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The Story the National
Media Couldn't Get

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Liberty is a publication of the
Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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the North American Division of
Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old
Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD
20904-6600. Address corrections
only: Liberty, 55 West Oak Ridge
Drive, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740.
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Printed bimonthly by the Review and
Herald Publishing Assn., 55 West
Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, MD
21740. Subscription price: U.S.
\$6.95 per year. Single copy: U.S.
\$1.50. Price may vary where national
currencies differ.
Vol. 88, No. 4, July/August, 1993.
Postmaster: Address correction
requested.

From The Editor

Sacrificing To Babalu Aye: It's Constitutional

Striking down one of the most blatant violations of free exercise of religion in decades, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that four Hialeah laws banning animal sacrifice were "enacted by officials who did not understand, failed to perceive, or chose to ignore that their official actions violated the nation's essential commitment to religious freedom."

Writing for the majority, Justice Kennedy said that the ban on the ritual slaughter of chickens, lambs, and goats was unfairly "underinclusive," specifically targeting the Santeria religion—an Afro-Caribbean sect that ritually sacrifices animals—while allowing animals to be killed for almost any other reason (see March-April *Liberty*). Kennedy said that some of the laws were "gerrymandered" with care to proscribe religious killings of animals by Santeria church members but to exclude almost all other killings."

Hialeah was the Supreme Court's first Free Exercise case since its infamous *Smith* ruling, in which the Court—overturning years of precedence—made it easier for governments to maintain laws that might "incidentally"

burden the free exercise of religion as long as those laws were "neutral, and generally applicable." For years prior to *Smith*, a facially neutral law that infringed upon the free exercise of a religion was, ideally, required to undergo strict scrutiny to determine whether the state had an important reason for enacting the law, and to determine if the law itself was the least restrictive means of achieving



the state's goals. If not, the law would be unconstitutional. Only when they were deemed not neutral nor generally applicable would they face this strict scrutiny.

Though some hoped that the High Court would use the *Hialeah* case to rework *Smith*, that didn't happen. If anything, it helped affirm *Smith*, because *Smith* did say that laws which sought to ban acts "only when they are engaged in for religious reasons" would be unconstitutional, and the Court agreed that the *Hialeah* ordinances were directed only at a religious practice. Because the ordinances, wrote Kennedy,

were "not neutral, but have as their object the suppression of Santeria's central element, animal sacrifice," they had to face strict scrutiny. The High Court found that the city's concerns about sanitation, cruelty to animals, and emotional injury to children didn't overbalance the right of the free exercise of religion. "The ordinances cannot withstand the strict scrutiny that is required upon their failure to meet the *Smith* standard."

Despite the unanimous opinion, three justices expressed concern about *Smith*. Wrote Justice Blackmun (Justice O'Connor signed on): "Thus, while I agree with the result the Court reaches in this case, I arrive at that result by a different route." For Blackmun, when the state enacts a law that either "intentionally or unintentionally places a burden on Free Exercise," it must face strict scrutiny, the view that had been the prevailing free exercise jurisprudence before *Smith*. Justice Souter, too, wanted *Smith* to be reexamined. "A law that is religion neutral on its face or in its purpose," he wrote separately, "may lack neutrality in its effects by forbidding something that religion requires or requiring something that religion forbids."

Despite the hopes of some, *Hialeah* wasn't the case to

revisit *Smith*. Laws as outrageously geared to the suppression of a religious practice as Hialeah's didn't enter into the area where *Smith* has aroused controversy. Unfortunately, with only three of nine justices expressing reservations, it looks—at least as far as the Supreme Court is concerned—as if *Smith* is here to stay. The only hope is that the legislative branch of government will enact the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, designed to reinstate the compelling state interest test for any law that infringes upon the free exercise rights of Americans.—C.G.

From Our Readers

Gunned Down: The Inescapable Logic of Dr. David Gunn's Murder

By Kevin D. Paulson

A defining moment for America's anti-abortion movement came on March 10, 1993, when Michael Frederick Griffin fired three shots into the back of David Gunn, an abortion clinic physician in Pensacola, Florida.

Pro-life leaders expressed qualified regret. Said Don Treshman, national director of Rescue America: "While Gunn's death is unfortunate, it's also true that quite a number of babies' lives will be saved." Operation Rescue's Randall Terry called the

shooting an "inappropriate repulsive act" and said that he grieved for Gunn's family, as he did for the thousands of children that Gunn had murdered. National Right to Life Committee chair Wanda Franz denounced the violence against Gunn, as she does the "violence of abortion that had killed 30 million unborn children in the last 20 years."

There is more than ambivalence in these statements; they contain the inevitability of more deaths, indeed, of a holocaust. For years anti-abortion leaders have insisted that abortion represents the mass murder of helpless babies. Dr. Bernard Nathanson—who in his film *The Silent Scream* compared abortion to the Holocaust—admitted to having performed 60,000 abortions. If no

difference exists between what happens in an abortion clinic and the smashing of a 6-month-old baby's head against a wall at Auschwitz, why condemn the death of Dr. Gunn? Why *stop* with Dr. Gunn?

The logic is irrefutable. And deadly.

Anti-abortionists could rightly point out that the murder at Auschwitz wasn't stopped by peaceful sit-ins or prayer vigils outside its barbed-wire fences. It took the armed forces of an enraged world to obliterate the Nazi horror. However appropriate nonviolence may be as a method of confronting social ills, it wouldn't have been effective against Hitler. And America's current legal system, from the perspective of the pro-lifers, isn't doing

much better against today's abortion holocaust.

Now, with Bill Clinton in as president and Byron White soon to be out as a Supreme Court justice, the likelihood of abortion being outlawed has been sharply diminished. With the White House and Congress in liberal hands, with the probable passage of the Freedom of Choice Act and the lifting of the ban on the French abortion pill RU-486, anti-abortionist frustration could lead to more desperate measures.

Historically, violence has brought many credible causes to their defining moment. Liberals like Hubert Humphrey and labor leaders like George Meany wisely responded by expelling Communists from their crusades. William F. Buckley, Jr., did the same for conservatism when he spoke out against anti-Semitism and the John Birch Society. And certainly Martin Luther King, Jr., placed the civil rights movement on unassailably high moral ground through his consistent condemnation of violence. "In recent times," said a *U.S. News and World Report* editorial (March 22, 1993), "the enduring movements in America prospered because they made quite clear what their leaders would not countenance."

Dr. Gunn's murder has brought the anti-abortion movement to its defining moment. For however

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.

"unfortunate" Michael Griffin's act was, it was the logical and inevitable result of holocaust rhetoric. The movement faces two choices. It can continue its rhetoric and express its further qualified "regrets" as blood from more Dr. Gunns splatters sidewalks outside abortion clinics—an anomalous situation indeed for a movement that calls itself "pro-life." Or as Humphrey and Meany and Buckley and King did, pro-life leaders can step from the bloodstained Pensacola sidewalk onto higher moral ground.

The example of a frustrated religious leader of another era is instructive. Confronted with a moral dilemma involving civil unrest and the potential death of many, he said, "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." Translate that era's holocaust language into the vernacular and you get: "In other words, if killing one clinic doctor will save countless lives . . ."

That incident, too, was a defining moment.

The victim of its rhetoric was Jesus Christ.

Kevin D. Paulson is a freelance writer living in Redlands, California.

"The Working Model Doesn't Work"

Richard Utt tackled a difficult subject in this article (March-April). Even though some of the wording was not conversational language, I managed to get the message!

I am a secretary and poet, and wanted to send my more *simplified* version of creation vs. evolution.

I believe the Bible, indeed I do—

every line and precept all the way thru.

If you want to know God's will, my friend,

just start with creation and go to "The End."

