

A MAGAZINE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

GRACE UNDER THE LAW | LAMB AND DRAGON

LIBERTY

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Center for American Research
Arizona State University
Scottsdale, Arizona

Religion and Real Politics

W e B e

E D I T O R I A L

BUT WHAT ABOUT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

My last editorial comments, written of necessity a few weeks before the U.S. presidential election, and this editorial, written unavoidably some weeks before the U.S. presidential inauguration, bracket a time of great moral hazard for all freedoms, not the least of which is religious liberty. It may be that calm settles again upon the land. It may even be that the immunizations so hoped for as a counter to a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic are having an effect. It may be that the dangerous frustrations of airborne hazard, financial meltdown (both personal and national), social distancing, and political impasse have melted away like the morning mist. Probably not!

I have been editing *Liberty* magazine for only a few weeks shy of 22 years. It has been my privilege over that span to continue this magazine's enduring commitment to religious freedom for all. *Liberty* built on the early Adventist experiences with the various blue laws in the late 1800s, which often criminalized worship on Saturday, instead of the general Sunday expectation. The increasing Seventh-day Adventist emphasis on religious liberty of course looked to the United States Constitution and its First Amendment guarantee as a civil security. However, they looked at their Western Christian heritage with a keen eye to the religious awakening of the Reformation and its continuation in the New World. Seventh-day Adventists were a people stirred, as were many Christians in the mid-1800s, with biblical statements that seemed to indicate the "end" of secular history and the imminent return of the promised Jesus Christ. They looked to prophecy and saw evidence that the United States would play an important

role in those last events: a role eventually at odds with its longtime protective and sheltering stance toward conscience. All of this has informed the *Liberty* magazine "package" for about 115 years and, under another name, several before that.

When I read the early issues of the magazine, I am struck by how forthrightly it addressed the various political issues of the day. How could it be otherwise, when religious freedom is part of the legal and political dynamic of our society! But Adventist cofounder Ellen G. White put it very succinctly to those who were arguing, and preaching even, on issues of the gold or silver standard following William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech at the 1896 Democratic Convention in Chicago. Ministers and teachers with such partisan political views, she wrote, should resign or be fired. *Liberty* has never been and cannot be partisan—but if it ever goes silent on the great issues of the day that impact civil and religious freedom, then it will cease to be relevant.

Over my tenure as editor I have fielded many questions and letters to the editor. Most have been positive; some not so friendly. And like all editors, I take them very seriously, and extrapolate the comments of the few motivated to take the trouble to contact the magazine as representing a far larger if more silent voice. Those that differed, I have usually called or corresponded with. Very often I was able to clarify the point of contention, and we ended up agreeing. Other times we parted amicably, realizing there was an essential difference of viewpoint but not an intent to attack. Rarely was there something

more elemental in the difference. That is, until several years ago. It was roughly at the beginning of the last administration.

Now, anyone who has read *Liberty* for more than a few years knows that at any given time there are national and local issues that impact religious liberty. Any administration has strengths and weaknesses in this area. *Liberty* deals with them as they occur. We are not, cannot be, Republican, Democrat, or even just opposed or automatically for a certain party or leader just because we like or do not like them in the main. We are for the issue of religious liberty for all; always.

Several years ago a thread of contact emerged that troubled me more and more. Many of them were members of my own church; many more claimed to be from the wider Christian community. Their common attitude was belligerent and closed-minded. They made attacks on *Liberty* and me that did not quite compute. The labels they threw at me ranged from liberal to socialist to Communist to feminist; and they were not to be reasoned with emotionally or factually. They also often had a view that the administration was not to be questioned. It was, at first, thoroughly mystifying to me, as I had been at pains to feature in *Liberty* positive statements and proclamations on religious liberty made by the president, and to run features on events like the first-ever Ministerial for Religious Freedom. It was impossible to ignore some of the moral inconsistencies of the administration on such issues as immigration, but we were careful not to personalize the critique. In covering a *Christianity Today* editorial that shook the evangelical world, we were critical of the wrong attitude to politics that lay behind the whole situation. No matter,



PEOPLE of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do hereby constitute for the United States of America.

IN THIS ISSUE

“Now we are . . . testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. P31”



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the troll-like e-mails now pepper my inbox. The question begs: Is it possible to communicate and dialogue on religious freedom anymore?

There is a topic that has long occupied *Liberty* magazine—long before my tenure. It is the danger to religious freedom posed by Christians seeking direct political power for their religious views. James Madison put it powerfully this way: “Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other sects?” Unfortunately, that is the dynamic that has been revealing itself of late.

In the buildup to the election of 2016, then-candidate Trump courted the politically dominant Christian coalition. It was his choice to make, and hardly a political no-no. In

anointing him their man, the coalition may have acted in good faith, but in bad church-state judgment. They further exacerbated the situation by continuing the opprobrium uncritically even for actions contrary to basic Christian tenets. This is not wise in secular politics, let alone from a faith perspective. And it laid the ground for the most dangerous us versus them, good versus evil polarity. Its bitter fruit is the demonization of the political opposition and the pulling down of the temple of democracy. To be sure, the besetting deficit of the twenty-first-century American republic is gross ignorance of and respect for the Constitution. But just as religion was inextricably entwined with the cultural formation of the United States, so its warping takes us in directions that I find more than hinted at in Scripture (see Revelation 13).

The United States experiment in republican representative democracy

has inspired many worldwide; but it has not been without setbacks and contradictions. A great and violent divide in society brought about the Civil War. And religion was both an instrument of division and the salve to that conflict. In his second inaugural address, President Abraham Lincoln, the man whose very election had precipitated the conflict, said this: “Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. . . . The prayers of both could not be answered—that of neither has been answered fully.”

Lincoln E. Steed, Editor
Liberty magazine

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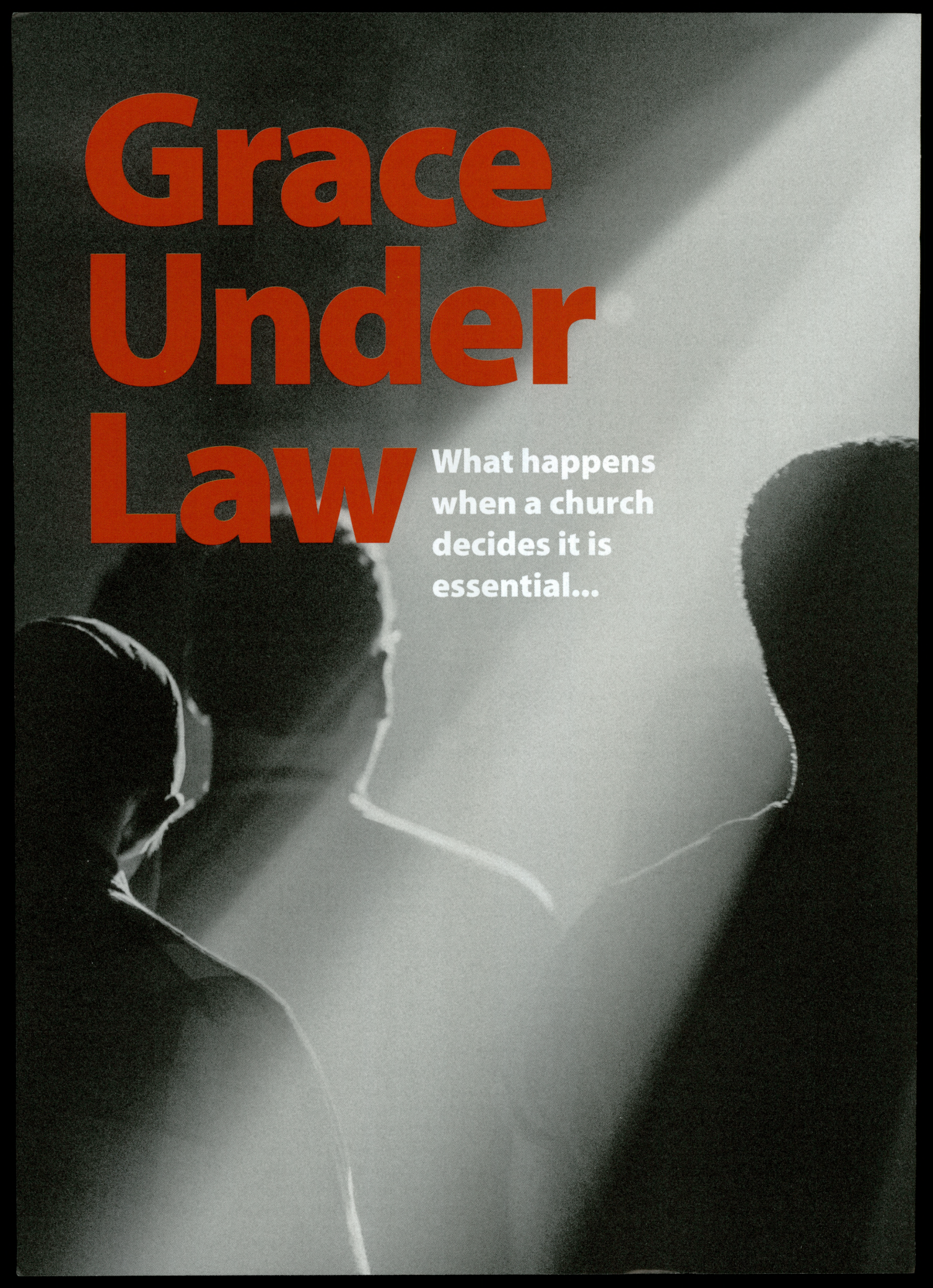
DECLARATION
of Principles

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.

