for a toast to praise “the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone” (verse 4).

Yes, the gods were actually made of these materials. But how easy to praise the riches of an imperial lifestyle; how easy and natural to praise the stone walls of protection and the weapons of iron! How great an oversight to forget the river and not notice that it was drying up and allowing the enemy to slip in. The figure has to be relevant to us today in these blessed United States. The Revelation of John speaks of the final acts in earth’s history and in chapter 16 says that the river Euphrates will be dried up.

The same complacency, the same false worship will likely lead to the same end as Babylon of old. As we Party on through these perilous days, it is just as important to avoid praising the false gods—whether of financial success, military might, or political privilege. It is important that we not allow compromised political leaders or power-hungry pastors to disillusion us into handing divine prerogatives into an unholy grasp. Pray for our political leaders in a time of great peril. And pray to our Father in heaven to maintain Lordship over our lives.



Lincoln E. Steed, Editor

Liberty magazine

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DECLARATION
of Principles

The God-given right of religious liberty is best exercised when church and state are separate.

Government is God’s agency to protect individual rights and to conduct civil affairs; in exercising these responsibilities, officials are entitled to respect and cooperation.

Religious liberty entails freedom of conscience: to worship or not to worship; to profess, practice, and promulgate religious beliefs, or to change them. In exercising these rights, however, one must respect the equivalent rights of all others.

Attempts to unite church and state are opposed to the interests of each, subversive of human rights, and potentially persecuting in character; to oppose union, lawfully and honorably, is not only the citizen’s duty but the essence of the golden rule—to treat others as one wishes to be treated.

Planting the seeds of freedom in the wake of ISIS

As the Islamic State (ISIS) wages genocide against Yazidis, Christians, and others in Iraq, a group of Iraqis are planting the seeds that will bring freedom and hope to these broken communities.

By March 2016 both the United States and European Parliament had declared the situation in Iraq genocide, but these designations brought little action; for many of those affected, the situation on the ground remained the same. Many people in the communities targeted by the militants wondered if they had any future in their homeland.

Ghanam Elyas is a high school teacher in northern Iraq whose Yazidi family was displaced when Islamic State militants ravaged his village and home. His brother, Jalal, runs an organization offering education and support to Yazidi youth displaced by the violence. Together they are teaching many of the displaced children who live in camps scattered throughout northern Iraq how to find hope.

In mid-2014 nearly a half million people fled Mosul, 200,000 fled the Nineveh plains,

A Peaceful Garden

BY TINA RAMIREZ



The children of Iraq.

and another 200,000 fled Sinjar. Of those displaced, not only were most of them Christians, Yazidis, Shabak, Kaka'i, and Turkmen, but those displaced also made up about half of the total population of their religious communities living in Iraq. Many of the holy sites and places of historical value to these religious communities were destroyed.

When ISIS seized control of northern Iraq, they sought to destroy anyone that opposed their way of life or beliefs—Shi'a were brutally murdered on the spot, Christians were told to "convert or die," Yazidis were killed or used as sex slaves. No one was safe. Thousands of those who fled were killed by Islamic State militants, including many of the Yazidi men, elderly, and older women. At least 5,000 girls were trafficked as sex slaves, with nearly 3,000 still being held. The villages in Sinjar are filled with land mines and mass graves.

The attacks by ISIS left these communities destitute, dependent on humanitarian and government aid, and on the verge of eradication. Few of those who fled want to return to villages where their former neighbors still live—the same people who welcomed ISIS and at times even turned them over to the militants.

These displaced children have been threatened simply because of their religious identity, and the scars run deep. Teaching children how to find hope in the midst of such darkness is not an easy task, but it is essential.

As Ghanam quietly walked his students to a nearby garden, he knew he had to help them



believe that circumstances would get better. He pointed to the flowers and asked the students, “Which is the most beautiful?” One by one the students pointed out the flowers they liked the most.

Then Ghanam asked the students to go pick any flower they liked except the yellow ones. Soon the garden had disappeared except for a few lone yellow flowers. The students were dismayed.

“This is what has happened in our country to my people and to many others,” Ghanam told them. He explained how Iraq was the cradle of civilization—a land in which many communities had existed for thousands of years together. It was not always a peaceful coexistence, but they found ways to live together. Now they find themselves in a country that has been trampled by militants who destroyed everyone



who was not like them.

Ghanam’s students wondered whether it would be possible for the Yezidis, Christians, and others who had suffered to forgive and rebuild their lives. Ghanam and Jalal handed each student a packet of seeds and then Ghanam said, “The future is in your hands.”

In the following weeks each student discovered the unique history of the many different religious communities in Iraq, from the Assyrians to the Yezidis. They learned how the Jews had been deported to Iraq during the Assyrian and Babylonian empires and how the

king of Erbil, which is now the Kurdish capital, had once converted to Judaism and helped rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. They became familiar with Zoroastrianism, the former national religion, and how, at one time, the Christian church in Iraq was more prominent than the Holy Roman Empire. They read about the split within Islam in the center of their country, and of the divisions and rivalries that it created. And they learned how each community had thrived and suffered in its turn.

At the same time, the students were given a section of the garden where they tended to their seeds to help them grow. And they waited for Ghanam to help them understand how they could find hope in the future.

At the same time the students were planting their garden, Mariwan Naqshbandi, director of relations in the Kurdistan regional government’s Ministry of Religious Affairs, was searching for a way to preserve the history and identity of Iraq’s diverse religious communities. He did not yet realize that he held a key to the students’ search for hope.

In early 2015 Naqshbandi had moved Law Number 5 of Protecting Components of Iraqi Kurdistan through the Kurdish Parliament. The new law required that all minorities be represented in the government and receive government support to build their places of worship.

For Naqshbandi it was his way of planting a seed for the freedom of these communities. Soon he appointed ministry representatives for eight religious communities—Muslim, Christian, Baha’i, Zoroastrian, Yezidi, Kaka’i, Sabeen Mandaean, and Jewish.

This was the first time most of these communities had been officially recognized in Iraq—albeit only in Iraqi Kurdistan at the moment. In fact, most still hold identity cards that list them as either Muslim or Christian, as those were the only options available when they are registered at birth. But since identity cards are issued by Baghdad, the Kurdish government cannot change them—another small hurdle that Naqshbandi wants to correct eventually.

This was also the first time that most Iraqis in Kurdistan had ever heard that there were Jews remaining in their region.

Shortly after law Number 5 passed, Sherzad Mamsani knocked on Naqshbandi’s door. It was a day that changed everything for the Jewish people of Iraqi Kurdistan.

When Saddam Hussein took power in the

1970s, he forced Iraq's dwindling Jewish population and other minority faiths to be identified as Muslims on their identity cards. After decades of persecution, many emigrated for good. But Mamsani's family and hundreds of others remained, quietly holding on to their faith.

Mamsani's Jewish mother did not hide her faith, and he grew up with a strong desire for a time that he and other Kurdish Jews could live out their faith openly.

But most lived in secrecy. They hid their religious objects under their homes and furtively married their children to other Jewish families. While the older generations held on to their prayers and memories, most did not pass them on to their children. With the fall of Saddam, families began to share their history with their children and rediscover their Jewish heritage.

On November 19, 2015, the ministry held a meeting with UNESCO in which leaders from the eight minority groups represented in Kurdistan came together to speak at a historic conference. Mamsani would speak as a representative of the Jewish community of Kurdistan.

As he approached the podium, the audience broke out into applause. No one was more surprised than Mamsani: "I am so happy. For 70 years our history was dead, and now it is alive."

The resurgence of Jewish faith and history in Iraqi Kurdistan is one result of the seeds Naqshbani planted by opening the door to all of the region's religious communities. Naqshbani has explained that these momentous steps in a country filled with sectarian divisions and religious strife will not come without challenges: "We believe we can now serve the humanity, but our road is not filled with a flower."

Soon even he would see the power of the seeds he was planting for freedom.

Naqshbani's next challenge was to help each community write their history so it could be preserved and taught in the schools, educating a new generation in the diverse history of the region. And upon learning about Ghanam and Jalal's work with youth, he realized it would fit perfectly into this plan.

The students gathered at the garden they had been tending, which was now filled with many beautiful colors and different types of flowers. It was a stark contrast to the barren, desert displacement camps where they live.

Ghanam asked the students if they preferred the garden before or with the yellow flowers better than the one they had tended. They agreed that this one was more beautiful and

each felt proud of the work they had done to create it.

Now they understood how their work in the garden illustrated the future for their communities and Iraq as a whole.

One young Yezidi shared how he got to know a Muslim boy in the class as he was learning about the history of his faith. He didn't want to talk to the Muslim before the lesson because he associated him with the terrorists that forced his family out of their home. But as they talked, he learned that the Muslim student, a Shi'a, had also been attacked by the militants. The Yezidi boy realized that he too had suffered and that it was important not to judge before he met him.

Both boys understood that relationships are similar to tending a garden: they take time and care, but they are worth the effort.

Several students said that they had never met someone from a minority religion before and how this activity helped them understand one another better. They were not afraid of others anymore. Their differences are part of what makes their history and country so rich, just like the different flowers that filled their garden.

Everyone deserves the right to freedom of religion, Ghanam explained, but for too long, minorities in Iraq were forced to hide their identity and the majority faiths fought each other for power, creating sectarian divisions that have fueled instability and chaos. But now they have the seeds for a better future.