It is so reassuring—as the story unfolds,

and the more I study, the clearer it grows—

to know I was created and part of a plan,

with no genes from apes and wholly God's (wo) man!

PAULINE PIERSON
Collegedale, Tennessee

The Evolution-Creation Controversy

Your March-April issue had some fascinating articles on the evolution-creation controversy. My curiosity was aroused when I heard my 78-year-old grandfather chuckling as he read it. I asked him what he found so humorous and he enlightened me with the following story.

Sixty years ago when he was a freshman in college this same controversy was raging. He was at that time residing with his grandmother near the

University of California in Berkeley. His grandmother was born the same year that Darwin's *Origin of Species* was first published and my grandfather knew that she had grown to maturity during the period when the evolutionary theory was in its infancy. He discussed the theory at length with her and she wasted no time in directing his thoughts into the correct channel. By irrefutable logic she convinced him that humans had not descended from apes by a long evolutionary process. She had an unshakable faith that the Holy Bible was God's Word and that the human race together with the universe had been created, according to meticulous calculations, in the year 4004 B.C. She was certain that Darwin had misinterpreted the evidence he had observed in nature. There was just no question in her mind that man had been created in the image of God approximately 6,000 years ago.

What amused my grandfather in reading your magazine was that the evolution-creation controversy has not abated after all these decades. For him the controversy was conclusively resolved 60 years ago. He has enjoyed a long and productive life because his mind has not been burdened with the atheistic baggage of the evolutionary theory.

"The Puzzle of the Petrified Trees" captivated me. The logic of the creationist theory expounded therein was impressive and confirms my bedrock faith in an omnipotent Creator.

JEANNETTE URRY
Hayward, California

The Principal Fallacy in the Creationist Argument

Please urge Richard Utt not to drink cyanide, hemlock, or whatever. We liberals (I am proud to wear that label) do not believe in capital punishment, even self-imposed, for those who disagree with us, even if they wheel out tired old fallacies for the hundredth time. Words like "apostate," "heretic," "infidel," and "traitor" do not come easily to our lips, as they seem to with Christian, Jewish, or Islamic fundamentalists. Besides, if Mr. Utt were to kill himself, at least two others would rise to take his place.

The principal fallacy in his creationist argument is a misunderstanding of the difference between conclusions arrived at by scientific inquiry, and those confirmed by blind faith in a particular sectarian interpretation of Talmud and Torah, or of the Old and New Testament, or of the Koran. When a scientist delivers a paper or thesis, he or she expects to defend it. The closest we can come to truth

WIZARD of ID



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is in the crucible of controversy.

The Fundamentalist misunderstands the nature of this controversy and uses it to argue against the scientific method, particularly as it inquires into subjects that he regards as permanently settled on sacred and received authority. How can there be anything to biological and geological science when its practitioners disagree so vehemently among themselves? To attack well-settled scientific principles because scientists on the cutting edge disagree about newly discovered modifications and advancements thereof is like attacking all religions because they cannot resolve their differences with one another.

The great scientists of history—Galileo, Darwin, Einstein, and countless others—all made errors of detail, but they were much more right than the bigots who persecuted them or their ideas on “religious” grounds, and much more faithful to the God who watched with interest to see what Adam

would name the animals.
DAVID N. BORTIN
Attorney
Walnut Creek, California

Regarding the March-April Issue

As a Seventh-day Adventist with graduate training in theology and law, I find the pages of *Liberty* speak directly to my interests and deepest concerns. I am proud that our church publishes such a thoughtful and balanced periodical. However, I do have a few comments regarding Clifford Goldstein's brief commentary (“The *Hialeah* Animal Sacrifice Case”) on John Locke: it is an accurate summary of the great philosopher's position. I appreciate Locke and find his tolerance to be ahead of his time. Yet, as I read Locke, he would have approved of the holding in *Smith*, would he not? Thus, perhaps the justices ought not consider Locke but rather *Sherbert v. Verner* and *Wisconsin v. Yoder*.

While I agree with Laycock's conservative strategy of arguing within Scalia's “neutral and applicable law” standard, from

Goldstein's commentary it seems that our church would likewise be satisfied with this same strategy. Isn't our church preference that this Court return to the compelling standard of *Sherbert* in all Free Exercise cases? Didn't we submit an amicus brief calling for the overturning of *Smith*? Why recommend Locke's *Essay on Toleration*, since it's only Laycock's fallback position and not really where he or the Adventist church would like to be with respect to Free Exercise jurisprudence?

As to Richard Utt's interview of Ariel Roth:

We don't really have to fear that this world may be older than 10,000 years. Isn't an omnipotent God capable of working with old—perhaps even ancient—material? Rather, our concern as a church is with the challenge posed by atheism, not the age of the earth. A young earth does not prove God's existence any more than an

old earth would threaten belief in Him.

DAVID A. Pendleton
Los Angeles, California

*[Yes.—Ed.]

Thorough Scholarship

It is so nice to read quality articles that reflect a depth of love and caring as well as thorough scholarship.

LOWELL N. HAWKES
Attorney
Pocatello, Idaho

Correction

[The quote on the back cover of the May-June issue should have had the following credit line: —Henry David Thoreau, American writer, libertarian (1817-1862)—Ed.].

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*Though morally flawed,
King David served his people well.
Does Bill Clinton
deserve the same chance?*

A Biblical Parable

In the heat of the presidential election, a woman showed me a pamphlet that had been distributed in great numbers charging that my candidate was an evil man, practically the Antichrist, whose behavior made him unfit to lead this nation. It was signed by one of America's noisy Savonarolas, who quoted Scripture to prove that Bill Clinton was the personification of the devil and must be defeated.

BY JAMES A. MICHENER

I was so awed by the force to this condemnation that I was driven to the Bible to see what it actually said about kings, emperors, and other heads of state, and the more I read, the more clearly I saw that the premier earthly king of the Bible was David, who led Israel for 77 triumphant years. He was wise, courageous, a born leader, a prudent defender of Israel, and withal the "sweet singer of the Psalms." Throughout his long reign, he served God and his own kingdom superbly. He was the paradigm of leaders. But morally he was flawed. In 2 Samuel it is told how this magnificent king fell into error: "And it came to pass in an evening tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon." She was Bathsheba, already happily married to Uriah, a commander of David's armies.

For Our Times

Despite this, King David conceived such a powerful lust for her that he connived to have her husband sent into a battle in which his own troops would desert him. To ensure the success of his diabolical plan, David actually wrote an infamous letter, which was preserved in Jewish chronicles: "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die."

Talk about a smoking gun that proves an evil act! David put his in writing. His plan worked. Uriah was posted to the most dangerous part of the front; his men did desert him; he was slain, and King David did inherit Bathsheba, who bore him the son Solomon, who became Israel's most grandiloquent king. And David, this flawed man, was a lineal progenitor of Jesus Christ Himself, who is described in that famous opening verse of the New Testament as "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."


Certainly God did not approve of David's behavior in the Bathsheba incident, and He sent the prophet Nathan to excoriate David, which he did in a way that reverberates through the centuries. Using a parable about an unidentified man who behaved abominably against a poor, defenseless man, he roused David's pity and anger until the king cried out: "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." And when he demanded to know who the culprit was, Nathan thundered: "Thou art the man." But in the end God forgave David, who resumed his reign with unparalleled success.

However, that wasn't the end of David's folly; for late in life he behaved in a manner that would certainly disqualify him from leadership by current standards. His misbehavior is chronicled in the opening verses of 1 Kings. David is now old and worn from long leadership. He finds he cannot sleep at night because his feet are too cold.