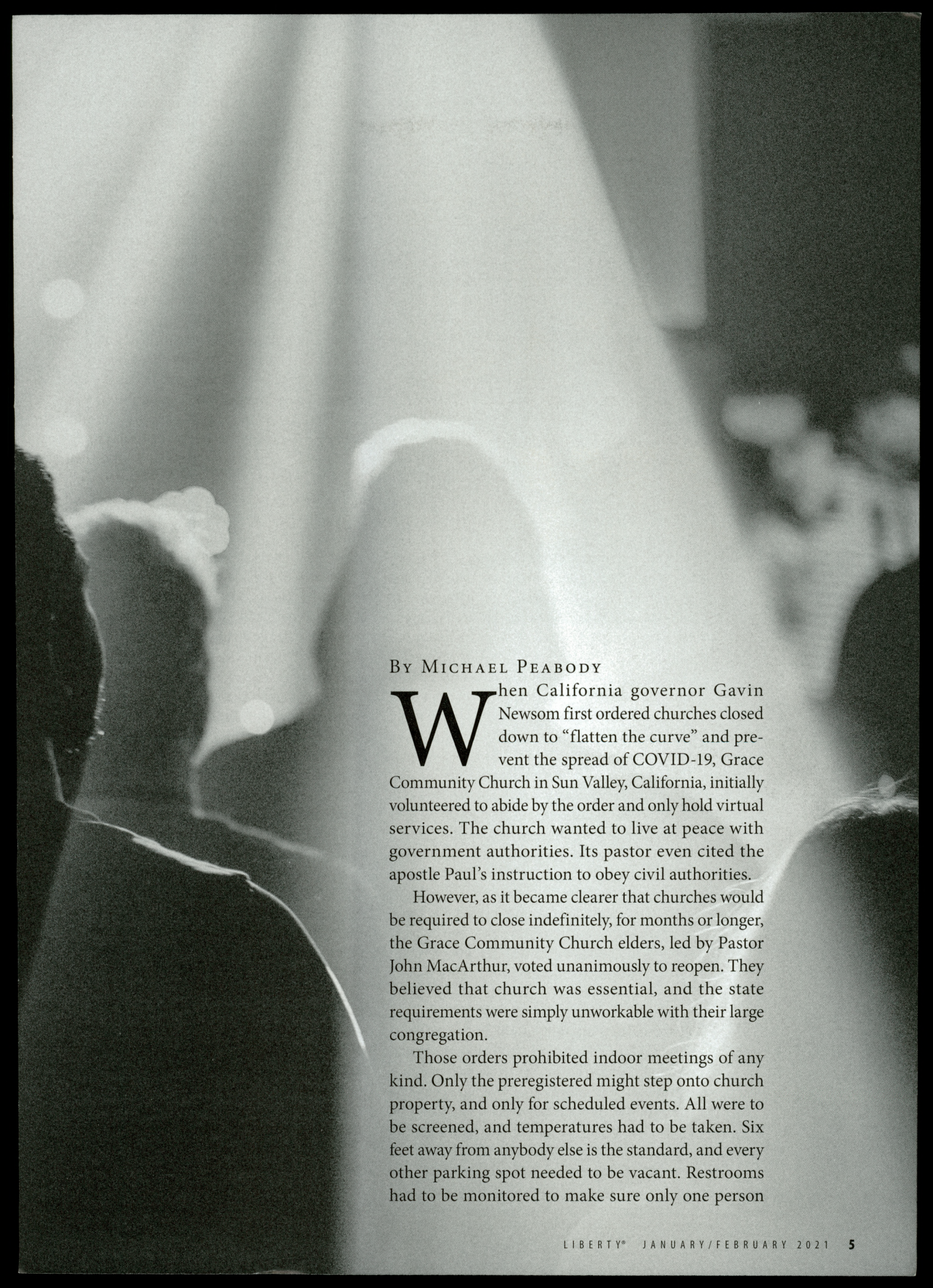
Religious liberty entails freedom of conscience: to worship or not to worship; to profess, practice, and promulgate religious beliefs, or to change them. In exercising these rights, however, one must respect the equivalent rights of all others.

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.



Grace Under Law

What happens
when a church
decides it is
essential...



BY MICHAEL PEABODY

When California governor Gavin Newsom first ordered churches closed down to “flatten the curve” and prevent the spread of COVID-19, Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, initially volunteered to abide by the order and only hold virtual services. The church wanted to live at peace with government authorities. Its pastor even cited the apostle Paul’s instruction to obey civil authorities.

However, as it became clearer that churches would be required to close indefinitely, for months or longer, the Grace Community Church elders, led by Pastor John MacArthur, voted unanimously to reopen. They believed that church was essential, and the state requirements were simply unworkable with their large congregation.

Those orders prohibited indoor meetings of any kind. Only the preregistered might step onto church property, and only for scheduled events. All were to be screened, and temperatures had to be taken. Six feet away from anybody else is the standard, and every other parking spot needed to be vacant. Restrooms had to be monitored to make sure only one person



was inside. No hymnbooks. No communion. Disposable seat covers had to be changed between services. And services had to be shorter. At maximum an outdoor, socially distanced tent can hold 350 to 400 people. All who had been in proximity with anyone outside their family who might have COVID-19 would be required to self-quarantine for two weeks.¹

When John MacArthur, the 81-year-old pastor of a large congregation read these restrictions, he said, “Obviously this is not constitutional, and more important, it goes against the will of the Lord. He calls us together.”

Founded in 1956, Grace Community Church is a nondenominational 8,000-member congregation on the northeast side of Los Angeles. The church asserted that a church operates separately from government control. In a statement released July 24, 2020, the elders wrote, “Christ is Lord of all. He is the one true head of the church. He is also King of kings—sovereign over every earthly authority. Grace Community Church has always stood immovably on those biblical principles. As His people, we are subject to His will and commands as revealed in Scripture. Therefore, we cannot and will not acquiesce to a government-imposed moratorium on our weekly congregational wor-

ship or other regular corporate gatherings. Compliance would be disobedience to our Lord’s clear commands.”

The County of Los Angeles responded by threatening the church, and MacArthur, with a daily fine of \$1,000 or arrest. The church hired attorneys from the Thomas Moore Society to defend their position, and attorney Jenna Ellis responded that “Grace Community Church has every right to assemble without impossible and unreasonable infringement from the state, and the state has absolutely no power to impose the restrictions it is demanding. Church is essential, and the government has no power to arbitrate whether religious organizations are essential. This is not about health and safety; it is about targeting churches.”

The church filed a lawsuit against the state of California and the local county and city governments. The complaint argued that the church was being treated differently from other groups that had met to protest racism and police brutality. The suit claimed that the public health orders were not enforced and that government officials had granted a “de facto” exception for the “favored protesters.”

On August 9 the church reopened, and MacArthur welcomed parishioners to “the

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without face masks and no special social distancing. . . .
It may be the weakness of their position.**

Grace Community Church peaceful protest.”

The county did not give up so easily. The fight escalated to the point where the county revoked the 45-year-old lease of a church parking lot on adjacent property.

The litigation went back and forth, and at one point a superior court judge ruled that the county had a burden of showing why they should be able to infringe on the church’s right to worship. The court ruled that the church could meet indoors so long as people used masks and observed social distancing.

The county did not relent, and demanded that the court issue a contempt order against the church; but the church argued that the issue of the constitutionality of the no-meet orders needed to be determined before contempt proceedings could begin. In a press release the church’s attorney, Jenna Ellis, said, “It’s tyranny to even suggest that a government action cannot be challenged and must be obeyed without question.”

As of this writing, the church is continuing to meet; without face masks and no special social distancing. In ignoring these two rather commonsense requirements, that would not compromise religious freedom and rather tend to safeguard health, the church is also acting on a view that the pandemic is exaggerated and that little risk exists. It may be the weakness of their position.

Some may think it is fatalism that MacArthur and his congregation meet despite the shutdown orders, and despite specific enforcement action brought against the congregation by Los Angeles County. The county is the most populous county in the United States, with more than 10 million inhabitants in a state of 39.5 million. As of September 22, 2020, 15,203 Californians, or 0.03 percent of the state’s population, had died, with 6,401 of them in Los Angeles County.

Although COVID-19 deaths are significant, the problem of the costs associated with sickness continued to prevail.

MacArthur and his attorneys have stood firm on the idea that not only was the enforcement unreasonable—it also represents a significant departure from church-state separation.

In July 2020 the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 against a Nevada church’s request to strike down Nevada’s 50-person limit on worship service attendance. Justices Alito, Kavanaugh, Thomas, and Gorsuch vehemently disagreed with the majority’s position on the subject.

Wrote Gorsuch: “This is a simple case. Under the governor’s edict, a 10-screen ‘multiplex’ may host 500 moviegoers at any time. A casino, too, may cater to hundreds at once, with perhaps six people huddled at each craps table here, and a similar number gathered around every roulette wheel there. Large numbers and close quarters are fine in such places. But churches, synagogues, and mosques are banned from admitting more than 50 worshippers—no matter how large the building, how distant the individuals, how many wear face masks, no matter the precautions at all.”

Gorsuch continued: “In Nevada, it seems, it is better to be in entertainment than religion. Maybe that is nothing new. But the First Amendment prohibits such obvious discrimination against the exercise of religion. The world we inhabit today, with a pandemic upon us, poses unusual challenges. But there is no world in which the Constitution permits Nevada to favor Caesars Palace over Calvary Chapel.”²

Gorsuch’s opinion is interesting; but it places the church at the same level of privilege as other businesses and relies on a discrimination standard to reach its conclusion. But as Justice Kavanaugh noted in his concurrent dissent in *Sisolak*, there is a two-step inquiry to religious claims against secular claims. The first step is whether the law creates “a favored or exempt class of organizations and, if so, do religious organizations fall outside of that

class?" If religious organizations are not favored, "the second question is whether the government has provided sufficient justification for the differential treatment and disfavoring of religion."

Religion cannot be relegated to a second-tier status below secular organizations. In many places in California, restaurants and stores were open, while authorities did not describe churches as "essential."

The concept of the essentiality of congregational gatherings has come under direct scrutiny. Many pastors and congregational boards recognized the risks of gathering and decided to go online exclusively. At first it seemed a weeks-long attempt to "flatten the curve," but months later it seems permanent. During times of national calamity, people often seek out the fellowship of other believers to provide spiritual clarity. Yet during the pandemic, with attendant economic and social issues, churches were physically closed, leaving many of the most

vulnerable to grapple alone with their problems and fears.