He challenged the students to do the hard work, each day in their own communities, of planting the seeds of freedom that would bring their country peace, telling them, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." Eventually, as generations are educated to respect human dignity, sectarian divisions will fade.

When Naqshbani learned of the impact Ghanam and Jalal were having with displaced youth, he realized that perhaps his road forward was paved with flowers.

The ministry had designated land for Naqshbani to landscape, but it still was barren. He had never known what to do with it.

Now, it was clear: as the religious education courses were completed by each community, students would plant a peaceful garden according to Ghanam's lesson, thereby ensuring that a new generation of children in Kurdistan would grow up learning to respect one another and the equal dignity and rights of others.

Thanks to the efforts of a small group of determined Iraqis, the seeds of hope and coexistence have been planted for a new generation.

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Their differences are part of what makes their history and country so rich, just like the different flowers that filled their garden.

How Tolerant Is Islam?

BY REUEL S.
AMDUR

Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, is not of one mind about religious liberty and the rights of minorities. The history of European Christianity is replete with ghastly tales of horror, with Christians persecuting Christians and Christians persecuting Jews. While Jews have been more on the receiving end, they also have shown their intolerance, both within their community and toward the outsider. Consider the expulsion of Spinoza from the Jewish community as an example. Currently there are extremist rabbis in Israel advocating the killing of Palestinians, including infants.

Going back to a far earlier time, Saint Augustine argued that various types of Christians must be tolerated because they preach the truth. Other views, he argued, need not be tolerated, because falsehood has no rights.

Tolerance in Europe came about at least in part because of exhaustion. Christian countries were tired of spending their wealth and the lives of their young men in continuing strife over trivial theological niceties.

So what of Islam? Historically, once an established political and religious community, Islam was comparatively tolerant. There was never a Muslim Inquisition. During the Ottoman Empire, persecuted religious minorities and heretics of various sorts often took refuge in the Empire. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Spain lived together in comparative harmony, with lively intellectual exchange, till intolerant Berber Muslims came to power.

All that still leaves us with a couple questions. What does the religion itself say about toleration, and what is the practice today? We begin with the first question.

As with just about all religions, pinning down specific principles can be a daunting task, no less with Islam. There are those, such as Australian

Muslim academic Abdullah Saeed, who argue forcefully for a tolerant interpretation of the religion, pointing out that Muhammad gave favorable recognition to Christians and Jews, the “people of the Book.” He viewed Christianity and Judaism as revealed religions, legitimate in the sight of God. While he gave no such favorable assessment to idol worship, polytheism, and unbelief, the Koran nevertheless says, “There is no compulsion in religion,” and “Your religion for you and mine for me.”

In looking at tolerance for the other in Scripture, Jews are apt to distinguish between the bloody chapters early on in the Old Testament narrative and the later prophetic writings. Christians cite the New Testament as distinct from the Old: “You have heard it said . . . But I say unto you . . .”

With the Koran, the more tolerant verses are often from the earlier time, when Muhammad was in Mecca and was not in power. The more aggressive ones appear from when he was head of government in Medina, faced with forces threatening the fledgling Muslim government. It is not always easy to determine which verse applies to which period, as they are placed in the Koran simply according to size.

Muslim theologians who favor a harder line often say that an earlier verse is abrogated by a later one. You have heard it said, but no more.

Saeed cites Muhammad’s cooperation with non-Muslim communities. In Medina, Jews and other non-Muslims had internal self-government. They were protected minorities who paid a tax for protection, for which they were given exemption from military service. Muhammad even made treaties with pagans on occasion.

While, Saeed explains, the abrogators try to exclude this or that, it is something of a challenge, as he claims that there are many verses supporting freedom of belief. And while some of them



من فضل العلم
ان فضل العلم
ان فضل العلم
ان فضل العلم
ان فضل العلم

Completed towards the end of Muslim rule of Spain, the Alhambra is a reflection of the culture of the last centuries of the Moorish rule of Al Andalus



declare that certain beliefs and expressions such as apostasy and blasphemy will result in punishment after death, Saeed acknowledges none that call for punishment in the here and now. Those who read the Koran might disagree, as it seems that many passages indicate death for apostasy. Part of the dissembling from Saeed and others is the apparent Koranic suggestion that the faithful are under no obligation to speak truth to infidels.

Saeed acknowledges, however, that there are hadith supposed sayings of Muhammad and various works of history and theology that do call for punishment of other religious expression, but he explains that hadith are not all given the same weight of authenticity. They may or may not be the actual words of Muhammad, which is curious since authority in Islam derives from the claim that the actual words of the Koran were dictated by the angel Gabriel. Muhammad functioned as the mouthpiece in principle; but in practice his every utterance and actions, such as marrying a young Aisha, have become models of perfect Islam.

Khaled Abou El Fadl, writing in *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), a Festschrift for him, goes to some length defending a tolerant interpretation of Islam. He cites a well-known verse: "O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another."

Arguing that, while the Koran and other sacred writings can be interpreted to promote intolerance, Fadl maintains that "the text does not command such intolerant readings." And Islamic history has shown a significant degree of toleration at key times. He identifies intolerant Islam with Wahhabism, a primitive puritanical movement dating to the eighteenth century, and with Salafism, which began as a reforming movement but eventually became entwined with

Wahhabism. In the early years of the past century the Saudis allied themselves with Wahhabism and are using their oil wealth to promote this austere form of Islam around the globe.

This leads us, then, to the intolerant interpretations of Islam. While we have seen the contention that various verses about apostates and blasphemers place punishment in the next world, surah 3:56 says something different: "As to those who reject the faith, I will punish them with terrible agony in this world and in the hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help." Although the verse does not say that others should give Allah a hand in the punishment, it is not a great leap of reasoning to think that they should. One can also argue that scriptures that foresee punishment in the next world for belief in this one provide a justification for brutal persecution. Just so, the Christian Inquisition of the Roman Catholic Church justified horrible tortures inflicted on heretics, witches, and unbelievers in order to get them to change their beliefs to save their souls from eternal damnation.

Patricia Crone, the late distinguished Orientalist, lectured at the University of Freiburg in the late 2007s on the subject of the place of religious freedom in Islam. An article based on her lecture appears online in *Open Democracy* ("No pressure, then: religious freedom in Islam"). She outlines the interpretations by Muslim theologians to limit the force of the pronouncement that there is no compulsion in religion. To begin, she points out that Islam is a religion that created a state, and that deviation from the religion presents a problem to the community so established.

One approach to dealing with such a verse is simply to abrogate it. Some have claimed that the verse referred to the situation in Medina where Jewish and Christian parents converted to Islam and wanted to compel their adult children to do so. Such interpreters say that the verse forbade



The question of religious freedom in Islam is most salient when we come to questions of apostasy and blasphemy.

this. Still another commentator says that the verse referred to dhimmis (protected people who paid the poll tax for non-Muslims).

Then Patricia Crone cites an argument that the verse is simply a statement of fact. You can't force belief. But that does not necessarily constrain what is done to the person in the effort. And still another reading is that it is unlawful to force a Muslim to renounce the faith.

The question of religious freedom in Islam is most salient when we come to questions of apostasy and blasphemy. We know what Islam has to say about these things in the next life. All this having been said, the hadith include many verses providing justification for religious deviance, subject as these hadith are to questioning of their authenticity.

We have seen something of the conflict within Islamic thought on the subject of tolerance. In a Festschrift, the anthropologist Stanley Kurtz places the issue in a sociocultural context. Referring to Abou El Fadl's stance, he says, "That sort of approach may be popular in liberal divinity schools and departments of religion in American universities, but I wonder how much appeal it would hold for Middle Eastern Muslims." As for the contemporary Muslim narrative, Milton Viorst, another contributor to that volume, blames the state of current Islamic thought to the suppression of the Mutazilite school of thought, which took Greek cultural influences into Islam. Their movement influenced European thought and led to the Renaissance. Meanwhile, Islamic thought stagnated. (Abou El Fadl does not agree with Viorst about the stagnation.)

In the West, blasphemy is still on the books in some jurisdictions, but such laws are no longer taken seriously. In many Muslim countries it is a different story. Then there is the matter of apostasy. In 2010 the Pew organization conducted a survey of Muslims in several countries, asking if

the respondents believed in the death penalty for apostates.

Turkey, with a moderate Islamic government in power, came in with 5 percent in favor, and Lebanon had 6 percent. On the other end of the scale, Jordan had 86 percent in favor and Egypt 84 percent. Other countries were in between. The stark discrepancy among the countries illustrates clearly that there is not just a single answer to the question of what Muslims say about tolerance. Cultural and historical differences play a role. With Kurtz' remarks in mind, it is noteworthy that both Abou El Fadl and Saeed write in the West, in the United States and Australia respectively. Egypt and Jordan—much less Saudi Arabia—would hardly be receptive to such open interpretations.

Yet let's leave the last word for Janice Stein, a University of Toronto political scientist with expertise on the Middle East. She told an audience brought together by the Federation of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Canada's Parliament Buildings on April 19, 2016, that "human rights and Islam can go together." It is an optimism we must explore.

Reuel Amdur writes from Val-des-Monts, Quebec, Canada.