The members of his Cabinet solved the problem by combing Israel in search of a young virgin of unusual beauty who would sleep with the king and keep him warm: "So they sought for a fair damsel throughout all the coasts of Israel, and found Abishag . . . and the damsel was very fair, and cherished the king, and ministered to him . . ." The passage does end, "But the king knew her not," biblical phraseology for "they did not have sexual relations." That's the Old Testament equivalent of "But I didn't inhale."

Shortly before the Inauguration I heard Representative Robert K. Dornan (R-Calif.) shouting over my radio that he had given away his tickets to President-elect Clinton's inaugural because he could not bear to witness such a disqualified sinner taking the oath of office to lead our nation for the next four years; other American ayatollahs are predicting catastrophe for the Clinton administration. They all quote the Bible against my man, but they seem to be using a different Bible from the one I know.

My Bible, the one I was reared on and which I revere, states clearly that King David behaved abominably in the Uriah-Bathsheba affair, but that he proceeded to become unquestionably the greatest leader Israel would ever have and the forebear of Jesus Christ.

If God could forgive David and clasp him to His bosom, I believe He might look with compassion on His servant Bill Clinton as he assumes leadership of the world's most powerful nation . . . for the time being. Unlike Representative Dornan, I accepted my tickets to the inaugural and prayed for God's guidance of His other, sometimes flawed, son Bill. 

James A. Michener, the author, most recently of Mexico (Random House, 1992), is currently at the Texas Center for Writers in Austin. Reprinted with permission from the Washington Post. Copyright 1993.

Right on, James Michener! From a biblical perspective, Bill Clinton is more qualified morally to lead the United States than King David was to rule over Israel.

In fact, if Bill Clinton had David's record, he would be in the Big House rather than the White House. And likely on death row. One doesn't have to be a Christian Rightist to abhor premeditated murder to acquire another man's wife.

Fortunately for Clinton, the alleged sins that brought barbs from White-Housed sepulchres brought David assurance of God's forgiveness.

But our age, after all, is enlightened. What sort of leadership will it take to make today's leader someone "after God's own heart"? First, I believe,

Bigness and Generosity of Spirit

Look over David's long reign (which wasn't as long as Michener stated—40, not 77 years), and

We see David's bigness in his close ties with Jonathan, Saul's son and heir to the throne. Here is one of the most unlikely friendships in history. By rights, Jonathan also should have been suspicious and jealous of the popular general David, who in turn should have been wary of Jonathan. But "Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself" (1 Samuel 18:1). When Jonathan fell in battle, David, rather than rejoicing that the way to Israel's throne was now clear, wept bitterly. "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother," he lamented (2 Samuel 1:26).

Bigness and generosity of spirit—these are attributes of greatness that I would like to see during Bill Clinton's presidency.

Two other qualities stand out from King David's reign, his

Compassion and Justice

These motivated his anger when the prophet Nathan recounted the story of an unjust rich man who took a poor man's one "ewe lamb" and killed it, rather than one of his own flock, to feed guests. David could smell injustice afar, but like us he was slow to recognize it in himself. When faced with the prophet's denunciation, however, he didn't try to excuse himself for his grievous sin.

David's psalms ring with themes of compassion and justice. The qualities he ascribes to God reflect his own convictions: "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling," he sang. "God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing" (Psalm 68:5, 6).

David's last words sum up his leadership philosophy: "When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth" (2 Samuel 23:3, 4).

Not imagery that Watts dwellers will recognize either for its emphasis on justice or a smogless environment, but a great ideal for Bill Clinton!

As great as David was, however, he wasn't the preeminent leader of Israel. The greatest king, to be sure; but Israel's greatest leader was Moses.

Vision and Humility

Moses had one of the toughest roles ever—to meld a group of enslaved tribes and lead them to freedom. David ruled over the nation, but Moses made a nation.

Those tribes were a mixed, fractious bunch. Some wanted to go forward, and some wanted to go back; some thought they could make it to the Promised Land, and others were sure they couldn't; and all complained. They complained

IS CLINTON God's Man IN THE WHITE HOUSE?

BY WILLIAM G. JOHNSON

you have to be impressed with the bigness of the man. He handled the intrigues of the royal court, the schemes of enemies, the blandishments of friends, and the connivings of relatives with largeness and generosity of spirit.

As unquestionable successor to King Saul, David could have sought to speed his rival's removal from the throne; instead, he loyally supported the increasingly jealous and demented ruler. When Saul sought to kill him, he fled for his life—a king-elect on the lam. Twice, as Saul pursued him, David had opportunity to dispatch the king. The temptation was great: a quick, clean kill, and the nation would rejoice under his rule. Friends and associates would provide a high-sounding rationalization: "This is the very day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish'" (1 Samuel 24:4).^{*} Both times David let Saul go unharmed and continued his life as a fugitive.

William G. Johnson is editor of the Adventist Review. He holds a Ph.D. in biblical studies from Vanderbilt University and was professor of New Testament studies at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, from 1975 to 1980.

about the heat, the food, the water—and Moses. Some thought he was a leader; some thought they could do a better job; some tried to impeach him.

For 40 years Moses put up with them. They wandered about in the desert, but he had a goal and he never lost sight of it. Tragically, he didn't lead his people into the Promised Land; but he brought them to the borders, and they went in after his death.

Moses stands tall as the visionary leader for all times—the forerunner and the inspiration for Abraham Lincoln, Mohandas Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Although Moses had been raised in Pharaoh's court and schooled in the martial arts, he led with humility. "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth," says the Bible (Numbers 12:3).

He guided the people with patience and gentleness, as though he were still among the flocks he herded in Midian.

These qualities, then, emerge from Israel's greatest leaders—bigness of spirit, vision, humility, justice, and compassion. Neither military conquests, nor wealth, nor building programs, nor even wisdom can substitute for the manner in which rulers relate to their subjects.

The Hebrew prophets continually harked back to these qualities. "Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor," thundered the prophet Jeremiah about Jehoahaz, one of Israel's last kings. "Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar?" Comparing the king with his late father, Josiah, he went on: "He did what was right and just. . . . He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well" (Jeremiah 22:13-16).

Finally, in the little book of Micah we find these concerns brought to a head: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

For Jews, of course, the Scriptures end with the Old Testament, but for Christians the story continues. In Jesus of Nazareth they see combined the best leadership qualities of David and Moses.

Here is Jesus, burning with justice and full of compassion for the poor and the broken. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor," He announces. "He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18, 19).

Here is Jesus the visionary, the dreamer: "The kingdom of heaven is near. . . . Come, follow me" (Matthew 4:17-19).

Here is Jesus, gentle and patient as He leads His people: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). "The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves" (Luke 22:26).

And at the end, here is Jesus, big in spirit, forgiving enemies who nail Him to the cross.

That's the biblical pattern of a leader for our times. We don't need a president who will seek to impose the worship of Yahweh or even adherence to the Ten Commandments, because we don't live under a theocracy: Bill Clinton pledged to uphold the Constitution of the United States, not the contents of the King James Bible. We need a *big* president, someone just and compassionate, a person of vision but humble.

That's a tall order! However, Clinton's Baptist heritage comes rich with a biblical idea that can help him.

Grace

Grace made possible Clinton's beginning and his coming to office, regardless of whatever flaws lie in his past. And grace makes possible his success as president. "'Tis grace hath brought [us] safe thus far, and grace will lead [us] home."

But there's another dimension to this matter. The Bible's high standard extends beyond leaders—it takes in citizens as well. "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1).

The Roman emperors of Paul's time fell far short of the biblical ideal for leaders, with the dissolute Nero the worst of a sorry line. Nevertheless, Paul counseled: "He who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. . . . For he is God's servant. . . . Give everyone what you owe him. If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor" (verses 2-7).

So the people of small spirit who quoted the Bible in an effort to keep Bill Clinton out of the presidency will have to be model citizens now that he is elected!