Some church leaders tried to argue that perhaps meeting in a church was not all that essential after all. The early church facing Roman persecution did not meet in a building, and churches in Communist countries famously met "underground." Why not volunteer for this kind of experience? Catholics wondered whether there was a need to partake in the Eucharist. Parents wondered if all their effort in taking their children to church had been worthwhile when it was just a click away. If meeting together during times of extreme stress is not essential, why would it suddenly become more "essential" in times of peace and good health?

While people will eventually seek out restaurants and gyms when all this is over, churches that have rolled over and allowed themselves to be shelved and labeled "nonessential" by overreaching authorities may find

Churches that have rolled over and allowed themselves to be shelved and labeled "nonessential" by overreaching authorities may find that their congregants will leave them on the shelves.



that their congregants will leave them on the shelves.

It is here where Grace Community Church and several others that took the risk to remain open shine. Instead of rolling over and allowing authorities to label it “nonessential,” they stayed open. John MacArthur stood up in front, under threat of arrest and fine, and welcomed the congregation to worship. Amid scenes of social unrest outside and threats of violence, the church filled with thousands of attendees, all aware that there was a risk but also of the need to meet, and the songs of hymns rose to the rafters. It may seem foolish or even dangerous, but if no churches stood up and affirmed the fact that they matter, all churches that remain quiet would run the risk of sinking into obscurity.

“We’re under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and He says to have church, and we will,” MacArthur told CNN on September 10, 2020, soon after the church was denied an injunction that would have allowed services to continue legally.³

Grace Community Church is hardly alone in resisting the orders to hold services outdoors with minimal attendance. In the northern California city of Santa Clara, North Valley Baptist Church finally gave up on indoor services after the county fined the congregation \$112,000. The church announced they would be meeting outdoors in line with guidelines, and the county has refused to release the fines.⁴

In Newbury Park, California, Ventura County fined Godspoke Calvary Chapel \$3,000 for holding services in violation of local orders. As of this writing, the congregation continues to meet openly and litigate.

Enforcement has been uneven—protesting social injustice has not been prosecuted, as it is a right to assemble issue. But churches, even those who claim to be holding “protest services,” have not been afforded a similar right.

The law has previously recognized that some religious practices that may seem antithetical to health and safety rules, and that propose a statistically more significant danger than COVID-19, are permitted because the state does not interfere with the church without good cause. Examples include Jehovah’s Witnesses, who do not believe in blood transfusions; Christian Scientists, who do not go to doctors; and even ritualistic poisonous snake handling.

COVID-19 is a highly unusual situation in which large churches that have been well regarded in their communities have been placed at odds with local governments. Because of the

nature of COVID-19 there is an increased risk, particularly if churches decide to ignore masks and social distancing recommendations. In a very few highly publicized cases, even churches that followed restrictions have experienced outbreaks and some deaths.

If churches agree that they should close down now, shutdowns will inevitably happen over and over as new issues arise in which there is a hint of “emergency.” Rather than having a recognized autonomy, secured by a strong wall separating church from the government, churches that submit without question may create a precedent that lowers the level of protection for religion. In legal terms, instead of the state having to show a compelling governmental interest in shutting down churches, they may instead only have to offer some rational basis for doing so. This could have broad-reaching implications. For instance, there has been a decrease in pollution as a result of the stay-at-home order. A state could make a decision that for the sake of the environment, non-essential work should cease one Saturday or Sunday a month. Churches that agreed in 2020 that it is “just as good to meet online” during COVID-19 could find themselves among the ranks of the nonessential during the new “environmental crisis,” and face fines if they met.

Churches have a constitutional right under the free exercise clause to govern their affairs unless there is a compelling governmental interest in a specific issue, and those interventions must be very narrowly defined to resolve the issue. When churches give the keys to their doors to the government and allow the government to decide if and when they can open, they’ve surrendered themselves to the state. It will be tough to get those keys back. So far the sanctions are only financial, but pastors who refuse to compromise and continue to hold worship services as they did before the pandemic might find themselves in handcuffs. This type of overreach is precisely why the Founders recognized the value of keeping church and state separate.

¹“COVID-19 Industry Guidance: Places of Worship and Providers of Religious Services and Cultural Ceremonies,” <https://files.covid19.ca.gov/pdf/guidance-places-of-worship.pdf>, retrieved September 22, 2020.

²*Calvary Chapel Dayton Valley v. Sisalok*, 591 U.S. ____ (2020); https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/19a1070_0811.pdf, retrieved September 22, 2020.

³See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTdcR-y3x90&feature=youtu.be>, retrieved September 22, 2020.

⁴“Calif. Pastor Moves Worship Outdoors After County Fines Church \$112k for Indoor Services,” *Christian Post*, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/calif-pastor-moves-worship-outdoors-after-county-fines-church-112k-for-indoor-services.html>, retrieved September 22, 2020.

Michael Peabody, an attorney, writes from Northridge, California.

OPINION

RELIGION AND REAL POLITICS

MARK GARAVAGLIA

Editorials published way back before the election in *Christianity Today* (“Trump Should Be Removed From Office”) and the *Los Angeles Times* (“An Evangelical Resurrection”) argued that Donald Trump, impeached and shamed, should leave office. The first piece was authored by *Christianity Today*’s retiring editor, Mark Galli. The second piece in the *Los Angeles Times* was authored by Randall Balmer. Balmer endorsed Galli’s position but pondered why it took so long for *Christianity Today* to call for the president’s ouster.

Mr. Galli moved for the removal of President Trump from office on essentially moral grounds. In Galli’s calculus the vote by the Democrats in the House of Representatives to adopt two articles of impeachment were the telling moral blows to Trump’s presidency. The magazine implied that it had previously exercised restraint in condemning the president’s actions, although he had purportedly “dumbed-down the idea of morality in his administration.” However, the articles of impeachment were the point of no return—now the moral failures had reached such a level that the call for his impeachment was ripe. In the opinion of *Christianity Today*, “the impeachment of Donald Trump [was] a significant event in the story of the republic.”

While I tend to disagree with the conclusions of both writers, they combine to raise a point that is arguably one of the most compelling questions facing every American who practices



his or her religion conscientiously: when voting for a politician, should Americans expect their leaders to display some type of moral virtue that transcends the population in general? The simple answer should be yes, for we look to leaders to lead in various ways, including shaping public morality, civility, and conducting lives that model good conduct. At a minimum we want our children to respect those who lead us. Elected officials flavor our public institutions, and their moral aroma should be positive. The truth is, however, that Americans regularly elect people who are not paragons of virtue. In fact, the American people have a history of electing people with significant moral imperfections.

Fortunately, the U.S. Constitution helps our thinking regarding how to choose and elect politicians, particularly when we consider the relationship between the church (religion) and the state (government). Unlike theocracies past and present, Americans in this people's republic don't select a president to be our pastor in chief, rabbi in chief, imam in chief, or even elder in chief. We elect him or her to lead as our chief executive and commander in chief over the increasingly pluralistic culture of a population with an array of religious and nonreligious citizens and viewpoints.

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The record is clear: Americans do not normally elect people such as Billy Graham or Mother Teresa to lead this pluralistic government. I well remember President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy's adulterous affairs have become legend. In researching this piece, I saw evidence that Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Baines Johnson, also had extramarital affairs. A report in *History.com* suggests that Johnson

actually bragged that he had sex with more women than John F. Kennedy. Unfortunately, immorality in the oval office is not limited to Democrats. A very guilty Republican president Richard Nixon escaped all prosecution surrounding Watergate by resigning from office and being granted a "full, free and absolute" pardon by President Ford. Nixon's vice president Spiro Agnew was not so fortunate. Agnew was found guilty of tax evasion (he technically pleaded "no contest") and resigned from office with no jail time. In the 1990s, the moral/immoral pendulum swung back to the Democrats with the impeachment of President Clinton. Clinton at first protested that he "did not have sexual relations with that woman," and was supported by his wife, former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Mrs. Clinton championed the view that the whole thing against her husband was a "right-wing conspiracy"—vast in nature. In the end it appeared that the only conspiracy was between the sitting president and Monica Lewinsky.

Those of us from Illinois are a bit more cautious in casting too high a moral vision for public officials. Illinois, the Land of Lincoln, has also proved to be the land of unethical politicians. Starting with Len Small a century ago, five sitting or former governors have been indicted, with four convicted and serving time in prison—two within the past 15 years. If we look toward Chicago, things get even bleaker. Those who are interested in a brief journey into the morality of Illinois political leaders can simply google an investigation known as Operation Greylord for a small sampling. The FBI History website reports that a mere 92 public officials were indicted for various crimes as a result of that single federal investigation in the 1980s.

Real politics includes the real fact that we do not always elect moral leaders or that "good" people do not always run for political office. So what is a religious person to do when voting for politicians? Two thoughts may provide some guidance when asking "How should I vote?" in every political election.

The first point is that yes, we should seek, investigate, pray, and ask hard questions as to the morality of a political candidate. Our goal should be to elect people who display certain character traits such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control, and gentleness. The Christian leader, Paul of Tarsus, focused on those character traits when he wrote those words to a church in Turkey nearly 2,000 years ago; his wisdom is timeless. The same saint believed that one's speech should be scented with salt. I, however, and most individuals I am familiar with, sometimes fall short

of practicing one or more of these character traits. We therefore need to be reminded that while we want to elect people with a structure of morality, the same Paul wrote to a church in Rome and reminded that religious group that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, NKJV).^{*} I am convinced by the experience of my life on this planet that we have no real guarantees that we will elect people who display these virtues, even after our most careful vetting. This leads to a second and equally important point in determining who should receive our vote.