Editor's note: *This is a topic sure to receive even more attention in the days ahead. A good discussion must involve knowledgeable parties from all faiths and positions. I have read the Koran twice and discussed it with imams and Middle Easterners (Saudis in particular) on a number of occasions. It has opened my eyes to how much of the public discussion is uninformed. I wish all who enter into discussion on this had read their own holy book and the other. Bible texts or Koranic verses plucked out at random prove little. And some knowledge of history and theology goes a long way.*





Freedom rights and the same-sex marriage debate

“LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL”

BY TOM CARTER

It's been said that “the Constitution amounts to a prescription for political struggle and an invitation for an ongoing debate about enduring constitutional principles.”¹ Never has this been truer than in the intense debate over same-sex marriage. The first round was noneventful, but lately the topic has exploded with activity:

ROUND ONE (1776-1992):

First same-sex marriage case—*Baker v. Nelson*, 409 U.S. 810 (1972)—was dismissed. Not another case was brought for 20 years.

ROUND TWO (1993-2011):

The first court to see a valid constitutional question for same-sex marriage came in with *Baehr v. Lewin*.² November 2003: the Supreme Court of Massachusetts ruled a ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional, paving the way for same-sex marriage. Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, the District of Columbia, and Vermont followed in 2009. New York adopted same-sex marriages in 2011.³

Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), signed by President Bill Clinton in 1996. California voters in 2008 approved Proposition 8, temporarily stopping court-ordered same-sex marriages. Thirty-one states had constitutional bans on same-sex marriages.⁴

ROUND THREE (2012-2015):

The U.S. Supreme Court, by a 5-4 decision, gave same-sex marriage advocates three major victories. In 2012 the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the district court's decision that California's Proposition 8 was unconstitutional.⁵ On June 26, 2013, the Supreme Court struck down the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).⁶ By 2015 federal courts had struck down bans on same-sex marriage in the majority of states.⁷

Two years after the above cases the Supreme Court in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. ____ (2015), issued the landmark United States



On the morning of June 26, 2015, outside the Supreme Court, the crowd reacts to the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision.

Supreme Court decision in which the Court held 5-4 that the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples by both the due process clause and the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

ROUND FOUR

Is the debate over? Hardly. Both the majority and minority opinions of the Supreme Court indicate the future battleground: Will religion, society, and individuals be forced to recognize same-sex marriage as a matter of public policy or suffer penalties?

Chief Justice John Roberts in his dissent points out the hard questions yet to be answered: “Hard questions arise when people of faith exercise religion in ways that may be seen to conflict with the new right to same-sex marriage—when, for example, a religious college provides married student housing only to opposite-sex married couples, or a religious adoption agency declines to place children with same-sex married couples. *Indeed, the Solicitor General candidly acknowledged that the tax exemptions of some religious institutions would be in question if they opposed same-sex marriage.*” (See transcript of oral argument on question 1, at pp. 36-38 [italics originals].) There is little doubt that these and similar questions will soon be before this Court. Unfortunately, people of faith can take no comfort in the treatment they receive from the majority today.⁸

BALANCING THE INTERESTS

How should the rights of same-sex marriage and religious rights be balanced? Paul G. Kauper, law professor at the University of Michigan for 38 years and constitutional law specialist, states: “No definite rules can be prescribed respecting permissible restrictions on religious liberty and . . . the court arrives at a decision by the pragmatic process of examining the burdens placed on that liberty and the nature and importance of the countervailing public interests that are advanced to justify the restriction. The appraisal and balancing of these conflicting interests is a function of the judicial process, and the end result is a matter of subjective judgment.”⁹

Religious liberty rights and same-sex marriage rights must be weighed against each other. The Supreme Court has ruled avoiding racial discrimination in education. Therefore same-sex marriage rights have to be compared to the 150-year legal history and *stare decisis* of racial discrimination.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY RIGHTS

For centuries church and state were combined, resulting in persecution for minority religions. A no-holds-barred struggle took place over which would be the established religion. A new concept was established by the U.S. Constitution. The First Amendment reads “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

The first principle was that no church or group of churches become the established religion. Nor was “atheistic or agnostic philosophy”

to become the established belief. Instead, government and religion would flourish best by being separate, with neither controlling the rightful sphere of the other. The “free exercise of religion” was to be our first and most important right.

Marriage is a unique institution with both civil and religious rights and responsibilities. The commitment made is considered sacred in most religious communities. In changing the definition of marriage, some want to change basic Judeo-Christian beliefs. For example, John Spong, Episcopal bishop of Newark, New Jersey, has said, “The fact remains that these so-called laws of God, which God was supposed to have written on tablets of stone, or the excessive claims made for Holy Scripture in general, which involve the assertion that the Bible is somehow ‘the inerrant word of God,’ are today indefensible, regardless of who utters those claims or any variation on them.”¹⁰

While many same-sex couples want a marriage similar to a traditional marriage, other homosexuals do not. Law professor Nancy D. Polikoff states, “The desire to marry in the lesbian and gay community is an attempt to mimic the worst of mainstream society, an effort to fit into an inherently problematic institution that betrays the promise of both lesbian and gay liberation and radical feminism.”¹¹

The majority in *Obergefell* recognized the enduring nature of one man, one woman marriages: “The lifelong union of a man and a woman always has promised nobility and dignity to all persons, without regard to their station in life.”¹² Then the bare majority go on to redefine public policy so that gender must be deleted from the definition of marriage. How far can the new public policy override religious freedom? The *Yoder* case (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*) said: “Only those interests of the highest order and those not otherwise served can overbalance legitimate claims to the free exercise of religion.”¹³ Many cases and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) recognize the importance of preserving freedom of religion and making reasonable accommodation.

RIGHTS AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Same-sex marriage and racial discrimination were compared in *Obergefell*. Justice Anthony Kennedy said that denial of either interracial marriage or same-sex marriage deprived “one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men.”¹⁴

Chief Justice Roberts drew a sharp contrast

In changing the definition of marriage, some want to change basic Judeo-Christian beliefs.

between the *Loving* case (*Loving v. Virginia*) and *Obergefell*: “Removing racial barriers to marriage therefore did not change what a marriage was any more than integrating schools changed what a school was. As the majority admits, the institution of ‘marriage’ discussed in every one of these cases ‘presumed a relationship involving opposite-sex partners.’”¹⁵

Justice Samuel Alito added in dissent: “[This case] will be used to vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy. In the course of its opinion, the majority compares traditional marriage laws to laws that denied equal treatment for African Americans and women.”¹⁶

Same-sex marriage rights differ from the long history of racial discrimination.

Justice Alito stated: “It is beyond dispute that the right to same-sex marriage is not deeply rooted in this nation’s history and tradition. In this country, no state permitted same-sex marriage until the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court held in 2003 that limiting marriage to opposite-sex couples violated the state constitution.”¹⁷

John Marshall Harlan became known as the “Great Dissenter” for his fiery dissent in *Plessy* and other early civil rights cases.



The U.S. History of Racial Discrimination

After the Civil War three constitutional amendments were passed, including the abolition of slavery, having privileges and immunities of citizenship, due process and

equal protection of laws, and voting rights.

Congress considered additional measures necessary, passing the 1866, 1870, 1871, and 1875 acts to combat racial discrimination.

Courts restricted racial rights: “It is a matter of well-documented history that civil rights legislation passed shortly after the Civil War to combat ‘Black Codes’ . . . was, for the most part, strictly construed through a series of cases which all but eradicated the original congressional intent.”¹⁸

The Supreme Court endorsed segregation with inconsistent rationales. *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 upheld segregation because it accorded with the “established usages, customs and traditions of the people.” In 1908 in *Berea College v. Kentucky*¹⁹ the Supreme Court upheld the forcing of college students to separate. Justice John M. Harlan was the lone dissenter in both *Plessy* and *Berea College*.

The Supreme Court in a 9-0 decision reversed its separate-but-equal doctrine: *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U. S. 483 (1954), stated: “We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” Ten years later the 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed.

Tax-exempt Status and Private and Religious Schools That Racially Discriminate

Racial discrimination in education became one of those interests “of the highest order” that trumped even freedom of religion. The cost of the Civil War and the three constitutional amendments thereafter gave the courts grounds to deny tax exemption to racially segregated schools in the *Green v. Connally* (1971): “There is a compelling as well as a reasonable government interest in the interdiction of racial discrimination which stands on highest constitutional ground, taking into account the provisions and penumbra of the amendments passed in the wake of the Civil War. That government interest is dominant over other constitutional interests to the extent that there is complete and unavoidable conflict.”²⁰

The *Bob Jones* case (*Bob Jones University v. United States*) withdrew the tax-exempt status of that Christian college. In a footnote the Court said, “We deal here only with religious schools—not with churches or other purely religious institutions.”²¹ So churches should be allowed to make their own decisions on same-sex weddings and membership.

But the rationale of *Bob Jones* is troubling: “An institution seeking tax-exempt status must

serve a public purpose and not be contrary to established public policy.”²² The 1983 *Supreme Court Review* of the University of Chicago Law School stated: “There were satisfactory reasons for allowing the Bob Jones University tax exemption to be withdrawn. But these were not the Supreme Court’s reasons. It had others that will not withstand scrutiny and that will haunt and discomfit future cases.”²³ *Bob Jones* should not be read as indicating that every public policy trumps religious freedom, but as *Yoder* stated: “Only those interests of the highest order and those not otherwise served.”