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possible
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"APOCALYPTIC ROCK"

My Days With David Koresh

THE STORY THE NATIONAL MEDIA COULDN'T GET



Karl Hennig, a Ph.D. candidate in developmental psychopathology, is a resident of Vancouver, British Columbia.



onolulu was warm, sunny, relaxing—just as it was every time I came for two weeks of vacation from my hectic teaching and coaching schedule in Vancouver, British Columbia. I was usually fried and dyed by the time I arrived, and my 1986 Christmas holiday was no different. The only sightseeing I wanted to do was with some friends. They were a fun young couple with whom I enjoyed zooming around the island in their white convertible Volkswagen bug. Their names: Steve and Judy Schneider.

The day after I arrived, I took a bus to Diamond Head Seventh-day Adventist Church, where I anticipated meeting them. It was a Hawaiian-style building, with open walls. A cool breeze blew against my face, and in the background the sun gently rose above beautiful Diamond Head volcano. From this picture-postcard setting, another volcano was soon to burst, spreading its caustic lava to the eventual fiery destruction of 72 followers of a man called Koresh.

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

I arrived late that Saturday morning and someone had already begun to preach, so I quietly found a place to sit. The talk, while convoluted (I sensed that I was missing some context), nevertheless woke me from my lethargy. After the closing prayer I looked for Steve. He hurried over the moment he saw me.

"Karl," he said, "you'll never believe what has been going on here!"

Steve, effervescent, magnetic, and always overconfident, spoke quickly, vigorously, and, for my frame of reference, unintelligibly. Something about a prophet, Hawaii becoming a fishbowl, the coming kingdom of God, about how I wouldn't believe . . . I had known him to be a bright, educated, and sensible individual of whom I had no reason to be suspicious. He aroused my curiosity.

During the next two weeks I would find little rest. We spent hours together in discussion as he explained what had been going on. Steve was an excited salesman with a product he utterly believed in, and he was the kind of person who could sell binoculars to the blind, or fish to a fisherman.

Most of his talk centered on a prophet named Vernon Howell, later to be known as David Koresh, who headed a small group called Davidian Adventists. Howell had, Steve told me, seen visions of great cataclysmic disturbances that would engulf not only the Hawaiian Islands but ultimately the world. It was all in the Bible, Steve said. Just as the New Testament church began with Pentecost (meaning fiftieth), so this new revival among the "remnant" was to take place in the fiftieth state, Hawaii.

Lines in the Sand

Lines in the sand, Steve warned, had already been drawn, identifying the "teachable" from the blind and backslidden. That many would be disfellowshipped was only further verification of the truthfulness of "the message," as was the inability of the pastors and theological leaders themselves, the presently shining stars, to see this "new light." Meanwhile, the church's perceptive youth were to become the energetic core of this new movement.

Of the seven angels (messengers) in the biblical book of Revelation, said Steve, Howell was the seventh and last. His key text was: "In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets," (Revelation 10:7). Howell was that voice, declaring all that the Old Testament prophets had spoken.

Steve and I, along with several others, spent considerable time together studying. Though al-

ways having much to say regarding any subject, Steve also left you a little short of understanding just what he was saying. Though confused, I found the issues interesting and worth further investigation.

The following spring, during school break, a friend named Bobby and I decided to meet this self-styled prophet of the "last days." While trying to find him, we ended up meeting a number of people in two separate communities—one in San Bernardino, California, and the other in Palestine, Texas. We headed for Texas first.

The Primitives

Upon our arrival in Dallas-Fort Worth, we rented a car and drove to Palestine, nearly 100 miles east of Waco. (At that time Howell didn't control Mount Carmel nor had he constructed the compound seen in the media coverage; it was in the hands of an earlier group—Branch Davidians, headed by George Roden, the son of Lois and Ben Roden, the fifth and sixth angels' messengers.) As we got closer to eastern Texas, the countryside changed into beautiful rolling hills and pine forests. Off a dusty country road we entered a small clearing and could see ahead a rough meeting/dining hall built from leftover lumber and plastic sheeting. To the left, lined up among pine trees, old black-and-yellow school buses were parked, where some of the families lived. Mostly older people and families stayed at the Palestine location—perhaps 15 people at that time.

Making a right angle with the buses and meeting hall, and enclosing the small open area, were six new large sheds, each with a single sliding window to allow light and the cool Texas breeze to enter. The shed contained minimal accommodations—a wide bunk and a place to store belongings and have some privacy. Those who could afford it had a small wood stove. Here amid the Texas pines a small community gathered.

They had no running water or electricity, though a communal phone line had been installed. When the Sabbath approached, a large tub of water was heated over an open fire for showers. Several Davidians had constructed their own residence, with a little shower stall, made of a portable five-gallon plastic water container with a shower nozzle attached to it.

Sabbath evening people gathered in the meeting hall for a light evening meal, usually fruit and popcorn, the latter being a virtual staple. The Davidians enjoyed a simple vegetarian fare. They listened to music. They liked Jewish folk songs, and the children danced. Sometimes the adults joined in. An attractive young Caribbean woman from

Ontario, Canada, prepared much of the food.

We came with our intrigue and questions, but found no one with sensible answers, except for a delightful though verbose elderly Texan who loved to tell convoluted stories of the good old days when he was the treasurer for Victor Houteff, the founder of the Shepherd's Rod, who was disfellowshipped by the Tabernacle Seventh-day Adventist Church in Fullerton, California, in 1930 for his aberrant prophetic views. The clearest thing he said was that he was delighted to be "in the message," the content of which we were still not quite sure. Howell, led by God, was taking care of them, and they weren't worried. Told that we would find Howell in San Bernardino, California, where the message was going forth, we flew to Los Angeles.

Two hours later we were in San Bernardino, 70 miles east of Los Angeles. There, amid a thick haze of pollution, we found a number of people crowded in a small three-bedroom house. To accommodate the group, two small makeshift mini-cabins had been erected out back, similar to those in Texas. A newly married couple, James and Michelle Tom from Australia, lived in the one, and a young woman, Shelley, from the Honolulu church, together with her daughter, lived in the other. They had also partially completed what was now a storage garage, although their original intention was to operate a bakery out of it. Some young girls living there, about 12 to 14 years old, would frequently go to the Loma Linda University area and sell the small pies and cakes that they had baked.

In a wide gravel driveway was parked a large and relatively new shuttle bus, where I was to stay when I returned the following summer. For this trip Bobby and I stayed at the Loma Linda University dorm with a student we knew. In the San Bernardino headquarters, the young girls shared a room, and Howell's wife and 2-year-old child, Cyrus, lived with him in the other room. The third room held all the musical equipment. It was upon the wings of contemporary rock-and-roll music that their message was going to travel.

The Time of Testing

Mornings began early; not that anyone had to get up early, but once a few were up, it was difficult to sleep. People tended to their own meals and housecleaning. Since there was little room in the house, we would usually eat outside under a big tree. The Davidians had the same simple dietary fare as those in Palestine. Food was purchased in large volumes, and once a week they took the van to pick up damaged or overripened produce that could be purchased cheaply from supermarkets.

The house was open for anyone who could find

space. Howell, I was told, asked only \$15, which they said he often forgot to collect. A few of the more affluent professional people gave more whenever Howell needed it—usually for the purchase of bakery supplies and musical equipment.

People were encouraged to be independent, to prepare their own meals as much as possible and wash their own dishes. They would need to be strong, Howell had told them. Once a week they would enjoy a treat—a bowl of sugar-free ice cream. I recall standing beside an 11-year-old boy named Joel.

"Here," he said to me, "you can have my ice cream. I want to be strong when the time of testing comes."