After seeking to find candidates that we believe exhibit most of the virtues/character traits noted above, we need to look inside our own souls and decide what values or issues we consider “absolute.” For instance, when we elect political leaders for national (federal) office, we should look to elect people who support our main values or absolutes. Deciding what we hold absolute (very dear) is actually easier than we may think. In his book *The Everlasting Man* the great British author G. K. Chesterton provided significant insight on how to define an absolute by posing an idea. He explained:

“There are generally two ideas, which are only two sides of one idea. The first is the love of something said to be threatened, if it be only vaguely known as [our] home; the second is dislike and defiance of some strange thing that threatens it.”

Many British citizens paid the ultimate price in protecting this absolute (their homeland) during two great wars. Chesterton added a personal note on his absolutes. It had to do with something he disliked and fought to defy; since it threatened that which he loved:

“Men are moved in these things by something far higher and holier than policy; by hatred. When men hung on in the darkest days of the Great War, suffering either in their bodies or in their souls for those they loved, they were long past caring about details of diplomatic objects as motives for their refusal to surrender. Of myself and those I knew best I can answer for the vision that made surrender impossible. It was the vision of the German Emperor’s face as he rode into Paris.”

The religious person in 2021 can take Chesterton’s wisdom (circa 1925) to heart. What are those values, issues, or absolutes that move our souls (in terms of earthly government)—what are the things we deeply love? At the federal (national) level, some of these things may include the economy (people need jobs to provide), education, military defense, health care, immigration, and human services (such as

Social Security). There may be others. The religious person should focus on which value or values he or she loves most and vote for the candidate(s) who support their absolutes.

This leads to the big values or absolutes for this season in American cultural and political life: the Supreme Court. When it comes to the federal government, the things I love and the things that most threaten that love often vest in the Supreme Court. In this era the Court may be the most important branch of the federal government. Even the newly President Trump found out quickly that the courts got to determine whether his views on immigration could go forward. In that case, the courts trumped Trump. The actions (laws passed) by the legislative branches are also subject to the Court’s review. There is a second reason, however, why the Supreme Court is so important: it is the ultimate arbitrator of secular morality and civility in America.

In the late 1890s it was the Supreme Court that left us with the idea that schools and institutions across the land could be “separate but equal.” The practical result was that people of color were formally discriminated against for another half century until the same Court changed its mind and gave us *Brown v. Board of Education*. In the 1960s the Supreme Court gave instructions on what we may consider public (legal) civility when it decided the *Miranda* case. That decision instituted a type of morality and fairness in America’s criminal justice system by protecting the rights of individuals accused of crimes. In 1973 the Supreme Court essentially decided when human life began (or did not begin) in its decision of *Roe v. Wade*. In more recent years the Court has set the standard for defining marriage and, important to religious people, the Court regularly reviews cases that pit religious freedom against the government.

As religious Americans approached the 2020 elections, it was more important than ever that we should seek to elect good people who support our absolutes. Whether Americans have avoided electing politicians who also fall short of the glory of God (as many of us do at some level) seems doubtful, but the desire to do so should be encouraged. It is my hope that this moral optimism will continue to guide us in electing imperfect people to political office and spur our encouragement to people of religious faith to honor those values that they hold absolute.

^{*}Bible texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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the Lamb that speaks like a Dragon

BY CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN

From their earliest years Seventh-day Adventists, today a worldwide movement with more than 21 million members, have been interested in religious liberty issues. This interest stems from the importance of the topic in general, and from two other reasons in particular. First, as their name suggests, they keep the seventh-day Sabbath, Saturday, a practice that at times has caused members legal trouble, such as when strict Sunday law legislation led to fines, or even jail time. Second, the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of last-day events anticipates a time of global religious persecution, with the United States as, unfortunately, the main engine of that persecution.

And given the recent political turmoil and chaos, unprecedented in this country since, perhaps, the American Civil War, for the first time since I became an Adventist, in 1979, I can see something that, previously, I could not see, and that is how the United States, once the beacon of religious liberty, could fulfill its unfortunate prophetic role as a religious persecutor. Or, to use language directly from the book of Revelation, I can see how the lamblike beast could speak “like a dragon” (Revelation 13:11).

Let me explain the thinking behind that assertion.

Daniel and Revelation

Seventh-day Adventists find their prophetic identity mostly from the books of Daniel (Old Testament) and Revelation (New Testament). Links between the two have long been noted by biblical scholars; with Revelation, coming almost a half millennium later, drawing upon concepts and images from Daniel. Three closely paralleled chapters in Daniel (2; 7; 8) form an historical/prophetic template that Revelation, in places, draws upon. This template, Adventists believe, is crucial for understanding apocalyptic prophecy in general and America’s role in particular.

Using what has been called the “historicist” hermeneutic, Adventists understand the book of Daniel and Revelation as depicting a broad continuous and consecutive outline of world history, starting in antiquity and climaxing at the end of this world and the creation of a new one. “The historicist view (also known as the ‘continuous-historical view’),” wrote Adventist scholar William Shea, “see the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation unfolding in historical times from the days of these respective prophets until the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom.”¹

In short, world history is revealed chronologically, starting in the book of Daniel with Babylon (Daniel 2:31-38), Media-Persia (Daniel 2:39; 7:5, 17; 8:20) Greece



“The American Experiment as we know it is not guaranteed to be eternal.”

(Daniel 2:39; 7:17; 8:21), and Rome, both in its pagan and papal phases (Daniel 2:35; 7:19-26; 8:9-12, 22-25). Ultimately, the chapters end with the establishment of God’s final kingdom, depicted in Daniel 7 like this: “Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (Daniel 7:27, NKJV).²

Some images and concepts in these chapters are, later, picked up by Revelation, such as the image of beasts as political powers (see Daniel 7), with a particular focus on the last empire, which exists until the end of the world. That, of course, would be Rome, particularly its papal phase (the pagan one having ended many centuries ago). Revelation 13, after repeating some of the historical episodes of Rome, including its past religious persecution, points to a revival of its power and influence in the last days (see Revelation 13:1-10).

The Lamb That Speaks Like a Dragon

However, Rome is not the only entity involved. Revelation 13 then depicts another power arising, which, too, exerts overwhelming influence in the world, though very negatively. “Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (Revelation 13:11, NKJV). That is, it starts out benignly, but ends up as a religious oppressor.

Seventh-day Adventist pioneers, as far back as 1851, have identified this second beast, the beast of Revelation 13:11-17, as the United States. That was an astonishing move, given that in 1851 America was still 10 years away from the Civil War, which could have destroyed the nation in its early years. And also, for perhaps a half century afterward, the United States was nowhere near the kind of political, economic, and military hegemon depicted in the prophecy. In 1876, 25

years after that first identification, Lakota, Arapaho, and Northern Cheyenne tribes butchered General George Armstrong Custer’s 7th Cavalry Regiment of the United States Army, killing Custer in the process. And this was going to be the behemoth that would enforce “the mark of the beast” (Revelation 16:2) on the world?

Also, in 1979, when I first was introduced to this idea, there was another slight problem: the Soviet Union. The United States was still licking its wounds from Vietnam, which—despite 50,000 dead Americans and years of napalming and poisoning the place with Agent Orange—still (with Soviet help) went Communist. Communist uprisings unfurled in Cambodia and Laos. The Sandinistas, a bit closer to home, took power in Nicaragua. Fidel Castro was sending troops to Angola. Here was this tin-pot dictator, 90 miles off our shores, and we could do nothing about him because of the Soviet Union. In Moscow, Leonid Brezhnev and his semi-Stalinist thugs still had firm control over Eastern Europe, and when later that year the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, what did President Jimmy Carter do other than to boycott the Moscow Olympics? (“I’ll show those Russian bully boys!”)

In other words, in 1979 the scenario depicted in Revelation seemed impossible.

What—was the Soviet Union just going to disappear or something?

Today, especially since the collapse of the cold war and the end of the Soviet Union, no power comes even close to the United States, at least militarily. In 2020 the United States military spending matched the next-largest spenders (China, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, and Brazil) combined. Whatever the present obstacles, and many remain—the prophecy seems much more possible today than it did in 1851, or, for that matter, in 1979.

The Roaring Twenties

However, even with these changes, something else has remained unresolved in my mind. Despite America’s military and economic might,

the nation's institutions and political structures have always been so stable, so secure, and thus it's been hard to see how it could ever fulfill this prophetic role as a persecutor. In Watergate, for example, Richard Nixon, the most powerful man in the world, was ousted from office without a shot being fired or a tank in the streets. Nixon made a speech, and then flew away on a helicopter while Gerald Ford raised his hand and swore an oath. And that was that.

But that was then, and this is now—and who, now, in these roaring twenties, thinks such stability remains in this country? An advertisement for the December 2019 *Atlantic* read, “We don’t believe that the conditions in the United States today resemble those of 1850s America. But we worry that the ties that bind us are fraying at alarming speed—we are becoming contemptuous of each other in ways that are both dire and possibly irreversible.” Editor in chief Jeffrey Goldberg in an introduction to that *Atlantic* issue, with the cover article, titled “How to Stop a Civil War,” wrote that “the American experiment as we know it is not guaranteed to be eternal.”

The American experiment as we know it is not guaranteed to be eternal?

Seventh-day Adventists have been warning since 1851 about this happening (well, technically, not until 1863, when the church was founded). In 1885 Ellen G. White, one of the Adventist church founders, wrote that “our country shall repudiate every principle of its Constitution as a Protestant and republican government.”³

However hard that might have been to imagine in 1885, it's not that hard now, with rancor, division, and outright hatred being hurled across the political divide in ways that most Americans, including old ones like me (born in 1955), have never seen. Even during the incandescent days of the Vietnam protests, which came with the Weathermen's domestic bombing campaign, who remembers anyone, ever, talking about civil war? But now, one of the nation's most prestigious magazines all but predicts one (“How to Stop a Civil War”), and with a 2019 Rasmussen poll stating that 31 percent of probable U.S. voters surveyed believe “it's likely that the United States will experience a second civil war sometime in the next five years”—it's obvious that something radical has changed in this country.