Same-Sex Marriage Rights

Putting the issue of Round Four into focus: *Is Same-Sex Marriage one of those “interests of the highest order” that can overbalance religious freedom rights?* The majority states: “The right to marry is a fundamental right inherent in the liberty of the person, and under the due process and equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment, couples of the same sex may not be deprived of that right and that liberty.”²⁴

Chief Justice Roberts in dissent does not see any such right or interest: “Celebrate the achievement of a desired goal. Celebrate the opportunity for a new expression of commitment to a partner. Celebrate the availability of new benefits. But do not celebrate the Constitution. It had nothing to do with it.”²⁵ What a difference in this 5-4 decision and the 9-0 decision of *Brown*. *Brown’s* reversal of segregation in schools had the solid footing of three constitutional amendments, and the congressional laws of 1866, 1870, 1871, and 1875, all specifically aimed at racial discrimination.

Solicitor General Donald B. Verrilli, Jr.’s statement on removing tax-exempt status is of real concern: “It’s certainly going to be an issue. I don’t deny that.”²⁶ Not much more assuring is Internal Revenue Commissioner John Koskinen’s statement at a senate hearing that the IRS would not pursue removing tax-exempt now, but would reevaluate it if public policy changed.²⁷

CONCLUSION

An all-or-nothing approach by either traditional family values or same-sex advocates would seem to be counterproductive at this point. Same-sex couples have achieved the right to marry. But churches and their institutions also have rights. They should be able to set their own rules consistent with their beliefs and conscience unless it is a public policy “interest of the highest order and those not otherwise served.” Where

individual conscience is involved, reasonable accommodation should be explored.

Demearing terms that do not convey equal worth of all persons should be eliminated. However we might identify ourselves, if we are in a minority environment, we are all subject to mistreatment. It is worth noting that the Holocaust, which targeted Jews, also affected homosexuals.²⁸

It is on the proper balancing of interests that our freedoms are maintained. As Christians, we remember that our founder, Jesus Christ, was crucified on the improper balancing of interests: “It is more to your interest that one man [Christ] should die for the people, than that the whole nation should be destroyed.”²⁹

Tom Carter writes from Douglasville, Georgia.

¹ D. M. O’Brien, *Constitutional Law and Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 25.

² See *Baehr v. Lewin*, 852 P.2d 44 (Haw. 1993), after remand *Baehr v. Miike*, 1996 WL 694235 (Haw. Cir. Ct. Dec. 3, 1996), 950 P.2d 1234 (1997).

³ “Same-Sex Marriage Laws,” www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/same-sex-marriage-laws.aspx

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_former_U.S._state_constitutional_amendments_banning_same-sex_unions_by_type

⁵ See *Hollingsworth et al. v. Perry et al.* certiorari to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, No. 12-144.

⁶ *United States v. Windsor*, 133 S.Ct. 2675 (2013)

⁷ “Same-Sex Marriage Laws,” p. 2.

⁸ 576 U.S. ____ (2015) (slip opinion, C.J. Roberts dissenting, at pp. 27, 28).

⁹ Paul G. Kauper, *Religion and the Constitution* (Baton Rouge La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 43.

¹⁰ J. S. Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1999), p. 158.

¹¹ Nancy D. Polikoff, “We Will Get What We Ask For: Legalizing Gay and Lesbian Marriage Will Not Dismantle the Legal Structure of Gender in Every Marriage,” 79 Va. L. Rev. 1535, 1536 (1993).

¹² 576 U.S. ____ (2015) (slip opinion at p. 3).

¹³ *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 92 S.Ct. 1526, p. 406 U.S. 205 (1972).

¹⁴ 576 U.S. ____ (2015) (slip opinion at p. 11).

¹⁵ 576 U.S. ____ (2015) (slip opinion, C.J. Roberts dissenting, at p. 16).

¹⁶ 576 U.S. ____ (2015) (slip opinion, J. Alito dissenting, at p. 6).

¹⁷ 570 U.S. ____ (2013) (slip opinion, J. Alito dissenting, at p. 7).

¹⁸ *Egan v. City of Aurora*, 174 F.Supp. 794, 797 (N.F. III, 1959), aff’d 275 F.2d 377 (7th Cir. 1960).

¹⁹ *Berea College v. Kentucky*, 211 U.S. 45 (1908).

²⁰ *Green v. Connally*, 330 F. Supp. 1150 (1971). Affirmed by the United States Supreme Court No. 71-425, Dec. 20, 1971.

²¹ 103 S.Ct.2017, at 2035, footnote 29.

²² *Ibid.*, at 2626.

²³ Mayer G. Freed and Daniel D. Polsby, “Race, Religion, and Public Policy: *Bob Jones University v. United States*,” *Supreme Court Review* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 31.

²⁴ 576 U.S. ____ (2015) (slip opinion at p. 22).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, C. J. Roberts dissenting, at p. 29.

²⁶ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, in *Washington Post*, Apr. 28, 2015.

²⁷ CBNNews.com, July 31, 2016.

²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_homosexuals_in_Nazi_Germany_and_the_Holocaust

²⁹ John 11:50, NEB. Bible texts credited to NEB are from *The New English Bible*. © The Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press 1961, 1970. Reprinted by permission.

The mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, on the morning of June 12, 2016—the largest such massacre in U.S. history and the worst terror attack on U.S. soil since September 11—has unleashed a host of controversies relative to terrorism, immigration, hatred (whether taught or spoken)—and, by implication, religious liberty. What follows will confine its focus to the latter two issues.

It is likely fair to say that had the slaughter in Orlando occurred in any number of other settings—a shopping mall, a popular beach, a house of worship, a school, a workplace, or a different sort of nightclub—discussions of the tragedy and what should be done about it would nearly all gravitate toward issues of national security, the jihadist threat, Muslim immigrants, and gun control. But because the terror in Orlando was directed against a group, which, like Muslims, holds respective victim and

pariah status on opposite sides of America's great divide, the resulting national conversation has risen—and inflamed—other questions than simply those noted above.

Hate Under Fire

Some in the wake of Orlando have opened a new attack on religious fundamentalism—be it Christian, Muslim, or Jewish—because of the stand religion takes regarding the immorality of homosexual practice.¹ One article has noted that according to the FBI, more than 20 percent of the 5,479 hate crimes reported in the U.S. in 2015 were committed against LGBT persons.² The article reminds us that “those crimes happened in a country where most of the homophobia is justified by citing Christianity, not Islam. But wave the Bible or wave the Koran, the common theme here is using religion as cover for vile bigotry.”³ A California congressman, a bit less bombastic, insisted that “it’s not about one religion who did this to LGBT people in Orland. It’s about a hatred toward LGBT people, and

THE ORLANDO MASSACRE

**Violence at the nexus
of rights and religion**

that hatred can come from a variety of places.”⁴

On the other end of the spectrum, certain ones have criticized many in the gay community for thinking “that Muslims, like gays, are an official victim group, and thus their natural allies.”⁵ One such author reminds his readers of the many brutal punishments prescribed by Islamic law for homosexuals—from stoning and throwing them off a high place to dropping a building on them⁶—and insists that Muslims moving to Western countries most likely retain these views.⁷ The author cites a report from the Netherlands indicating the erosion of tolerance for gays in that country because of the growth of Islam in such cities as Amsterdam,⁸ and cites similar reports from Norway and Great Britain indicating widespread support among Muslims in those lands for the harsh penalties prescribed by their faith tradition for homosexual conduct.⁹ (We note with interest, however, a 2015 Pew study showing 45 percent of American Muslims believing that homosexuality should be accepted by society, compared to 36 percent

of Mormons and evangelical Christians.)¹⁰

Other voices, less shrill perhaps, ascribe general blame for the horror, reminding us “this is the type of killing that could happen anywhere in America. The shooter could be Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Catholic, Hindu, or atheist, motivated by intolerance, religious zealotry, mental disorder, or simply blind rage.”¹¹ I think of certain ones in my own religious community who, following the David Koresh/Branch Davidian episode in Waco, Texas, in 1993, attacked what they considered “fundamentalist” approaches to the Bible in general and its apocalyptic passages in particular as presumably bearing responsibility for the tragedy that took place. Such persons seemed not to remember that the principal drawing cards for Jim Jones’s Peoples Temple—with which comparisons to the Waco incident were often made—were such causes as civil rights, world peace, and social justice in general. Do such ideologies merit condemnation merely because a madman hijacks them for his own purposes?



But the broad-brush attack on “hatred” inspired by the Orlando shootings—especially as it relates to religious expression—is the primary focus of the present essay, and to this we now turn.