Unlike the warmth, love, and excitement that one of the first movie enactments of the Waco events portrayed members as having for one another, the atmosphere was fearful. People imagined what they would face at the end of the world. This community was much more aware than those at Palestine of the hardships that lay ahead—perhaps torture and even betrayal from fellow members, they said.

Gothic Horror Tales

I spoke with Margarida Vaega, who had come with her husband, Naele. A slim woman in her late 30s, with long black hair and dark eyes, she said that her most immediate and omnipresent sensation was a deep, gut-wrenching fear. She believed that she had no choice but to join Howell. It was either that or be "lost." She knew too much now, and would be judged according to the amount of light she had been given. Her only comfort was that the rest of the world, especially those who rejected the message, would suffer far worse than she. Her husband, a shy, good-looking fellow of Hawaiian ancestry, seemed more carefree and liked the idea of being in a rock band. He practiced rhythm guitar for long hours.

Another member, Douglas Wayne Martin, a graduate of Harvard law school, had accepted the message a few years earlier. His Harvard entry ticket could have opened the door to the nation's leading law firms, but his belief system focused on the final test. Howell encouraged him to continue his studies because the message could use a smart lawyer. During my brief stay I found him becoming ever more captive to morbid thoughts. In quiet moments together, he spoke of his fascination with the Gothic horror tales of Edgar Allan Poe. He was convinced that the horrors of the "last days" would probably be only psychological—a departure from Howell's teaching.

The San Bernardino community comprised



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middle-aged folk and their families (if they had any) who had long been members of the Branch Davidians, and young adults in their late 20s from the Honolulu church. Bobby and I still had not met Howell, but were told he would be arriving in a few days.

What kind of expectations does a person have of someone who thinks he is a prophet? Certainly, he fit well into the contemporary scene. He had shoulder-length wavy dark-brown hair, a beard, glasses, cowboy boots, and blue jeans. His wife, a tall attractive woman named Rachel, was the daughter of the long-winded elderly man living in Palestine. Howell's caustic style, mixed with a generous Texas accent, was not everyone's picture of what a prophet would be like—self-styled or otherwise. Bobby found him just plain offensive.

Prophetic “Normality”

I was intrigued. Old Testament characters presented no picture of “normality,” nor did they follow a particular pattern. Howell appeared to behave more sociably than did Nehemiah during his cursings, and more prudently than some biblical prophets such as Ezekiel, who ate barley cakes mixed with human excrement. He seemed more “moral” than Samson, who more often than any of the other charismatic leaders in the book of Judges is spoken of as being filled with the Spirit.

Then there was Hosea and his prostitute wife and other prophets whom God had selected contrary to the expectations of the multitude. The more unlikely a candidate Howell seemed to be, the more valid his candidacy appeared.

Though barely able to spell three words in a row, Howell was extremely sharp. There was no question but that he believed in his own calling. He spoke with such bold conviction that he stirred one's own deepest doubts and insecurities. His style would best be described as “contentious.” Frequently he began conversations with a barrage

of rhetorical questions and a string of Bible verses released in such rapid-fire succession that one felt pressed to find a reasonable reply.

“Why do you believe in the biblical letter to the Colossians?”

Before I could even scan my memory banks, he would answer. “Because it came with the rest of the Book!”

“How do you know,” he asked, “what kind of fruit Eve ate? Christians think it was an apple. Scripture doesn't say what kind of fruit it was. Who knows—maybe you're eating it now! Do you know about...? How about this passage...? In the light of the prophecies of Isaiah 2 and Micah 4... After the great event foretold in Isaiah 56...”

How does one begin to get a handle on this type of speaking? Those who challenged him soon found themselves entangled within their own words or—from the perspective of the group—by Howell's “wisdom.”

Every day the Davidians celebrated what they called the “daily,” a break in the day's work, which corresponded to the ancient Jewish morning and evening hour of prayer and sacrifice in the Temple.

Delusional Brilliance

During the “daily,” Howell would give an hour-long study from the biblical prophecies in which the prophecies were explored. At the end of the hour he would seek, even incite, others to ask questions. But most knew little of what it was he was saying, not even enough to ask a reasonable question. With no formal (or theological) training, he nevertheless had an amazing command of ancient history. Amid his frequent flurry of questions intended to reveal the ignorance of his audience, I recognized his delusional brilliance. He drew attention to the many unfulfilled Old Testament prophecies, particularly those that scholars find historically problematic.

During one of Howell's confusing “daily” Bible

lectures Steve became angry, saying that he didn't understand what was being said. Howell called Steve back as he began to storm off. "It will become clearer to you, Steve," he said. "Be patient."

The Koresh Syndrome

Howell's emerging complex vision of himself as a Messianic deliverer was rooted in the historical figure of Cyrus, referred to as Yahweh's "anointed" in Isaiah 45:1, as well as the messianic allusions to Zerubbabel. Cyrus was an unclean, uncircumcised foreigner, the sinful deliverer who would bring about the fall of Babylon, which represented the modern world. Here is the rationale of his name change to David Koresh. *Koresh* is the original Persian word for "Cyrus." He believed himself to be the culmination of all the types in the Old Testament—including Cyrus, the Persian king, and David, the Hebrew king. David, on his "stringed instrument," soothed the troublesome spirit of King Saul, composed many psalms, and hid out in the wilderness as a fugitive with his band of dissidents (1 Samuel 22:1, 2). Scholars have long struggled with what to do about the superscriptions to the psalms that are difficult in the context of the historical King David, even less so of Christ. The answer, according to Howell, is that they were prophecies of himself.

The deepest prophecy of all, he believed, was the Song of Solomon. Solomon had many wives. Howell's Davidic stringed instrument was his electric guitar, and his Hawaiian recruits were his band of soldiers, his royal guards of the royal bed: "Look! It is Solomon's carriage, escorted by 60 warriors, the noblest of Israel, all of them wearing the sword, all experienced in battle, each with his sword at his side, prepared for the terrors of the night" (Song of Solomon 3:7, 8, NIV). It was in the spirit of Old Testament holy war, the roots of yom Yahweh (the day of the Lord), that Koresh was to later move and have his being. His mind drew numerous disparate elements together into a single picture.

I was able to grasp a sense of what he was saying only long after I had left. At the time, neither I nor Howell's audience knew of the implications of his teachings, which little by little became increasingly bizarre. One was never quite sure what Howell was saying, or whether he meant it literally or figuratively. He was the modern musical David, the weaver of apocalyptic poetry.

Apocalyptic Rock

While my ear inclines more toward classical music, I rather enjoyed the Davidian's "apocalyptic rock." Howell had written numerous songs with words primarily from biblical prophecy. He would

jokingly tell the story of his learning how to play the guitar as a rebellious youth. With an untuned instrument he discovered various finger positions corresponding to different chords. He went along like this, playing to music over the radio, until someone showed him how to tune his instrument. He subsequently had to relearn his finger positions. Whether apocryphal or not, I do not know. These and other "miracle stories" were delightfully recounted by the believers.

In the evenings the Davidians would seek visually creative ways in which they might do musical videos. Howell often would caution his followers to stay humble, because once the music took off, they were going to be famous. And so the message would spread. Little effort at that time was actually spent in recruiting other followers, with the exception of seeking a drummer, which they needed. During my stay, they were also without their bass guitarist James Tom, who, with his wife, returned to Australia after their visas expired.

Another young man, Marc Breault, was on keyboard. Regarded as a visionary prophet—though of a lesser sort than Howell, he was quiet, and rarely presented his thoughts unless asked—a gentle soul. A trinity seemed to be in the making—Howell as apostle-Messianic type, Marc as prophet, and Steve as evangelist.