And if things weren't bad enough in 2019, in 2020 we now throw in COVID, which—besides only exacerbating the rabid political and social divide already here—revealed just how quickly, and dramatically, the world, including the United States, can change. When COVID-19 hit, and Americans were told not

to leave their house unless necessary, and to wear a mask when they did, it felt as if we were living in an alternative reality, something out of a science fiction movie. Yet today we're getting used to alternative realities—a scary prospect. What else, over time, will we get used to?

A Wounded Beast

After Nixon resigned in Watergate, President Gerald Ford said that “our long national nightmare is over.” Ours, in contrast, has only begun. Whether on the left or the right, Democrat, Republican, or neither—who thinks that this is going to end well? We are watching our democracy, our democratic institutions themselves, start to disintegrate. If we can't trust the electoral process, why bother to vote, and if we don't vote—what's left? Who's going to govern us, and how? Because, one way or another, someone will.

Seventh-day Adventists, who are as divided politically among themselves, just as the rest of the nation is, don't know what's going to happen short-term. Long-term we believe that sooner or later America, the lamblike beast, is going to speak like a dragon (Revelation 13:11); that is, it's going to take on the role of a religious persecutor of worldwide dimensions. Talking about what we believe is the United States, the Bible says: “And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (Revelation 13:12).

I don't know any better now than I did in 1979 how, exactly, this will happen. However, unlike 1979, I for the first time can see that it could. I've realized, for decades, that in order for America to fulfill its prophetic major changes, bad changes will have to take place.

Well, they're taking place! Whether these changes will lead directly to the fulfillment of this unfortunate prophecy, I don't know. I know only that things have gotten surreal, and that institutions and processes that we once took for granted seem on the verge of collapse, even destruction, which might help explain why the lamblike beast will, one day, speak “as a dragon.” After all, a wounded animal, a wounded beast, can be a very unpredictable creature.

¹ William Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1982), p. v.

² Bible texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), vol. 5, p. 451.

Clifford Goldstein writes from Ooltewah, Tennessee.

Demonstrators march January 2015 in Strasbourg to honor the victims of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack.



Terror Trial in France



A Muslim refugee claimant who was working at the supermarket and hid a bunch of customers away from the mayhem was immediately awarded French citizenship for his actions.

BY REUEL S. AMDUR

As I write this in September 2020, a trial is underway in France for 14 people charged in connection with acts of Islamic terrorism in January 2015. At the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, Saïd Kouachi and his brother Chérif killed 12 people in a hail of bullets; cartoonists, editors, police, a janitor, a proofreader, and a visitor died violently. Eleven more were wounded. Police hunted the brothers down and killed them in a shootout. The day after the

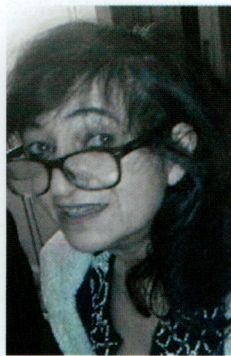
attack Amedy Coulibaly, another terrorist in the group, killed a policewoman. On January 9 he laid siege to a kosher supermarket, where he killed four before police shot him. A Muslim refugee claimant who was working at the supermarket and hid a bunch of customers away from the mayhem was immediately awarded French citizenship for his actions.

Charlie Hebdo, a left-wing atheist publication that regularly ridicules all religions, raised the ire of Muslim extremists by republishing

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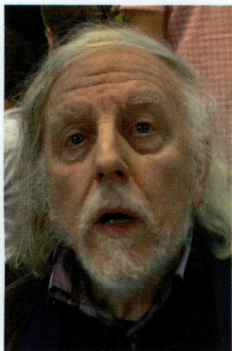
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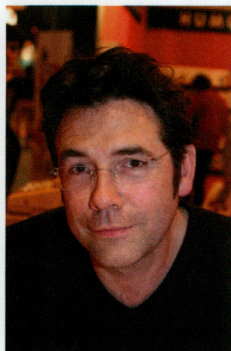
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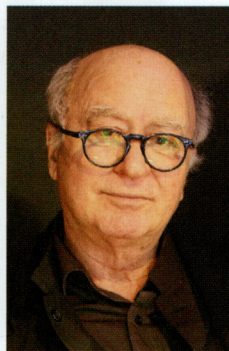
Stéphane Charbonnier



Philippe Honoré



Bernard Verlhac



Georges Wolinski

The journalists and cartoonists pictured above were among the twelve people killed in the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices.

Charlie Hebdo responded in that same issue by reminding readers of the persecution of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman falsely accused of insulting the prophet.

cartoons about Muhammad from the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. At the time of the original publication in the Danish paper, the cartoons created major outrage throughout the Muslim world, with riots and church burnings.

As the present trial started, *Charlie Hebdo* republished the cartoons once more. This republication led to a denunciation by the Pakistani government and mass protest demonstrations across Pakistan. *Charlie Hebdo* responded in that same issue by reminding readers of the persecution of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman falsely accused of insulting the prophet. She was able to flee Pakistan after eight years in prison and is now living in Canada. Muslims protesting the cartoons see them as blasphemous on two counts. First, in Islam, it is forbidden to make any image of the prophet. Second, the cartoons ridicule him.

In the West we understand blasphemy as showing disrespect for God. A secondary meaning, according to *Merriam-Webster*, is “irreverence toward something considered sacred or inviolable.” In Islam, insulting Muhammad is seen as blasphemy. Except for one small sect, the Alawites, Muslims accept that Muhammad was a man, not in any sense divine. Yet he is seen as of central importance as the one who received the Quran from the angel Gabriel, and his life and sayings attributed to him are studied and revered. There is some evidence that Muhammad was personally tolerant of some who ridiculed him during his lifetime, a lesson that not all of his followers have learned, it seems.

Muslims claim that Muhammad was not the author of the Quran but rather that he received it orally and then dictated it to be written down. He was illiterate. In it there are various passages favoring freedom of religious belief and respect for Jews and Christians, the people of the book. There are also passages that were composed when Medina was under threat, raising suspicion of them. Some Muslims have at all times favored the liberal passages, while others have taken the other path. While the rising Ottoman Empire embodied the more tolerant aspect of the faith, Muslim countries today increasingly tend to illustrate the darker side. In Canada, Ottawa Imam Dr. Zijad Delic, for example, actually looks not to Muslim countries but to Canada as the embodiment of Islamic values. He comes from Bosnia and studied for his doctorate in Canada, not from

the Arab world, Africa, Iran, Afghanistan, or the subcontinent. The operative influence here is culture, not just religion.

When it comes to Muhammad the man, it is hard for nonbelievers to see him as a tower of virtue in modern terms. He was undoubtedly a powerful unifier whose movement spread a certain modernism throughout a large area of the world, even if that modernism has stagnated. He was in some ways a socially progressive influence, but he was very much a man of his time. He lived from around 570 to 632.

Many of his contributions, progressive at that time, are not so today, even though at least some Muslims still try to apply some of these principles unchanged. For example, there is the provision that a woman inherits half of what a man inherits. Some Muslims continue to try to practice this rule even where, as in Canada, it is contrary to law. However, at the time it gave women a right that they previously did not have, and it was the expectation that men were entitled to the greater share because men had the duty to support, with no financial input from the wife. A woman had the right to keep whatever wealth she had entering a marriage and got to keep it all in case of divorce. A man was allowed up to four wives but only if he treated them equally. Again, this was a limitation that did not exist prior to Muhammad.

Rather than continuing on with this line of thought, let us instead think how Muhammad might stand up to progressive values today. Even in terms of his own standards, his behavior was less than exemplary. In her book *Islam* Karen Armstrong excuses his multiplicity of wives as a way of making bonding with various tribes and interests. It is true that Alexander the Great, for example, married the local princess in one place after another during his conquests. In European history the marriages of royals were very often arranged as ways of strengthening ties between realms. However, contrary to the Quranic prescription, Muhammad had one wife who was clearly his favorite: Aisha. While Armstrong tries to justify his plurality of wives for reasons of state and argues against

any licentious motivation, the prophet also had several concubines, some of whom were war booty slaves.

That brings us to another concern, that of slavery. Muhammad owned slaves, even though he emancipated and enlisted some of them in his body of followers. And not only did he own them. During trying times when Medina was under threat from hostile forces from Mecca, a Jewish tribe that consorted with the Meccan forces was severely punished. All the men were executed, and the women and children were sold into slavery.

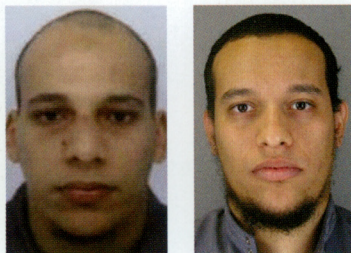
The lack of his opposition to slavery had its consequences in the history of the slave trade. Muslim Arabs and Muslim Africans captured other Africans to sell them to the slavers who transported them on to the New World.

Muhammad was also for a time a pirate of the desert. His forces attacked and robbed passing caravans.