Criminalizing Opinions

In 1991 an article titled “Thought Crimes” appeared in *The New Republic*, written by one Jonathan Rauch.¹² Describing himself at one point as an “unrepentantly atheistic Jewish homosexual,”¹³ Rauch currently works as a contributing editor for *National Journal* and *The Atlantic*, and

any old rock through any old window,”¹⁹ Rauch poses two questions which address the basis of these laws—and then gives his answer:

“Should prejudice, which often leads to injustice, be punished? Should hate, which often leads to violence, be a crime? More and more well-meaning Americans are now saying yes to both questions. It’s the wrong answer.”²⁰

He goes on to explain why, with a simple eloquence often missing in contemporary discussions:

“Hate-crimes activists argue that bias-motivated crime deserves special handling because it is especially harmful to society. But they have a hard time explaining why this is so. Why is it more terrorizing or socially destabilizing to stab someone because he’s Jewish, for instance, than to stab someone for his sneakers? The former signals that Jews are in danger; the latter signals that everyone is in danger. . . . Necessarily, if you say that assault motivated by bias is especially objectionable, you also say that assault not motivated by bias is less objectionable. Tying the fight against violence to other political agendas clutters and compromises what needs to be a clarion message: violence is intolerable, period.”²¹

Lauding the efforts of certain groups to eliminate prejudice, Rauch nevertheless cautions:

“But different groups will have different ideas of what constitutes ‘prejudice.’ (Is secular humanism ‘prejudice’ against Christians? Is Afrocentrism prejudice against whites?) That is why eliminating prejudice is exactly what ‘the country’—meaning its governmental authorities—must *not* resolve to do. Not only is wiping out hate and bias impossible in principle, in practice ‘eliminating prejudice’—through force of law means eliminating all but one prejudice—that of whoever is most politically powerful.”²²

He then writes: “Personally, being both Jewish and gay, I do not expect everybody to like me. I expect some people to hate me. I fully intend to hate those people back. I will criticize and excoriate them. But I will not hurt them, and I insist that they not hurt me. I want unequivocal, no-buts protection from violence and vandalism. But that’s enough. I do not want policemen and judges inspecting opinions.”²³

And finally: “As on campus, so in the courtroom: the best protection for minorities is not prejudice police but public criticism—genuine intellectual pluralism, in which bigots, too, have their say.”²⁴

“Hate Speech” and Religious Expression

Being a devout religionist myself, I’m sure Mr. Rauch and I hold varying opinions on many



Activists carry placards during London’s vigil in memory of the victims of Orlando’s Pulse nightclub terror attack.

is vice president of the Independent Gay Forum.¹⁴ He is the author of a number of books,¹⁵ including *Gay Marriage: Why It Is Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America*.¹⁶ Conservative author Peter Wehner has called Rauch “the most formidable and persuasive voice for same-sex marriage.”¹⁷

But it was Rauch’s criticism of hate crimes laws in the above-mentioned *New Republic* article that vaulted him to national attention as an author on gay-related issues.¹⁸ Though written some years ago, the article is most insightful and merits thoughtful attention in today’s polarized, incendiary climate. Significant portions will be cited below.

Though acknowledging the rationale behind hate crimes laws, stating at one point that “throwing a swastika-emblazoned rock through a synagogue window is not the same as throwing

subjects. But the points he makes regarding efforts to criminalize hatred are spot-on and, in my view, unassailable.

First, like the attempt to eliminate prejudice, efforts to marginalize or even outlaw “hate speech” are an attempt at the impossible. All who hold strong convictions harbor hatred, regardless of the issue. Advocates of social injustice naturally despise what they consider to be injustice. Opponents of racial segregation, the Ku Klux Klan, and other expressions of ethnic hostility despise racism. Attacks on economic inequality and the exploitation of the poor by the rich likewise involve hatred of certain ideologies and the practices they encourage. Hate speech, in other words, is ubiquitous in the interplay of ideas in a free country. And as Rauch says, to outlaw or forbid the airing of one form of hatred inevitably means embracing another—specifically that form of hatred held by whoever at the moment is making the rules.

We think of those who reject the construct held by many conservative Christians regarding homosexual practice—the need to love the sinner while hating the sin. When pressed, few if any—Christian or non-Christian, devout or irreligious—will dispute the broad outlines of this construct. Who among us, after all, doesn’t hate certain actions committed by persons we truly love—boyfriends, girlfriends, spouses, and children? Honest Christians, of course, are constrained to face the sad fact that too many who speak of loving the sinner while hating the sin tend to remember enthusiastically to do the one while giving notable neglect to the other. But for the purposes of the present discussion, the quarrel too many have with this construct is not with its basic truthfulness, but is rather rooted in their resistance to tolerating anyone who describes a cherished feeling or practice of theirs as wrong.

But this too, whether we like it or not, is part of free dialogue in a free society. As Rauch has rightly noted, violence and vandalism are not allowed, period. But the unfettered exchange of ideas—religious and otherwise—is quite another matter. And as Hendrik Hertzberg wrote many years ago regarding a different but related subject: “The First Amendment contains no requirement that the speech it protects be harmless. On the contrary, speech that somebody thinks is harmful is the only kind that needs protecting.”²⁵

I submit this applies as much to what some will call “hate speech” as to any other kind.

Civil Concord, Vigorous Disagreement

The Orlando tragedy sends the strongest signal yet to America’s warring factions that neither physical nor civil force is the rightful

means for settling differences of religion and consensual morality. Nor can either side rightfully nurture the notion of a right not to be offended. Offense is part of the price of true liberty. And this applies both to the injunctions of conservative religion against homosexual practice and to those wishing to engage in these and similar consensual practices without legal curtailment. Those who resent and despise the belief that homosexual practice is sinful are not required in a free country to sit and listen to such discourses. And religious communities and their institutions who cherish orthodox teachings on sexuality cannot in a free country be forced to tailor their public statements, policies, and hiring practices toward accommodation of theoretical and lifestyle choices contrary to their faith.

In sum, civil concord and vigorous disagreement need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, they are essential bedfellows in a political culture that holds liberty supreme. Neither violence nor vandalism need stem from strong convictions. The respective realms of persuasion and coercion, like church and state, must be kept strictly separate. If this proves in the end to be the ultimate lesson of Orlando, perhaps the blood spilled that awful night will not have been shed in vain.

Kevin Paulson writes from Berrien Springs, Michigan.

¹Amanda Marcotte, “Orlando Mass Shooting: Bigotry Is Bigotry, No Matter What Religion You Use to Justify It” *Salon*, June 12, 2016, www.salon.com/2016/06/12/orlando_mass_shooting_bigotry_is_bigotry_no_matter_what_religion_you_use_to_justify_it/.

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*

⁴Rep. Mark Takano, quoted by Emma Roller, “Donald Trump’s Fear Factor,” *New York Times*, June 14, 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/06/14/opinion/campaign-stops-donald-trumps-fear-factor.html?ref=opinion&r=0.

⁵Bruce Bower, “Brutal Realities,” *City Journal*, June 12, 2016, www.city-journal.org/html/brutal-realities-14573.html.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Roller.

¹¹Michael A. Cohen, “All of Us Must Bear Responsibility for Orlando,” *Boston Globe*, June 12, 2016, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2016/06/12/all-must-bear-responsibility-for-orlando-mass-shooting/csr9NuKrnQzwylnajog2ML/story.html>.

¹²Jonathan Rauch, “Thought Crimes,” *The New Republic*, Oct. 7, 1991, pp. 17–20.

¹³https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Rauch

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Jonathan Rauch, *Gay Marriage: Why It Is Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America* (Times Books, 2004).

¹⁷https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Rauch

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Rauch, “Thought Crimes,” p. 18.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*, p. 20. (Italics original.)

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Hendrik Hertzberg, “Ed Meese and His Pornography Commission,” *The New Republic*, July 14 and 21, 1986, p. 24.

**The Atheism
of Christopher
Hitchens**



**A TRUE
BELIEVER**

BY CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN

Jews, often in response to those who want to “convert” them to another religion, have a common retort: “I was born a Jew, and I will die a Jew.” Fair enough, if one could actually be born a Jew (the long debate of what is a Jew will not be entertained here) any more than one can be born a Unitarian, a Pentecostal Free Will Baptist, or a Hinayana Buddhist.

If, however, anyone could have claimed to be born atheist, it would have been the late Christopher Hitchens. And though to say that he was “born” one is, of course, a big stretch, Hitchens nevertheless got his atheism early, honestly—and it appeared to have stuck right to the bitter end, at 62, when he died in 2011 of esophageal cancer.

On the other hand, a new book out by an evangelical friend of Hitchens’ claims that things were a bit more nuanced, at least in private, with Hitchens, one of the world’s best-known atheist apologists, and that he was more open to faith than his public persona dared let on to.

Either way, the story of Christopher Hitchens, his life, his atheism, his activism, touch on some larger issues, especially now when, in a post-cold war world, religious tensions are running higher than ever, tensions that could have some unexpected consequences in regard to religious freedom in an increasingly divided and fractious world.

The Early Years

Christopher Hitchens was born in post-World War II England, in 1949, the older of two boys. His childhood, he said, had been dominated by two themes, both political: the recent and costly defeat of the Nazis, and the evacuation and loss of the colonies England could no longer afford to maintain, which could help explain the political activism that engaged him most of his life. His father had been an officer in the Royal Navy, on board the H.M.S. *Jamaica*, which helped sink the German battleship *Schamhorst* in the Battle of the North Cape, the one event that, according to Christopher Hitchens, was about the only remarkable thing his father ever did. Christopher often referred to him, in not the most endearing manner, as “the Commander.”

He was much fonder of his mother, Yvonne. However, when Hitchens was in his 20s, his mother informed him and his brother that she was leaving their father. As if that weren’t bad enough, at the same time she also told him that she had had two abortions, one before Christopher had been born and one after his birth. Wrote Hitchens: “The one after I could bring myself to think of with equanimity, or at least some measure of equanimity, whereas the one before felt a bit too much like a close shave or a near-miss, in respect of moi.”

Perhaps this knowledge of how close he came to being aborted helped explain why Hitchens, though liberal politically, took an anti-abortion stance.