During my stay Howell became increasingly abrasive. In defense he stated that he would eventually become a part of their test. They would have to focus more on the message and less and less on the medium. But Howell also had his humorous side. Because he was always complaining about the pesticides on food and the pollution in the air, I asked him why, if health was so important, he didn't buy organic produce. With a grin he handed me his wallet and told me to buy a week's worth. Of course, there were only a few dollars in it.

In retrospect, it is hard to imagine how anyone could have gotten involved with Howell in the first place. But at its beginnings, six years ago, the message was far more subtle, and Howell's outbursts infrequent. The elements of something hideous and frightening were there, but people were free to come and go. At no time was I either smothered with love, as the "cult" stereotype portrays, or coerced. Most of my days were spent pursuing my own interests as part of a broader summer vacation. They wished me Godspeed as I returned to Canada, and hoped that I would be able to join them for their next feast day, when members from all around the world would gather in Texas. While their chosen lot appeared to be oppressive, I could understand it, given their view of the world. *Who knows*, I thought. *Maybe they*



The building in this picture is the mess/meeting hall/church, built from trimmings acquired free from a nearby lumber mill. Windows were made from plastic sheeting. The buses were used as homes till the shelters/cabins were constructed.

were right. Without any system of recruitment, they appeared only a handful of pathetic people who would probably fade off the horizon like so many other "new light" movements, particularly those with prophetic figures whose forecasts eventually fail. After leaving, I had no further communication with them until, several years later, I received a letter from Marc, whom I had seen as the prophet of the group.

"You'll be interested to know," he wrote, "that I am no longer part of 'the message.' Yes, maybe you had the jump on all of us, Karl. Anyway, that's the way it is; I've been out for more than a year now, really longer, and between threats to my life and other interesting events, I have hardly had time for anything."


He told me of some of the bizarre events that had been gradually escalating over the years. David Koresh, as he now called Howell, had a message that "God had not joined" any of the marriages of cult members, and their present relations were adulterous. Their wives, including Steve's, were part of a harem that Koresh had begun. This would be the ultimate test the world would face. The Old Testament gave no evidence against polygamy, the law of Moses assumed it, and yet the world with its false "wisdom" would stand in judgment against God and His holy law. Koresh was professing, Marc wrote, to be "Jesus Christ, come again to the world. Since they killed him before, when he was

sinless, he has now come as a sinful Messiah, and the world will kill him again. . . . Everyone will obtain a perfect mate who will emerge from our sides, just as Eve came forth from Adam's side. In the meantime, no one is allowed to marry, or procreate, except him."

Marc also mentioned an incident of child abuse, and some attendant lawsuits against Koresh that he, Marc, had enacted. He wanted to let me know that he was doing everything he could to help the children.

"Right now," he continued, "my main concern is to get those children to safety. . . . When this blows, it will really blow. Once the authorities saw the children they wanted blood. Koresh married off some foreigners to U.S. citizens. That's a big no-no and he's really in hot water now, although he doesn't know it yet."

A flaming inferno was certainly not how I expected things to end. The events—first the shoot-out, then the fire—shocked me. In addition to getting together with Steve and Judy at Christmas, I had talked, laughed, and shared stories with many of them. I'm thankful that at least the young boy Joel and his family got out sometime in the intervening years.

But Peter Gent, a thin and fragile 17-year-old when I met him, died in the first assault, when he was shot off the top of the water tower. His parents had left the cult earlier. Martin, the Harvard law graduate, was reported in an affidavit as having been "observed with a string of hand grenades around his neck." He died in the blaze, along with Margarida and Naele Vaega. The cause of Judy Schneider's death, the nineteenth body to be publicly identified, is as yet unreleased. Steve Schneider, who drove me around sunny Hawaii in his white Volkswagen convertible, died of smoke inhalation and carbon monoxide poisoning, with possible traumatic injury from "either a blast or gunshot" to his head. 

"Where Everybody Knows Your Name" The Psychology Behind Waco

Devoted husbands gave their wives to Koresh for his sexual use.
How could it happen?

Next in the September-October issue.



PORTING THE MESSIAHS

BY GEORGE W. REID

moke had hardly ceased curling from the ashes of David Koresh's Ranch Apocalypse when the nation plunged into a litany of angst over its destruction. How could intelligent, credible moderns submit to immolation rather than relinquish their fantasies? If the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms agents who attacked the Waco, Texas, compound had had the answer—indeed, had even known the question—they might have chosen another approach to subduing the Branch Davidians. Or is there something about messianic expectations that defies analysis?

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Was David

Koresh one?

Can we expect

more?

What are the

likely

consequences to

faith and

freedom?

Your life may

depend on the

answers.



Today Christians and other religious groups are predicting the return of a messiah by the year 2000. The Bible predicts not only Christ's return, but the end-time profusion of false messiahs. There will be other Koreshes. Other Wacos. And the return of Jesus Christ. If we cannot distinguish between the true and the false, if we regard religious conviction as obstinacy, obstinacy as unallowable deviation from the norm, and the norm as the verdict of the majority, it may not be the songwriter's "home fires" that are kept burning. To the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the Koresh compound represented a clear and present danger, its arsenal (AK-47 assault rifles by the dozen, hand grenades, and allegedly a 50-caliber machine gun) violated federal law. Add to this charges of child abuse and sexual improprieties, and you have a conflagration waiting for a spark. It came with ignorance of bedrock apocalyptic assumptions so true in the Davidians' minds that martyrdom was not too great a price to pay to retain them.

Secularists steeped in contemporary values find it difficult, if not impossible, to understand the depth of commitment to the transcendent. What is not rational is brushed aside as aberrant, if not insane, behavior. But evidence suggests that the holdout Davidians were as rational as most of us. Why then their persistence to the point of irrationality?

Psychologists and cult deprogrammers advance defensible theories for persons joining such groups: the charismatic leader, the malaise of social dissatisfaction, economic deprivation, the lure of a "righteous" cause, and the sense of God at work on behalf of change. All these provide empirical evidence of a cause-friendly mentality that may slip past reasonable guidelines.

Certainly David Koresh matches the classic pattern of a cult founder: troubled childhood, rejection by male authority figures, and his off-and-on courtship with religion. Psychological factors are clearly at work. But none of these explain why followers—from high school dropouts to university graduates, the credulous and the questioners alike—linked their lives to Koresh. Even while claiming to be the Messiah he admitted that he was "sinful"—a status his sexual practices alone repeatedly confirmed. There are, I believe, two keys to understanding the phenomenon of commitment within the Koresh compound. First is Koresh's call to certainty, a prophetic destiny already in place in the mind of God. We must see this call against the texture of this erratic age of flux and frivolity. Koresh offered meaning to the meaningless, an appointment to the Messiah's cabinet to those denied even a church office. In short, he called for

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL HILL

an end to playing church.

Second in understanding how hearers metamorphosed into believers willing to die for their convictions was Koresh's existential emphasis. The ultimate test of truth was one's inner experience. It all seemed so good, so true. Questions based on Scripture were met with a cascade of biblical texts drawn mainly from Old Testament prophets. Overwhelmed with the barrage, Koresh's disciples failed to note that the texts often had little relationship with one another except in their use of common words or expressions. Left intellectually breathless from the dazzling performance, they accepted Koresh's conclusions without passing them through the filter of reasoned meaning. Questions raised on objective grounds were summarily dismissed, for they challenged the authority of inner experience. For this reason, those who tried to reason with the devotees seldom found success.

The Precursor Image

An alleged appointment to proclaim God's kingdom needs little more than a nudge to become a Messianic fixation. So it was with Koresh, who slipped easily into the precursor image. The transition was signaled by his change of names from Vernon Wayne Howell to David Koresh—the "David" presenting his alleged standing in the heritage of the biblical king David, the model of his work. Koresh defended his sexual behavior pattern, already in place before his arrival at Waco in 1981, by David's plurality of wives. "Koresh" is the Persian spelling of Cyrus, the Persian king referred to in Isaiah as God's anointed, or "Messiah."