These are general facts of history, which may cause discomfort to some. But they are what they are. It does not do much good to deny them or to rudely repeat them to disparage a faith. We may sympathize with the discomfort and even agony some Muslims feel when their founder is mocked and even blasphemed. Yet freedom of expression must be

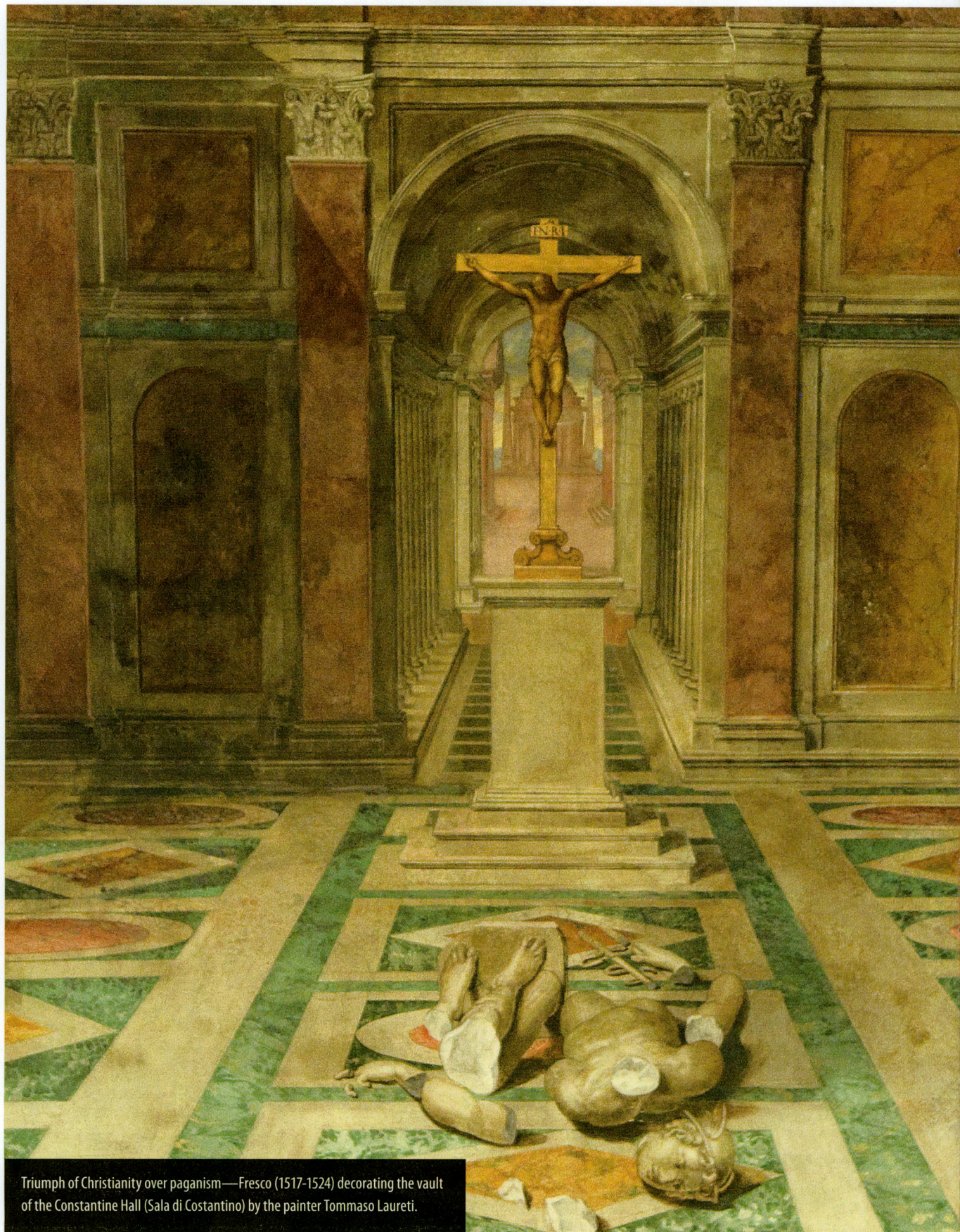
defended. When *Charlie Hebdo* published salacious pieces about the Holy Trinity and about rabbis, neither Jews nor Christians held massive demonstrations against the magazine, nor did we attack their offices and kill their journalists.

As with freedom of speech, religious freedom must be defended at the margins when others offend our sensibility. It is the most objectionable speech that must be defended, for no one cares about mild speech. While we may not admire those who offend religion, if, in the name of religion, we fail to protect their right, our faith may come under prohibition, or we may persecute those whose faith we find offensive. Conscience and conviction in all things of faith: charity and forgiveness of offense will disarm the unbeliever.



The primary suspects, Chérif and Saïd Kouachi, were killed in a shootout with police after a massive manhunt.

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



Triumph of Christianity over paganism—Fresco (1517-1524) decorating the vault of the Constantine Hall (Sala di Costantino) by the painter Tommaso Laureti.



Was Medieval Christendom Christian?

Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World

by Tom Holland, Basic Books, 2019. 624 Pages.

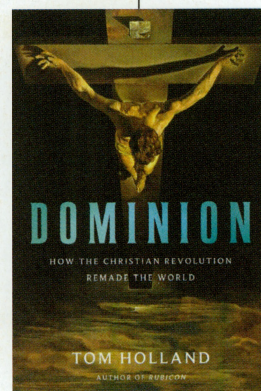
A #1 Christian church history book on Amazon.

The only recorded encounter of Jesus with Greeks was shortly before His crucifixion. As John 12:20, 21 tells us, some Greeks asked through Philip to see Jesus. We are not told why or what they asked Him, but verses 23-25 says, “Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds’” (NIV)¹ and added in verses 31, 32: “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (NIV). Commenting in verse 33, John said, “He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die” (NIV), the death on the cross.

Certainly the Greeks didn’t understand Jesus’ response, because neither did His Jewish audience nor His disciples, who understood only after the Resurrection, and only through illumination by the Holy Spirit. As the apostle Paul discovered, Jesus’ death on the cross, that “emblem of suffering and shame” at the heart of the gospel, was “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks” (1 Corinthians 1:23, NIV).

And yet paradoxically this Evangelion, the gospel of “the crucified God,” so incomprehensible to Greek reason and repugnant to Jewish monotheism—indeed, whose very absurdity

A BOOK REVIEW
BY ELIJAH
MVUNDURA



seemed designed to provoke universal rejection—mastered the Roman Empire and effected, in Nietzsche’s famous phrase, the greatest transvaluation of values in world history. The story of this transvaluation has been told many times; but Tom Holland retells it in *Dominion*, and, as many reviewers have said, very interestingly, showing how all reform movements in Western history up to the Me Too movement, are a flowering of the moral revolution seeded by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

What makes Holland’s retelling so interesting is that he focuses on key figures from antiquity to our modern present who impressed Christian values on the world. And the key figure in the transmission is Paul. “By preaching the primacy of love” in social relations and God’s partiality for “the low and despised in the world,” and equality of all in Christ, he upturned the Roman hierarchy, and set Christianity on its world-transforming career. Holland graphically describes the gross immoralities and cruel oppression of the Roman Empire, to show the deep-seated cultural practices and forces that Christianity upturned. Then Augustine could say in the fourth century, that “all are astonished to see the entire human race converging on the Crucified One, from emperors down to beggars.”

But in Part II: Christendom, Holland notes that “the original, unsettling radicalism of Paul’s own message had been diluted” by social and political realities, enabling construction of the foundation of modern civilization. Thus, when the Roman Empire collapsed in the West; bishops in many cities (e.g., Gregory the Great in Rome) and clerics in monasteries filled the political vacuum. Author Holland rushes through this crucial foundational period and covers three centuries from 754 to 1076 (the Dark Ages) in 20 pages. Yet all the corruptions and tensions of medieval Christendom, which increased in scope and intensity until they sparked the Protestant Reformation, giving birth to our modern world, were sown during the Dark Ages.

Precisely it was during the Dark Ages that clerics replaced pagan elites at the top of the Roman hierarchy, that the church fully inherited the Roman legal-administrative-coercive apparatus and legitimized it with the famous forgeries—the Donation of Constantine and False Decretals; that the church absorbed pagan rituals, folklores, and magic, *radically changing Christian faith and life*. Holland overlooks all these radical changes; yet they beg the question

as to whether medieval society was Christian. As some medievalists have contended, medieval texts show that outside of the minuscule clerical elite, the great mass of medieval folk “were at best only superficially Christianized; Christian faith and practice first took hold among the European masses during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.”²

To be sure, the conclusion that medieval society was “superficially Christian” was first reached by some medieval Christians, the so-called heretics. Indeed, as Holland himself noted: heretics’ “charge . . . was customarily the same: that unworthy priests . . . were polluted, tarnished, corrupted; *that they were not truly Christian*” (italics supplied). Yet oblivious to this theologically correct indictment, Holland writes, from the viewpoint of medieval clerics that “heresy had to be rooted out.” He even adopts their demonizing language: “The great serpent of heresy . . . had begun to shake its coils again.” But theologically this is wrong, and “historically it is evidently false,” as R. I. Moore showed in *The Origins of European Dissent*.³

Orthodoxy has never reigned unchallenged. Reproof, protest, dissent, criticism, is inscribed in the DNA of biblical faith. The very charges of being unworthy divine representatives, of depravity and hypocrisy that heretics leveled at medieval clerics, the prophets and Jesus leveled at the religious leaders of their day. As Jesus Himself said in Mark 7:6-8: “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions” (NIV).

This charge of letting go of *God’s commandments* and *holding to human traditions* must also be directed at the medieval Papacy. Because, as Moore rightly noted in *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, “those who denied the necessity of infant baptism, of the sanctification of matrimony, intercession for souls in purgatory, of regular attendance at mass and confession to priests, were not rebelling against ancestral patterns of faith and practice. Whatever the theology of the matter, these were innovations in the daily life of the faithful that throughout the period [eleventh century], were gradually being pressed upon the priesthood and its flocks by the . . . papacy.”²⁴

Holland doesn’t specifically mention these religious innovations, but notes that “Gregory VII’s ambitions for the papacy were of a

All the corruptions and tensions of medieval Christendom, which increased in scope and intensity until they sparked the Protestant Reformation, giving birth to our modern world, were sown during the Dark Ages.



Pope Gregory VII

“A supreme paradox: that the church, by rendering itself free of the secular, had itself become a state. And a very novel kind of state.”

momentously original order. [Instead of deferring to canons of church councils] . . . he was more than ready to introduce innovations of his own.” By missing the religious innovations, Holland missed the *real* significance of papal innovations: that they “let go the commandments of God” and the gospel. As such, the charges of heresy actually apply to the Papacy. After all, the doctrines of those condemned of heresy, as Moore noted, “amounted to a simple literal adherence to the precepts of the New Testament, especially the Gospels and Apostles, which made them sceptical of some of the teaching and claims of the church.”⁵

And the claims that Gregory VII made in *Dictatus Papae* are radical and heretical. To cite only four: “all princes shall kiss the feet of the Pope alone”—*angels refused human homage* (Revelation 19:10). “His name alone [the pope] shall be spoken in the churches”—*displaced Jesus*. That he can “depose emperors”—*only God can depose or set up kings* (Daniel 2:21), and that “the Roman Church has never erred. Nor will it err, to all eternity”—*Paul’s pastoral letters and the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation shows that the church errs*. To say otherwise is to arrogate an attribute—*infallibility*—exclusive to God. Indeed, the universal supremacy in religion and in politics claimed by the *Dictatus Papae*, no king, priest, prophet, or apostle ever claimed them in the Bible. It belongs to God alone.