Sadly, his mother committed suicide with a lover in a

hotel room in Athens, Greece. “She took an overdose of sleeping pills,” he wrote, “perhaps washed down with a mouthful or two of alcohol, while he—whose need to die must have been very great—took an overdose with booze also and, to make assurance doubly sure, slashed himself in a hot bath. I shall never be sure what depth of misery had made this outcome seem to her the sole recourse: on the hotel’s switchboard record were several attempted calls to my number in London which the operator had failed to connect. Who knows what might have changed if Yvonne could have heard my voice even in her extremity? I might have said something to cheer or even tease her: something to set against her despair and perhaps give her a momentary purchase against the death wish.”

For someone who didn’t believe in God already, something like this could, of course, only harden that sentiment.

The Atheist

Though he had been baptized in the Church of England as a child, it had been just a ritual, part of what was considered a good English upbringing, even if no one in the Hitchens home at that time took it seriously. His upbringing was decidedly secular, and religious faith was rarely talked about, if at all, and often with, if not outright disdain, then at least irrelevance. His father, he said, had been an agnostic, turned off to faith by the rigidity and legalism of his Church of England upbringing.

Thus, from the start Christopher Hitchens had no inclination, at least from family influences, toward faith. What sealed the atheism was his boarding school experience, where compulsory religious attendance and worship of a god you weren’t sure existed and didn’t like even if he did pushed him over the edge. The tyranny and totalitarianism of those boarding school years were, in his mind, associated with the god they attempted to cram down his throat—an association he kept through most of his adult life.

In college, prodded on by anti-Vietnam War sentiment, he moved to the left, to socialism, Communism, even for a while being a Trotskyite, joining “a small but growing post-Trotskyist Luxemburgist sect” and later writing for such papers as *International Socialism*—not exactly an environment to nourish theism. He eventually worked for more mundane publications, such as the *Times Higher Education Supplement* and ITV’s *Weekend World*. He moved to the United States, writing for *The Nation*, *Vanity Fair*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*.

And though his writings were on culture, politics, literature, he was not afraid to deal with religious issues, even writing a book against Mother Teresa called *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*. In it he said that Mother Teresa “was not a friend of the poor. She was a friend of poverty. She said that suffering was a gift from God. She spent her life opposing the only

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known cure for poverty, which is the empowerment of women and the emancipation of them from a livestock version of compulsory reproduction." Besides that, he called her "a fanatic, a fundamentalist and a fraud" and "a thieving fanatical Albanian dwarf."

September 11 and Beyond

Obviously predisposed against religion for years already, Hitchens found an even bigger reason to hate it. One of the seminal events in his life occurred with the terror attacks on September 11, 2001. Out of the ashes, two things changed for Hitchens. First, his break with the extreme political left and its default *blame America first* mode. Quitting *The Nation*, he said in his final article for it that the magazine seemed to believe "that John Ashcroft [then the United States Attorney General] is a greater menace than Osama bin Laden." Though always a leftist, he wasn't a narrow-minded dogmatist about it, breaking with them where he felt they needed to be broken with.

Second, if Hitchens or anyone who needed an excuse, even if not a very good one, to hate religion, the murderous Muslim fanatics who carried out the September 11 attacks handed to them on bloodstained and burned platter. Many of the "New Atheists," such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, wrote their most vitriolic anti-religion screeds after September 11, which provided the atheist faithful with all the ammunition they needed to show that religion, *of any kind*, was evil and detrimental to society.

"My respect for the Abrahamic religions went up in the smoke and choking dust of September 11," said Richard Dawkins, the grand poobah of the New Atheists. "The last vestige of respect for the taboo disappeared as I watched the 'Day of Prayer' in Washington Cathedral, where people of mutually incompatible faiths united in homage to the very force that caused the problem in the first place: religion."

No question: religion played a key role in the September 11 attacks. Atheists generally don't, as a rule, fly jetliners filled with people into buildings or strap explosives on their bodies and walk into mosques and blow up themselves and others. Atheists and agnostics will, though, cram men, women, and children into gas chambers, or purposely starve to death entire populations. One doesn't need religion to commit atrocities, though, no question, it helps. (One thinks of physicist Stephen Weinberg's quote: "With or without [religion] you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion.") Never mind the fact that the vast majority of religious people, Muslims included, were not only appalled at the September 11 attacks (who knows how many religious people, Muslims included, were killed in them as well?), but would have never sanctioned them to begin with. That didn't matter. What mattered was that these attacks were done by religious people; ergo, all religion is bad. End of discussion.

Hence, the following few gems from Christopher Hitchens in regard to religious faith.

“By trying to adjust to the findings that it once tried so viciously to ban and repress, religion has only succeeded in restating the same questions that undermined it in earlier epochs. What kind of designer or creator is so wasteful and capricious and approximate? What kind of designer or creator is so cruel and indifferent? And—most of all—what kind of designer or creator only chooses to ‘reveal’ himself to semi-stupefied peasants in desert regions?”

“Religion comes from the period of human prehistory where nobody—not even the mighty Democritus, who concluded that all matter was made from atoms—had the smallest idea what was going on. It comes from the bawling and fearful infancy of our species, and is a babyish attempt to meet our inescapable demand for knowledge (as well as for comfort, reassurance, and other infantile needs). Today the least educated of my children knows much more about the natural order than any of the founders of religion.”

“Violent, irrational, intolerant, allied to racism and tribalism and bigotry, invested in ignorance and hostile to free inquiry, contemptuous of women and coercive toward children: organized religion ought to have a great deal on its conscience.”

These are views that, until his dying day, Christopher Hitchens never, at least publicly, wavered from.

The Restless Soul of the World’s Most Notorious Atheist

Thus, how remarkable is the new book, released in 2016, called *The Faith of Christopher Hitchens: The Restless Soul of the World’s Most Notorious Atheist*, by a Christian friend of Hitchens’ named Larry Taunton, the founder and director of the Fixed Point Foundation, “a nonprofit dedicated to the public defense of the Christian faith.” Taunton—who helped arrange some of the debates that Christopher Hitchens loved to partake in (and was quite good at, too), and who even himself had publicly debated Hitchens—befriended him as well.

Taunton never claimed that Hitchens had a deathbed confession or the like. That would be too easy of a claim to make about a man no longer around to refute it. In fact, in the book he quotes Hitchens as saying that if something like a deathbed confession were to come out of his mouth, “it would not have been made by me. The entity making such a remark might be a raving, terrified person whose cancer has spread to the brain.” Taunton also quoted Hitchens’ wife, with him when he died, as saying that he never said anything about God during those last hours.

“I,” wrote Taunton, “believe her.”

Taunton’s claims for Hitchens were, instead, much more nuanced. Despite the outward and public bombast against faith, even calling the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) the “axis of evil,” Hitchens in private was much less dogmatic than how he appeared before playing to the crowds, whose enthusiasm for him was also a source of his bread and butter. Nevertheless . . .

“My private conversations with him,” Taunton wrote,

“revealed a man who was weighing the cost of conversion. His atheist friends and colleagues, sensing his flirtations with Christianity and fearing his all-out desertion to the hated enemy, rushed to keep him in the fold. To reassure them, Christopher . . . was more bombastic than ever. But the rhetoric was concealing the fact that even while he was railing against God from the rostrum, he was secretly negotiating with Him.”

Taunton had done some traveling with Hitchens, by car, often going to debates that he had arranged for Hitchens. He talked about one trip during which he and Hitchens studied together, in the car, the book of John. Larry Taunton did not say that Hitchens believed what they read; he said only that Hitchens seemed to have enjoyed the time that they spent doing it. Taunton was certain that Hitchens had been seriously and painfully struggling with questions about faith and God, much more than his public persona would have ever let on, and certainly more than his hateful bombast against faith revealed. No doubt, the reality that his esophageal cancer would soon kill him certainly would get even Christopher Hitchens to rethink a few things.

The Legacy

Of course, in the end, only the God Christopher Hitchens professed not to believe in (whatever doubts he might have harbored about his nonbelief) will make the final call on Christopher Hitchens’ life. Until then, however, his endless tirades of anti-religious vitriol, especially against Muslims, available on YouTube and in his writings—which include his bestselling book, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*—will be Christopher’s more immediate legacy.

And it’s not one to be proud of, either. In an increasingly fractious world, especially along religious lines, page after page, video after video, of his anti-religious rhetoric—some fair, some ludicrous—can make matters only worse. The divide not only between religions, but also between secular and the religious, will continue to be made wider by the written and verbal legacy left in his wake. Little, if anything, he said or wrote is geared toward looking for common ground, or toward points of reconciliation. That was not, it seems, his motive. For the public Hitchens—the only Hitchens the world knows—religious faith, whatever the faith, is bad, and will lead only to more violence, discord, and hatred, which is why it must be fought against (whatever that entails). The private Hitchens, the one expressing doubts, has hardly made a dent in the discussion.

Christopher Hitchens will be remembered, not for the internal struggle that, according to Taunton, he was having, but for the loud, articulate bombast against the very thing that, it seems, was starting to cause him to reconsider all the loud and articulate bombast. Unfortunately, now that he’s gone, only the loud articulate bombast remains, and we are left to deal with the results.

Clifford Goldstein writes from Mount Airy, Maryland.