Since the founding of their sect in 1930, leaders of the Davidian group (initially called the Shepherd's Rod) had declared the next event in God's climactic timetable would be establishment of what they called the "Davidic Kingdom," a special society marked by absolute righteousness. Included in their worship was observance of the annual Jewish feasts. In response to the Selective Service statute of January 1942, they registered as Davidian Seventh-day Adventists. Seventh-day Adventist church leaders, in turn, emphatically rejected any claim by the Davidians to be authentic members of their faith, pointing out that the Davidian founder, a layman, had been disfellowshipped for his views and conduct by a California congregation in 1930.

Each leader of the Davidians (Koresh was the fifth in the series) claimed the gift of prophetic contact with God, and each considered himself or herself (two were women) as designated to preside over God's coming kingdom. The imperial style of that rule surfaced within the Waco community.

The Messianic Hope

To claim prophetic office is one thing; to claim to be the Messiah propels the discussion from human kingship to divine action. In contrast to Koresh's mishmash interpretation of a future Davidic kingdom, the concept of Messiah has a legitimate place in biblical teachings, first within Jewish thought and even more clearly among Christians.

As a Hebrew word, Messiah draws etymological roots from the idea of anointing with oil as a way of designating a leader. Thirty-nine times the Hebrew Bible applies the term to persons chosen by God for a specific purpose, often deliverance. One example: the Persian king Cyrus (Koresh) in Isaiah 45:1, whose name Howell chose as his own.

The forecast of an intervening deliverer reaches to the beginning of biblical history, promised, in the aftermath of their sin, to Adam and Eve. Later the idea of the king as God's anointed became common, as found in certain chapters of Psalms (2, 18, 20, 110, 144, and others).

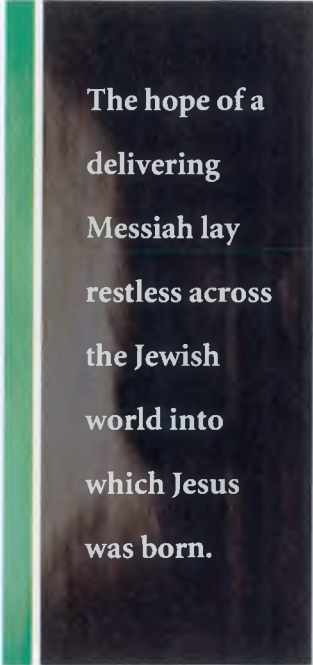
Prophetic passages advance the concept by foreseeing a day in which wars will cease, exiles will return, and justice and prosperity will be established worldwide. Central to the new order will be a descendant of David. The most direct presentation of the coming Messiah is found in Daniel 9:24-26, where His coming is said to precede a time of great destruction, including the devastation of Jerusalem. Koresh's version incorporated these ideas, but prefaced them with dire predictions of an immediate cataclysmic destruction.

Restless Hope and False Shadows

The hope of a delivering Messiah lay restless across the Jewish world into which Jesus was born. But so also did the shadow of false messiahs. The death of Herod the Great (4 B.C.) spawned several claimants of peasant origin, three of whom are described by the Jewish chronicler Josephus. One then another gained control of substantial parts of the countryside, only to be brutally suppressed.

Under the burden of Roman, Hasmonean, and priestly taxation and social requirements, the populace seethed with unrest. Jewish insurrections in A.D. 66-70 and 131-135 produced new Messianic claimants, but all failed, and the ideal era remained elusive.

Christians early recognized in Jesus the fulfillment of numerous Messianic predictions. Upon hearing Jesus, Andrew, brother of Simon Peter, hurried to him to announce, "We have found the



The hope of a
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Messiah" (John 1:41, RSV*). However, this identification required modification of the popular image associated with Messiah. Jesus was apolitical, no mean achievement in so tense a society. By instructing His followers not to resist evil in physical ways, to suffer injustice rather than rebel, He departed widely from popular expectations. His kingdom, He said, was not of this world. Small wonder that His presentations baffled as well as attracted hearers. While Jesus encouraged hope among His followers, at several critical times in His ministry He chilled their enthusiasm with talk of coming rejection and even death, to be followed by a future kingdom of glory.

Jesus was often retiring, not domineering. His relationship to women was unquestionably proper; not even His bitterest enemies charged Him with impropriety. When Peter tried to defend Him with a sword at the time of His arrest, Jesus instructed him to put away his sword and miraculously healed the wound His disciple had inflicted. The second-century Christian writer Tertullian observed that in disarming Peter, Christ disarmed every Christian. Jesus and Koresh: their traits and ideals differed radically.

The Measure of Messiah

It is true that Jesus foresaw mass destruction involving the whole planet. First, in graphic terms He described the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem with great loss of life. That event, He said, would be a miniature of the ruin of the earth immediately prior to His return.

In this context He warned repeatedly that false messiahs and prophets would emerge to deceive credulous followers. In sweeping language He carried His hearers to His coming in great glory to inaugurate an everlasting kingdom. Not until His gospel had blanketed the world would these events occur. Then His return to earth would be witnessed by all humanity (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

David Koresh's claims as Messiah must be measured against the character, values, work, and teachings attributed to the Messiah in the Scriptures. More than 300 passages from the Old Testament make prophetic reference to the Messiah, none of which envisions a person fitting the pattern of Koresh, who referred to himself as the "sinful" or "imperfect" messiah, able because of his sin, he said, to understand fallen humanity. But the writer of Hebrews assures us that "we have [in Jesus] not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15, RSV).


Ranch Apocalypse is past, yet painfully present with us. Always false messiahs have offered themselves as saviors in times deemed ominous. The approach of the year 2000 is certain to trigger further claims, speculations, and conspiracy theories, as occurred prior to A.D. 1000. Today's world finds itself particularly vulnerable because of the social destabilization induced by rapid change as well as the ability of extremists to communicate their messages through the modern media. Experiences such as Waco, Jonestown, Philadelphia's MOVE, and others of past centuries are almost certain to recur. Specialists have identified more than 1,000 groups currently active in North America with the potential to precipitate a similar crisis.