Holland calls Gregory VII a reformer, who set the West “upon a distinctive course of its own” by freeing the church from the control of the Empire, which resulted in “the distinction between *religio* and the *saeculum*, between the sacred and profane.” Evidentially this is false. History clearly shows that the aim of the medieval Papacy was supremacy in both *religio* and the *saeculum*. As Miri Rubin observed, papal reforms from the eleventh century with the Eucharist at the center were vigorously advanced at “a time when popes were attempting to enforce claims of primacy and universality, against regional political powers and local liturgical forms.”⁶ And the result was an all-embracing sacramental system that mixed *religio* and the *saeculum*, the sacred and the profane, the natural and the supernatural, in other words, an *enchanted universe*.

Holland uncritically acclaims the “miracles” and rituals that buttressed papal supremacy and generated this *enchanted universe*. But from a biblical standpoint an *enchanted universe* is a *deformation*. “Christ did not enchant men,”

as W. H. Auden said, "He demanded that they believe in Him."⁷ And this entailed breaking off from the realm of appearances. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed," said Jesus in John 20:29, NIV. Indeed, as a religion of the book, Christianity is intrinsically designed to effect a break with the realm of appearances. Reading is a solitary activity. It alienates, detaches one from the external world, transports one into the world within the book. In the case of the Bible, read, believed, and lived, it transports one inwardly or spiritually into the "body of Christ"; radically changes one's life in relation to the world so that one is in the world, but "not of the world" (John 17:16, NIV).

In purely structural terms being "not of the world" or being "in Christ" (Romans 8:1, NIV) implies distinctions between the sacred and the profane, the natural and the supernatural, the religious and the political, for "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19, NIV), "that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world" (Revelation 12:9, KJV). And the crux of the distinctions is to protect from deception, from confusing Satan, "the prince of this world" (John 16:11, NIV), with the true God. "For Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14, NIV).

And against Satan's deceptions and masquerades, as Jesus showed in the three temptations, protection is in the Word of God. But in another major *deformation*, medieval Christendom shifted protection from the Word of God to the priest's ritual action: the devil was said to be allergic to holy water, was repelled by the sign of the cross. Embellished in art, drama, and liturgy, this ritualization produced an image of the devil, at once comical and monstrous. In an irony that has escaped notice, this ritualization went hand in hand with demonization of Jews and heretics, that they were in a confederacy with the devil to destroy Christian society by every diabolical means, and therefore they had to be exterminated.

And the exterminators, or "warrior pilgrims," as Holland nonchalantly called them, were "well-suited to the ambitions of the Papacy," he added in a section subtitled "A Great and Holy War." But he curiously failed to notice that in the New Testament: *the war between good and evil, Christ and Satan is spiritual, fought in the heart*. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against . . . spiritual forces of evil" (Ephesians 6:12, NIV). That's why, "though we live in the world, we do not

wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world" (2 Corinthians 10:3, NIV). In other words, to fight with "weapons of the world" against "flesh and blood" is a diabolical *deformation* of the gospel. Such a war is neither holy nor Christian. "Strictly speaking, this comes under . . . paganism, for since the gospel never sets up any national religion, holy war is impossible among Christians," as Rousseau rightly noted.⁸

Indeed, the militarism of the medieval papacy is a Roman legacy. Thomas Hobbes' famous remark "that the Papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof" was not a mere gibe. After all, the pope assumed the title of the Roman high priest: Pontifex Maximus. And Holland himself notes that the papal "court, in an echo of the building where the Roman Senate had once met, was known as the 'Curia.' Yet the pope was no Caesar," he says. True. But in a direct negation of Christ's Word (Matthew 22:21) the bishop of Rome joined in the Papacy the things of Caesar and the things of God. Yet he still called himself the "Vicar of Christ," even as he deformed the Church, the "body of Christ," by corrupting it with militarism and political fanaticism.

Indeed, as Holland himself noted: "the church that had emerged from the Gregorian *reformatio* was . . . an institution of a kind never before witnessed." It was, he wrote, "a supreme paradox: that the church, by rendering itself free of the secular, had itself become a state. And a very novel kind of state." But this novelty notwithstanding, Holland ironically traced it "back to . . . Paul . . . the surest basis for the papacy's claim to a universal authority," and even asserts, "The order defined by the Roman church was one that consciously set itself against primordial customs rooted in the sump of paganism." But again, historically this is evidently false. Holland should have consulted the work of Peter Brown and Ramsay MacMullen, distinguished historians of late antiquity. About paganism they conclusively showed that "the triumph of the church was not one of obliteration but of widening embrace and assimilation."¹⁰

This embrace and assimilation of pagan elements—Greek, Roman, and Germanic—is of vital importance, because, as Jean Seznec showed, it ensured "the survival of the pagan gods,"¹¹ a survival that Nietzsche also noted and gleefully celebrated, as "so diabolically divine" because "Christianity would thereby have been *abolished!*" but then, he dolefully

“The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority.”

added, “Luther went to Rome.”¹² Holland cites Luther’s polemic that the Roman church “had seduced Christians into paganism and idolatry.” But he overlooks Luther’s “theology of the cross,” a curious oversight indeed, given that the front jacket cover of *Dominion* has an imposing image of Christ on the cross, and begins with a graphic description of crucifixion as a method of execution.

But after that the cross disappears from *Dominion*. Holland never explains precisely how it transformed the world. And it’s because he explains everything materialistically, in terms of concrete events, ideas, or unique individuals. The agency of the Holy Spirit, so central in New Testament Christianity, is unnoticed. Had he noticed, *Dominion* would have been a very different book. For it was through the Holy Spirit that the early Christians experienced the resurrected Christ and imitated His humility and self-sacrificing love epitomized by His death on the cross. Again, it’s through the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit that the martyrs endured persecution and death under the Roman Empire. “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12, NIV).

If Holland had told the Christian revolution from the perspective of the experience of the cross, it would have been from the martyrs through the heretics to Luther’s “theology of the cross,” instead of through Constantine, bishop of Rome, to medieval Papacy. To be sure, Jesus Himself drew a scarlet line “from the blood of [righteous] Abel to the blood of Zechariah” (Luke 11:51, NIV), and predicted in John 16:2 that a “time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God” (NIV), and warned, “They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:15, 16, NIV). And the fruit of the medieval popes—unbridled avarice, venality, power politics, immorality, burning heretics, antisemitism, the Crusades, the Inquisition, magical religion—fits the bill of the “ferocious wolves” predicted by Jesus.

“The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority.”¹³ “A ‘truth’ that must use violence to secure its existence cannot be truth. Rather the truth that moves the sun and the stars is that which is so sure of its power that it refuses to compel . . . by force. Rather it relies on the slow, hard,

and seemingly unrewarding work of witness, a witness which it trusts to prevail even in a fragmented and violent world.”¹⁴

This witness, encapsulated in the “theology of the cross,” and expressed in the self-accusing confession “I am a sinner” and commitment to fight evil in one’s life, is the crux of the Christian moral revolution. Precisely by turning to self the accusing finger that had been pointed at another, confession engendered what the theologian Krister Stendahl called “the introspective conscience of the West,” and thus shattered the “scapegoat mechanism,” the primordial, universal human practice to make oneself appear good by falsely accusing others. It was a radical departure from “the old path that the wicked have trod” (Job 22:15, NIV)—so radical that Paul said it meant death and a new life. “For we know that our old self was crucified with [Christ] (Romans 6:6, NIV). “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20, NIV).

People kill themselves in many ways, but never by crucifixion. That’s done by another. “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:6, NIV). Spiritually, the impossibility of crucifying oneself and producing a new life; or, put differently, the ability of *God alone* to do it is what is expressed in the Protestant credo of *sola gratia*, by grace alone. It’s precisely the *sola*, the alone, that raised the ire of the medieval Papacy, because it excluded all the sacramental-liturgical and Platonic-Aristotelian additions to the gospel upon which its power and authority was based. In short, the ire was provoked by politics.

Indeed, politics is the clue to the Counter-Reformation and the modern Papacy. “Whatever the doctrinal differences the structural one remains the most intractable. As before Luther, Rome still plays politics and claims secular and spiritual dominance . . . a church that is a state and a state that is a church,” as this magazine’s editor has often noted.¹⁵ This unchristian amalgam, we must recall, was the specific target of Voltaire’s rallying cry *Ecrasez l’infame* (crush the infamy); and also of the anticlericalism, radical atheism, and dechristianization of the French Revolution, which set the modern world against Christianity, even as it is, in Holland’s words, “still utterly saturated by Christian concepts and assumptions.”

This paradox of our modern world—Christian roots and yet a secular and unchristian culture—forms the last part of *Dominion*. Equality, freedom, love, social justice, human

dignity, concern for victims and the weak—all these values that have animated modern revolutions and reform movements are a flowering of the gospel, as Holland rightly showed. But they trust human power and reason to bring about change and perfection, just as medieval Christendom trusted in sacraments. That’s why they have all failed, and catastrophically. For as Jesus said: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, NIV).

This “nothing,” which requires faith alone, because Jesus did everything on the cross, is very offensive to human pride. Indeed, even those who first accepted the gospel were vexed by “the offense of the cross” (Galatians 5:11, NIV). They shrunk from it, sought to temper the abject self-denial and humility it demanded. In a way the history of Christianity is a history of tempering, diluting, or outright eliminating “the offense of the cross.” Here Protestantism is just as guilty as Catholicism. Elimination of the “offense of the cross” is what enabled Christian values and ideas to become cultural artifacts in the building of Western civilization.