Religious Persecution and Power in North Korea

BY DAVID
RHEE

The denial of religious liberty and the establishment of the state-sponsored religion of Juche has enabled the Kim dynasty to maintain power in North Korea. Change will come only when the people of North Korea are afforded the right to religious freedom so they can choose to worship a deity other than the one created and imposed by the Kim regime.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a hereditary dictatorship where political power has been passed down through three generations of the Kim family. The fact that one family has sustained power over a nation supposedly built on Leninist-Marxist principles is remarkable, especially considering the economic hardships experienced by the North Korean people during much of the Kim dynasty. North Korea has suffered a series of devastating famines since the 1990s that have resulted in the deaths of millions as well as stunted the growth of an entire generation of children. An empty stomach will motivate an individual to risk their life in order to bring forth change. That is why food shortages are often the fuel that drives political revolutions. For instance, famine played a significant role in spurring the French Revolution. Food crises driven by the spike in global food prices contributed to the political unrest in North Africa and the Middle

East earlier this decade. In North Korea, however, famine has done little to impede the citizenry's allegiance to the Kim family. North Koreans continue to worship and adulate the Kims even as they suffer.

The History of Religion in Korea

Religion has long been an important part of Korean culture. The inhabitants of the Korean peninsula were practicing a form of shamanism as far back as the fourth century.¹ It was around that time that Buddhism and Confucianism were introduced to Korea via China. Confucianism ultimately became the dominant philosophy of the Korean ruling classes, while Buddhism maintained broad appeal among the masses. Catholicism was the first Christian denomination to be introduced to Korea, when Catholic missionaries reached the "Hermit Kingdom" in the sixteenth century.²

Protestant Christianity arrived in Korea during the nineteenth century. In 1866 a Welsh Presbyterian named Robert Thomas headed to Korea on the American trade ship *General Sherman*. The ship came into military conflict with Korean troops. Most of the crew was killed, and according to one account, Thomas was arrested and beheaded. Thomas had been distributing Bibles during the trip, and he ultimately gave his final copy to his executioner,

위대한장군님만

계시면



우리는 이긴다!



Park Chung-won, who later became a Christian and established a church in Pyongyang.³ The first missionary to have a meaningful impact on Korea was the Reverend Dr. John Ross of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland.⁴ Ross believed that evangelism was most effective when carried out through native converts rather than through foreign missionaries. His process of indigenous evangelization took place



Attack on the *General Sherman*

through the distribution of Scripture. In 1887 Ross completed and distributed the first Korean translation of the New Testament. Ross also selected the Korean term for God, *Hananiim*, which is a Korean word for the Ruler of Heaven.

It is worth noting that the capital city of North Korea, Pyongyang, was once regarded as the “Jerusalem of the East,” as it was a place where hundreds of churches existed and Western missionaries actively engaged in numerous humanitarian projects.⁵ Pyongyang was the site of the Great Revival of 1907, which fostered the spread of Christianity throughout the entire Korean peninsula and even into Manchuria.

Religious persecution has a long history in Korea. Much of the persecution derived from the pervasive influence of Confucianism on Korean society, as well as the Hermit Kingdom’s enmity toward anything foreign. It was during the Choson dynasty that the governmental system was framed by Confucian ideals. Korea adopted a Confucian system of education whose purpose was to supply a trained bureaucracy that would serve as advisors to the king.⁶ These Confucian-trained government officials tended to be wary of anything foreign, and Christianity was no exception. Christians were looked upon with suspicion for their refusal to respect and partake in Confucian traditions such as the worship of ancestors. In 1791 two Catholics,

Kwon Sangyon and Yun Chich’ung, were arrested and executed for not performing the ancestral rites.

The Korean government had concerns that Christianity was a tool being used by subversive foreign powers. The Sinyu Persecution of 1801 was a significant governmental suppression of the Catholic Church. It started because a young scholar, Hwang Sayong, drafted a letter that appealed for a Western army to protect the fledgling Catholic Church. Korean authorities intercepted Hwang’s letter, and its contents were all that they needed to prove that Catholicism endangered the political independence of Korea.⁷ In 1815 the Urhae Persecution took place as a result of the discovery of foreign missionaries on Korean soil, which raised the fear of subversion of the Korean state by foreign powers.

Between 1910 and 1945 Japan occupied the Korean peninsula. The Japanese sought to impose their religious traditions, including Shintoism. During this period Koreans were forced to take part in Japanese Shinto worship, which included worship of the emperor. Korean Christians perceived such acts as being idolatrous. Between 1938 and 1945 some 2,000 people were arrested for refusal to comply with mandatory attendance at Shinto shrine events.⁸

Many Christians also resisted Japanese demands to acknowledge Shinto mythology as a creed, and this resulted in the church being singled out for harsh retribution from the Japanese occupying forces. The Japanese military engaged in burning down churches and executing significant numbers of Christians. In one notable incident Japanese troops herded villagers into the local church and then set it aflame. Missionaries were the first to smuggle out reports about these atrocities, and it was the mission boards in their home countries that forced Western governments to condemn Japanese brutality.

The suppression of religious freedom came to an end once the Japanese forces withdrew from the Korean peninsula following World War II. Christianity and Buddhism, having endured through the years of Japanese occupation, still had significant numbers of followers despite Japanese efforts to eradicate them. According to the *North Korean Central Yearbook* published in 1950, it was estimated that there were in North Korea right after the national liberation approximately 2 million religious believers, including 375,000 Buddhists, 200,000 Protestants, and 57,000 Catholics.⁹

Juche—The State Religion of North Korea

When Kim Il Sung took power in the newly formed Democratic People's Republic of Korea, he began a systematic campaign of indoctrination based on his own interpretation of Stalinist ideology. Religion would initially have no place in Kim's Leninist-Marxist inspired society. Kim considered Christianity to be a superstition and a hindrance to the socialist revolution.¹⁰ He also considered religion to be a tool of the ruling class to exploit and oppress the people. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Kim's secret police embarked on intense efforts to eradicate religious belief. All churches, temples, and other religious sites were closed. Bibles and other religious literature were destroyed. Religious leaders were either executed or sent to concentration camps. However, instead of completely expunging religion from North Korean society, Kim created a new religion that would be used for self-serving purposes. He named his new religion "Juche."

At the time Korea was liberated from Japanese rule on August 15, 1945, Kim Il Sung was an army captain in the Soviet Union's 88th Special Brigade. He was chosen by the Far East Command of the Soviet Union's State Security Commission to become a puppet to represent the U.S.S.R.'s interests in Korea. Kim returned to Korea through Port Wonsan on September 19, 1945, aboard the Soviet warship *Pugachev*, with no political base at all inside the country. However, backed by the Soviet Army, Kim established his new regime on September 9, 1948.¹¹ Stalin made Kim's rise to power possible, and his death in 1953 created a sense of instability to Kim's rule.

So Kim created Juche as a tool to justify his status as the leader of North Korea. Also, with the death of Stalin, Kim could no longer depend on the backing of the Soviet Union, so he used Juche as the rationale for ridding North Korea of foreign influences. Juche, which means "self-reliance" in Korean, summoned the people of North Korea to purge themselves of foreign influences and develop a loyalty and reliance on their own culture. It also became a mechanism to deify Kim Il Sung, who was presented as "God" to the North Korean people.¹² According to Juche doctrine, Kim was omniscient and omnipresent. He was also the progenitor of the Korean race, who must be deified and worshipped by all.¹³ Juche later became the rationale to justify the passing of power from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il. Just as Kim Il Sung



Tower of Juche Idea,
Pyongyang, North Korea

**Documenting
human rights
abuses in
North Korea is
extraordinarily
difficult
because it is
one of the most
closed societies
in the world.**

is “God,” his son Kim Jong Il is a surrogate Jesus Christ.¹⁴

The U.S. State Department’s 1996 Human Rights Report observes that worship of the Juche ideology and Kim Il Sung and his family had reached the level of a state religion.¹⁵ All DPRK citizens are required to adhere to Juche, which has no tolerance of other religions, which are viewed as presenting a challenge to the Kim regime’s ideological foundations. Kim Il Sung was the longest ruling dictator in the world at the time of his death. That fact alone demonstrates the success of Juche as a tool for maintaining political power.

Religious Persecution Today

Article 68 of North Korea’s constitution ensures the right to freedom of religion. However, it also attaches the condition that religion must not be used to bring in foreign influences or as the pretext to engage in activities that are harmful to the state.¹⁶ It is the government that ultimately decides whether a religion meets this test; there cannot be any religion in North Korea except for those approved by the authorities, and they will proscribe any religion that poses a threat to the Kim regime. Thus religion in North Korea is permissible only when it benefits the Kim family. Article 68 was added to the constitution amid the famine of the 1990s in order to procure aid from the rest of the world.¹⁷ It was during this time that North Korea began a series of posturing measures intended to dupe the rest of the world into believing they suddenly were committed to protecting civil and human rights. North Korea essentially practices a “parallel” policy toward religion, whereby it takes advantage of religion for political purposes on the international stage, while suppressing it internally. The government tries to appear to the international community as if it is tolerating religion and guaranteeing religious freedom, while in reality it is repressing religion within its borders.