But a Christianity without the “offense of the cross” isn’t Christian. One wonders how modern Christianity would react to another recovery of the “theology of the cross”!

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² John Van Engen, “The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (June 1986): 521.

³ R. I. Moore, *The Origins of European Dissent* (Basel, Switzerland: Blackwell Publishers, 1985), p. 3.

⁴ R. I. Moore, *The Formation of Persecuting Society* (Basel, Switzerland: Blackwell Publishers, 1987), p. 71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 12.

⁷ W. H. Auden, *A Certain World: A Commonplace Book* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), p. 150.

⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, ed. Maurice Cranston (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 185.

⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962), p. 543.

¹⁰ Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth and Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 159.

¹¹ Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* (Princeton University Press, 1981).

¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/Antichrist*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 194, 197.

¹³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898, 1940), p. 22.

¹⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (University of Notre Dame, 1983), p. 15.

¹⁵ Lincoln E. Steed, “Future Shock,” *Liberty*, November/December 2017, p. 2.

Keep the Faith, Liberty!

A retrospective:

Nearly two decades ago, on September 11, 2001, the world changed forever. In November of 2020 democracy in the United States underwent a similar shock. This was my 9/11 editorial. It seems an apt bookend.

Lincoln Steed, Editor.



September 11, 2001: a great horror is visited upon the United States and the entire civilized world. We watched it blossom into wicked flame high in a cloudless sky and then collapse in a moaning menace to life as we knew it. It replays itself on television screens and in millions of minds. Brave flags fly in the searing winds of change. But where are we bound?

I returned home that evening, numbed by the enormity of what I had witnessed, but anxious that Christopher, my 3-year-old son, should not have to look into such a dark pit. Christopher does not watch television at all, other than an occasional carefully screened cartoon at bathtime. I knew that my wife had turned the set on briefly as the tragedy unfolded, but she said he was playing by himself and seemed not to be watching. When I came home the first thing he said was “Daddy, there’s been big bombs in buildings!” He knew. I made a mild reply, and we went on to the usual play before bedtime.

Sunday, September 16, we attended the annual Sharpsburg festival, held at the little town in the middle of the Antietam battlefield park—site of the bloodiest battle of the Civil War. On the way there, as we paused at a traffic light, Christopher suddenly said, “I want to talk to that man.” From his booster seat perch he buttoned the window down and leaned out toward the pickup parked next to us. “Excuse me, sir,” he trilled in childish tones. The man looked over at him.

“There’s been bombs, fires in buildings . . .,” said Christopher with his usual animation. The man nodded. There was a pause. Then Christopher said, “Are you sad?” It was more of a statement than a question. “Yes, I’m very sad,” said the man.

On our cover this issue is a sad-eyed Lady Liberty. Yes, we have had our shocks and sorrows before: the anguish of civil war, a Great Depression, presidents assassinated, citizens and soldiers held hostage, murdered and defiled by howling mobs. But the scale of this latest act, the symbolism of the targets and the realization that we have been violated in our own home, has been devastating. And while we weep





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for the lost and their families, so much of the grief is for ourselves. The priest poet Gerald Manley Hopkins wrote in his 1918 poem to a young child tearful at the loss of foliage in the fall, "It is Margaret you mourn for."

And in the aftermath so much rage and blame setting. One Christian leader appeared on national television and said that "God is angry with America. We must put religion back into our government." Let us not fall for that version of God. It is too reminiscent of the mindset that produced the terrorists and the regimes that support them. Jesus Himself, when asked to comment on those who had recently died in the fall of a tower in Siloam, asked, "Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you," he assured them (Luke 13:5, ESV),* while reminding them that all should repent of their selfish ways and follow Him.

In a fine opinion piece written days after the terrorist acts, Chuck Colson quoted from this passage, calling it a "hard saying" of Jesus. But it is not problematical at all in context. Jesus was discussing the coming of His kingdom and the need to prepare. He dismissed the idea of such incidents as signs of God's personal malice. But He did enjoin His listeners to be sensitive to the times. And He did promise security amid crisis. Earlier, during the same teaching session, He said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Since I travel hours each day to get to work, I listen a lot to C-Span and other programs that allow call-in opinions. In the aftermath of the attacks, caller after caller said they would willingly give away freedoms to gain security. Curiously, it was an Arab who has lived most of his life here who called in and tried to call a halt to such talk. "It is an oxymoron to give up freedom to protect freedom," he reminded. But the howls for control and intrusion rise with each passing day.

The Founders could scarcely have imagined the technological colossus targeted by the terrorists. But we sell short the experience of those who lived to see the upheavals of the French Revolution

and their grasp on the essential nature of freedom if we think liberty can be bargained away in a devil's pact to "protect" it.

I think of Thomas Jefferson's powerful reminder given during his First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1801. He pointed to freedom of the press and freedom of persons under the protection of habeas corpus, trial by juries. "These principles," he maintained, "form the bright constellation which has gone before us, and guided our steps through an age of revolution . . . and should we wander from them in moments of error or alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty, and safety."

Yes, this surely qualifies as a "moment of alarm."

The Sharpsburg festival next to the silent sentinels of the Antietam conflict and the civil war trauma was a heart-warming few hours amid the prevailing sorrow. It was a step back into the basic goodness and uncomplicated love of freedom that characterizes America. Street stalls sold funnel cakes and popcorn, freshly ground wheat and various home crafts. Many people had dressed up in homespun "finery" of another era. Folk bands played aching songs of immigrants and their search for freedom.

It was a scene festooned with flags, children and bantering small talk. But no moment was more revealing than when "Abraham Lincoln" stood up and presented the Gettysburg Address—with a few modifications to apply it to the trial of the moment. My spine tingled to hear again of "a new nation, conceived in Liberty." And even without adjustments, when Lincoln said, "Now we are . . . testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure," I heard our cry for help. I can only pray that "this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

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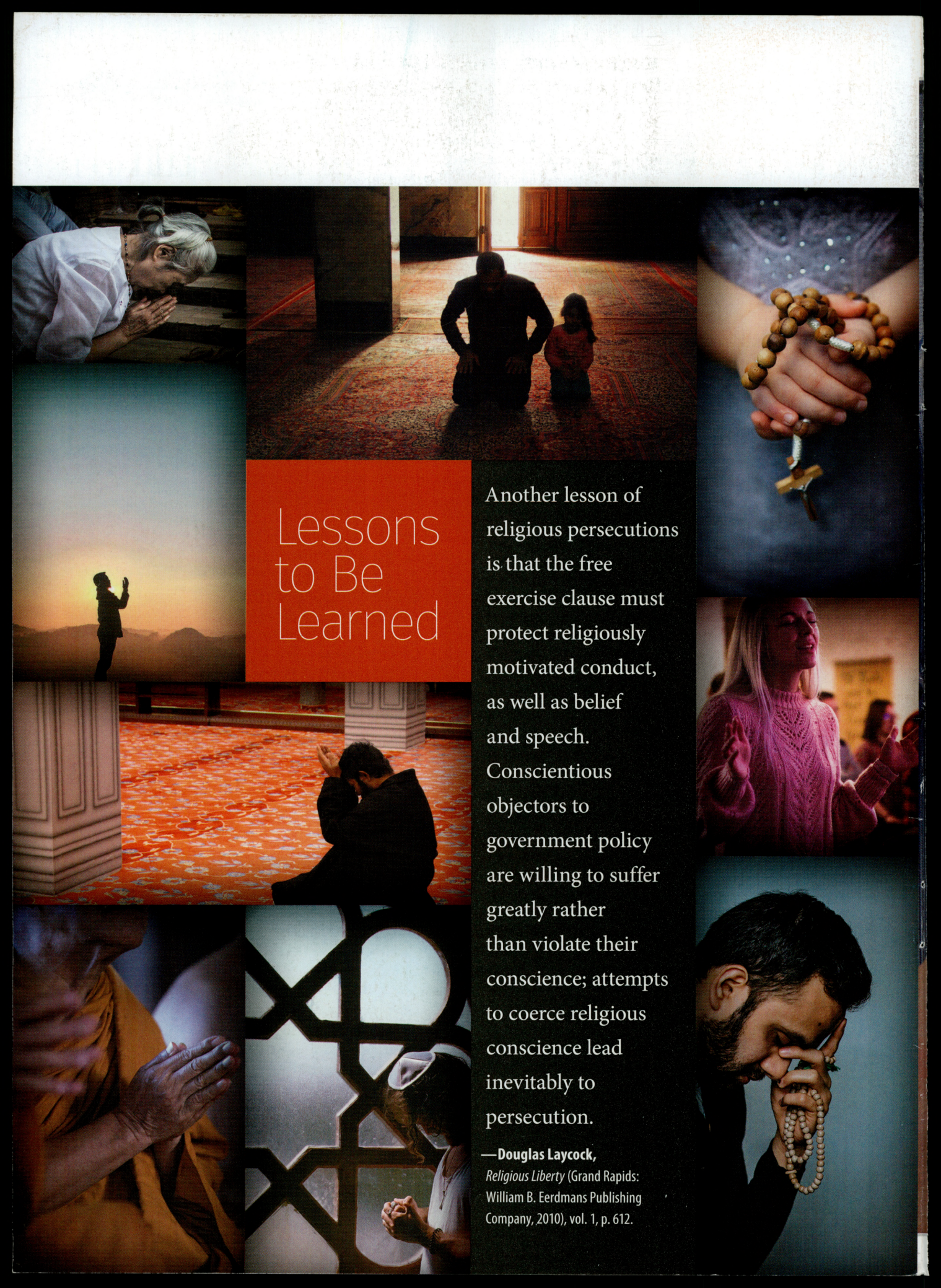
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Lessons to Be Learned

Another lesson of religious persecutions is that the free exercise clause must protect religiously motivated conduct, as well as belief and speech. Conscientious objectors to government policy are willing to suffer greatly rather than violate their conscience; attempts to coerce religious conscience lead inevitably to persecution.

—**Douglas Laycock**,
Religious Liberty (Grand Rapids:
William B. Eerdmans Publishing
Company, 2010), vol. 1, p. 612.