One manner in which North Korea maintains its façade of religious liberty is through the operation of three religious organizations: the Buddhist Federation, the Korean Christian Federation, and the Korean Catholic Association. The Protestant Korean Christian Federation claims to have 10,000 members, and the Catholic Association claims to have about 3,000 members. In reality, these are shell organizations that do nothing to facilitate the practice of Buddhism, Catholicism, or Protestant Christianity in North Korea.¹⁸

There are two Protestant churches and a Catholic church that have been built in Pyongyang since 1988. Although the churches have received widespread international publicity, several analysts believe they are opened only when foreign visitors request to attend services. They appear to be propaganda facilities established for visiting foreigners, such as tourists and religious leaders. When in use, the government fills the pews with individuals posing as Christians. A *Washington Post* correspondent who attended services in two of the churches reported that the four Protestant congregants he was allowed to speak with could not name the first book of the Bible. Similarly, a British journalist met with a national leader of the Protestant federation who could not even name the first three books of the Bible.¹⁹

Documenting human rights abuses in North Korea is extraordinarily difficult because it is one of the most closed societies in the world. The few Westerners permitted into the country are largely confined within the Pyongyang area, where they are vigilantly supervised. The government’s tight security makes defections of North Korean citizens rare.²⁰ The Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB) is an NGO with access to every North Korean defector admitted into South Korea. Since 2003 the NKDB maintains an archive that contains testimonies of defectors who witnessed human rights abuses.²¹ As of July 2013 the NKDB Unified Human Rights database has kept files on a total of 46,713 human rights violations in North Korea. Of those, 1,034 or 2.2 percent, of all cases were related to religious persecution.²² Among those who provided information on religious persecution cases in North Korea, 36.8 percent were eyewitnesses to religious persecution, 17.5 percent were colleagues of victims, 6.7 were actual victims of religious persecution, and 5.1 were relatives of victims. The reason the proportion of victims and their relatives is low is that most of them were sent to prison camps and thus unable to defect.

If a person is arrested because of religious activities within North Korea, they will be subject to intense interrogation. It has been reported that victims are severely punished in political prison camps.²³ Once an individual ends up in a political prison camp, it is kept secret whether they are alive or not. Although imprisonment is the most common punishment for those who have had contact with religion, victims are also subject to other punishments,

such as public or secret executions, which serve as warnings to other people about what will happen if they too engage in the worship of a deity other than the Kims.²⁴ The regime is also very harsh on defectors who are deported from China because of concerns that they have been exposed to other religions.

Ways to Bring About Change

In 1997 Secretary of State Madeleine Albright suggested that declining economic conditions would motivate the people of North Korea to demand reforms from the Kim regime. Albright's assessment underestimated the massive impact the decades of intense religious indoctrination has done to the psyche of the North Korean people.²⁵ Juche is a religion that encourages North Koreans to prevail through the hardships and to find joy in the suffering. To North Koreans, tough times are not a reason to rebel, but instead an opportunity to demonstrate their unceasing faith in their divine leaders.

The only way to inspire the North Korean people to rise up against the Kim regime is by revealing the deceptiveness of Juche. North Koreans must be shown that Juche is a religion that benefits the Kim family and their cohorts at the expense of ordinary North Koreans. They need to see that Juche is not a religion worthy of their faith. They might realize this if given the opportunity to compare it to other religions.

The U.S. should collaborate with religious groups to promote religious liberty in North Korea. The State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom is committed to assisting religious NGOs to promote religious freedom.²⁶ Therefore, this government agency should support religious NGOs working to disseminate information into North Korea. The financial backing of the U.S. government will empower NGOs with the resources to disseminate religious materials into North Korea; literature and other information that will take the blinders off the eyes of the North Korean people, who have been restricted to just one distorted religion.

Freedom of religion is a basic human right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says the right to choose a religion is essential. This includes "the freedom to choose a religion, to change a religion, to

confess a religious belief, to not express a religious belief, and to choose not to have any religion."²⁷ The people of North Korea are denied all of these freedoms, and the result is their unwitting compliance with a repressive regime that causes them to live in a state of suffering. The only way to end the Kim regime is to let North Koreans know that Juche is not their only option when it comes to religion. They deserve to know that there exists a God of love and mercy, who, unlike the Kim family, values the life of every person and desires to bless all who worship Him. If they are given the freedom to choose, the people of North Korea will shed their distorted image of god as depicted by Juche, and embrace the true God.

David Rhee is an adjunct professor of theology and Bible studies at Horizon University, Los Angeles, California.

¹ James Huntley Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002), p.19.

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³ Zoe Smith, *Religion and Belief in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: A Report of the All Party*.

⁴ Grayson, p. 156.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 143, 144.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 161.

⁹ Yeo Sang Yoon, *White Paper on Religious Freedom in North Korea 2013* (Seoul: Database Center for North Korean Human Rights, 2013), p. 62.

¹⁰ Nina Shea, *In the Lion's Den: A Shocking Account of Persecution and Martyrdom of Christians Today and How We Should Respond* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), p. 68.

¹¹ Thomas Belke, *Juche: A Christian Study of North Korea's State Religion* (Bartlesville, Okla.: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1999), p. 172.

¹² Belke, p. 62.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁵ Jae Jean Suh, ed., *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2002), p. 124.

¹⁶ ConstituteProject.org, *Korea (Democratic People's Republic of)'s*

Constitution of 1972 With Amendments through 1998,

https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Peoples_Republic_of_Korea_1998.pdf?lang=en (accessed Apr. 18, 2016).

¹⁷ Yoon, p. 45.

¹⁸ Suh, p. 121.

¹⁹ Shea, p. 69.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Yoon, p. 139.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 140-144.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

²⁵ Belke, p. 68.

²⁶ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *Religious Freedom*, www.state.gov/j/drl/irf/ (accessed May 9, 2016).

²⁷ Yoon, pp. 30, 31.



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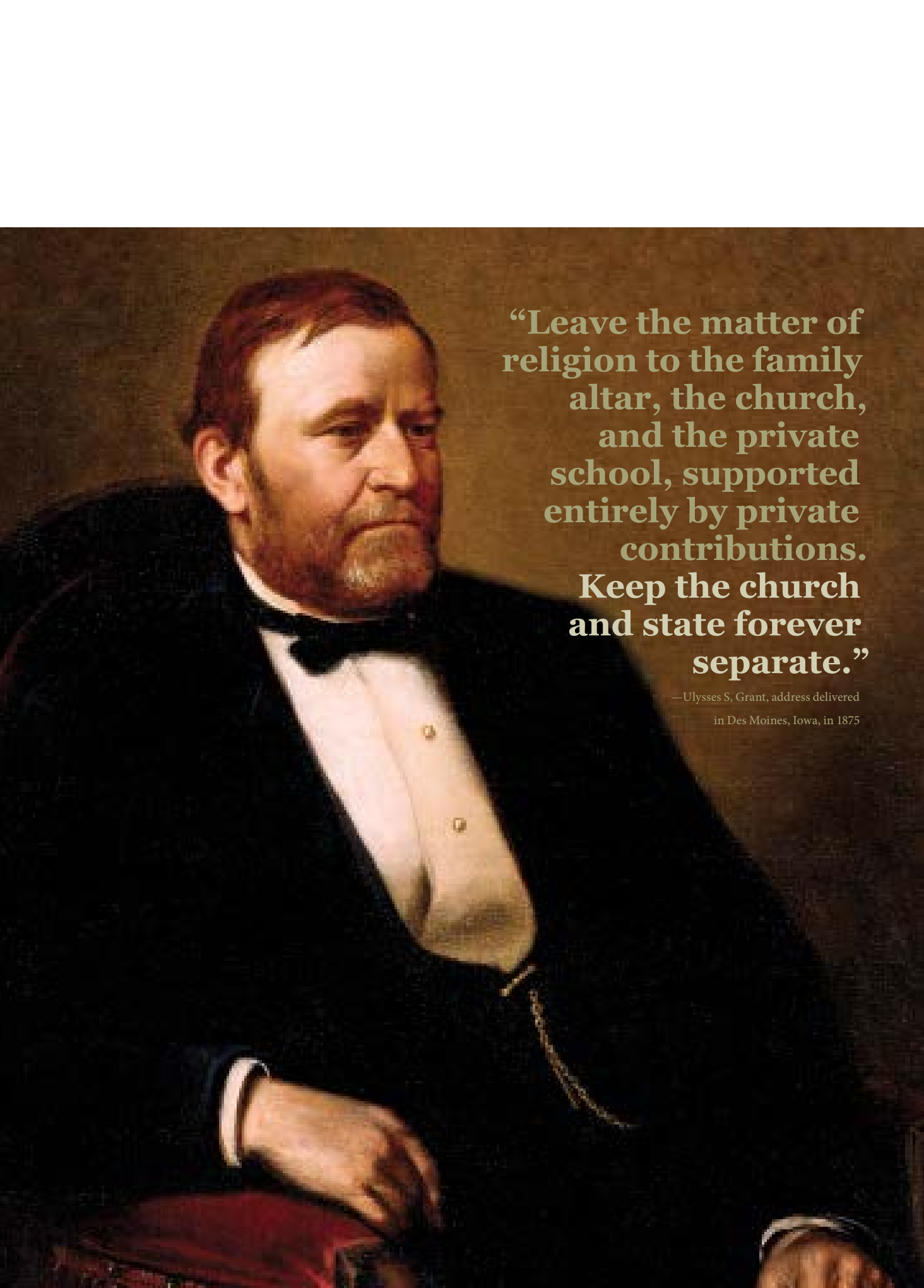
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A portrait of Ulysses S. Grant, a man with a full red beard and mustache, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a black bow tie. He is seated and looking slightly to the right. The background is a dark, textured brown.

“Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the church and state forever separate.”

—Ulysses S. Grant, address delivered
in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1875