Cause and Effect

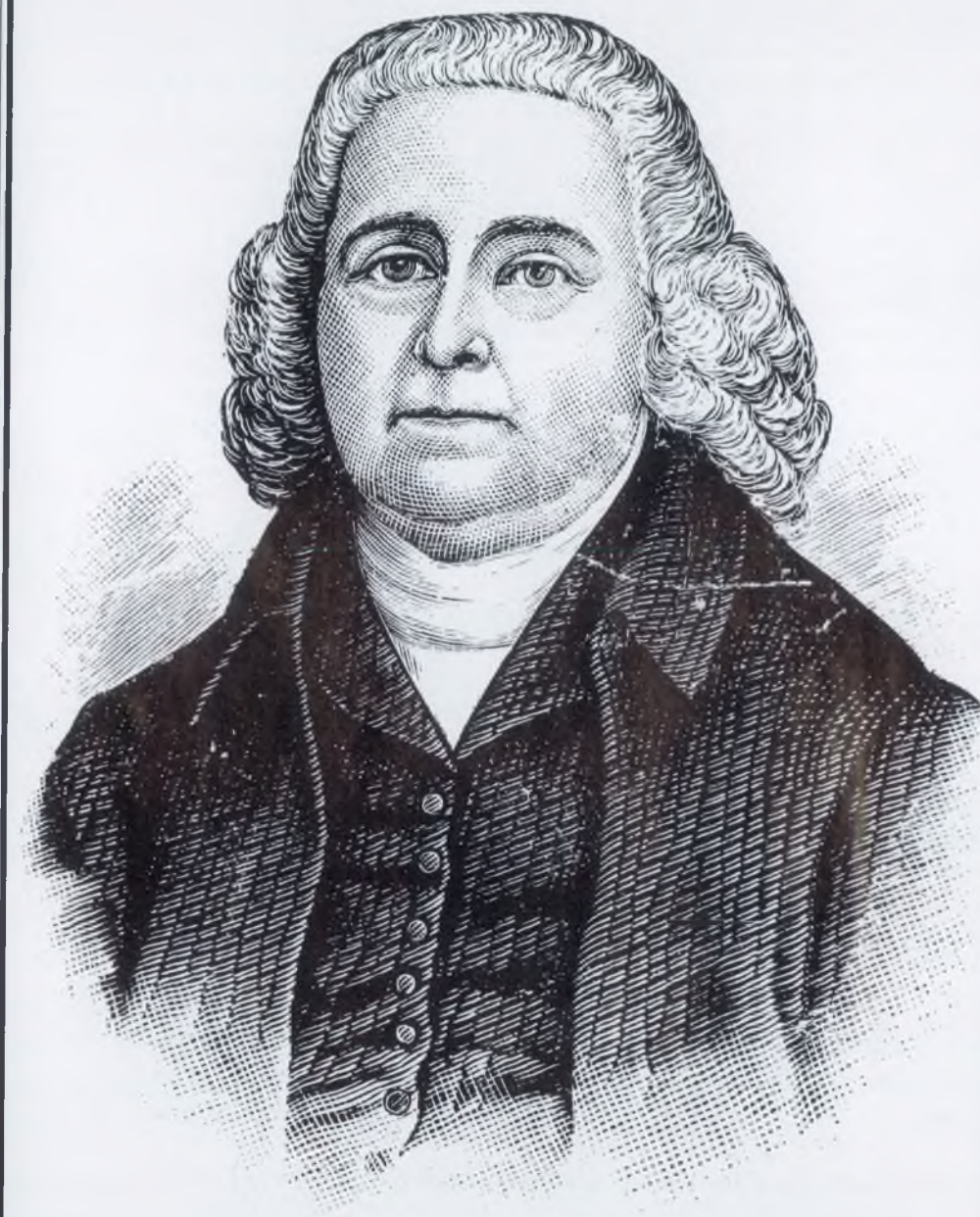
Two courses of action, both alien to the spirit of American values, present themselves as preventives of a repeat performance. First, given the horror of Waco, knee-jerk public reaction inevitably will call for government to suppress groups judged odd or out of line.

But America was founded in large part as a haven for unpopular groups: Puritans, Quakers, Jews, Moravians, Methodists, Baptists, Mennonites, and others. We have had more than our share of offbeat communities as well: Oneida with its communal marriage, Shakers, Oberlin with its radical educational scheme, Mormons at Nauvoo, Sylvester Graham's vegetarian societies, Iowa's Amana Colonies, and dozens of others now seen as contributors to the richness of American life. Our forum is persuasion, not coercion.

A second course embraces disillusionment with religious belief. Ranch Apocalypse's residents were, in fact, bonded by religious (though nonbiblical) teachings, but profound nonreligious social factors combined to give shape to its community. Despite aberrant exhibits such as those of the Branch Davidians, a balanced faith in God, pursued in an open society, has proved effective in establishing and maintaining not only personal integrity, but genuine respect and concern for one another.

Distortions inherited from the tragedy at Waco should not be allowed to threaten the higher values of faith and liberty that make the American experience so nearly unique in human history. 

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The Forgotten Champion of Religious Freedom

BY DEAN M. KELLEY

He didn't found a colony, his name is not found on the Constitution. But he deserves to be ranked among the foremost proponents of a free religious conscience in early America.

Ask students of American history to name early champions of religious liberty, and the answers will be prompt—and predictable.

Most will mention the roles of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in formulating our Constitution. Less frequently George Mason will be linked with the Founders who wrote protections of religious liberty into the laws of Virginia and later into the federal Constitution. Many students will be familiar with William Penn and Lord Baltimore, who established colonies free from the civil disabilities customarily imposed on religion. And you don't have to be a Baptist to remember Roger Williams, pioneer thinker on religious liberty who not only envisioned a government without enforced religious conformity but created such a community—Providence Plantations, later to become the colony of Rhode Island, where he served as governor. One name, however, often will not be included in the answers, though his contributions to freedom of conscience

rank him among the foremost thinkers of the era. I refer to Isaac Backus, who didn't found a colony, and whose name is not found on the Constitution. His name does, however, appear frequently in accounts of the struggle for religious freedom during the formative decades of this nation. Whereas Jefferson, Madison, and Mason sought creation of a secular state standing free of ecclesiastical dominance, Isaac Backus and his counterpart in Virginia, John Leland, worked to free religious conscience from governmental control.

Jefferson, Madison, and Mason were products of the Enlightenment; their goal was to free the mind from tyrannies of doctrine and dogma to follow the pure light of reason. The Great Awakening produced thinkers such as Backus and Leland who (like Roger Williams a century earlier) wanted

to free the human will from civil penalties to follow the imperative call of spiritual experience. These two parties agreed to conduct a radical new experiment in human affairs: the creation of a nation in which religious and civil covenants were separate.¹

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Nonconformity: An Affront and Danger

Throughout most of human history it had been assumed that the security and stability of the civil realm depended, to a great extent, on the acceptance and affirmation of a common faith and observance of a common cultus or church. Any deviance from this shared obeisance was seen as not only an affront to the true faith but as a danger to the civil order of the state, punishable by imprisonment, exile, or death. Some of the world's bloodiest atrocities have been committed to stamp out the perceived religious threat to civil authority: the "crusade" led by Simon IV de Montfort against the Albigenses in 1208-1209, the massacre of the Huguenots on St. Bartholomew's Day in 1572, and the systematic extirpation of "heretics" by the lengthy Inquisition begun in 1231.

One of the first to question this assumption was Roger Williams, who in 1654 expressed a revolutionary new notion: "There goes many a ship to sea with many hundred souls in one ship, whose weal and woe is common and is a true picture of a commonwealth, or human combination of society. It hath fallen out some times that both Papists and Protestants, Jews and Turks may be embarked in one ship; upon which supposal I affirm that all the liberty of conscience that ever I pleaded for turns upon these two things—that none of the Papists, Protestants, Jews, or Turks be forced to come to the ship's prayers or worship nor compelled from their own particular prayers or worship, if they have any. I further add that . . . , notwithstanding this liberty, the commander of this ship ought to command the ship's course, yea, and also command that justice, peace, and sobriety be kept and practiced, both among the seamen and all the passengers. If any of the seamen refuse to perform their services, or passengers to pay their freight; if any refuse to help in person or purse toward the common charges or defense; if any refuse to obey the common laws and orders of the ship concerning their common peace or preservation; if any shall mutiny and rise up against their commanders and officers; if any should preach that there ought to be no commanders or officers, no laws, nor orders, nor corrections, nor punishments . . . , the commander or commanders may judge, resist, compel, and punish such transgressors, according to their deserts and merits."²

This new notion took root and—with the example of its successful practice in Rhode Island—became a live option for wider application.

Nevertheless, in other colonies its call was muted, its light was lost sight of because of the century of vicissitudes caused by the established religion. The Established Church of England dominated the

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religious scene in the southern Colonies, and the no-less-established Standing Order of Calvinist Puritanism ruled New England (with the exception of Rhode Island).

Of Prominent Beginnings

Born in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1724, Isaac Backus was a product of the Established Church in New England. The Backuses, a wealthy family with large land holdings acquired over the previous century, had intermarried with other prominent families of the area. Isaac's father had served in the General Assembly; his grandfather had been a justice of the peace. The family built and operated a smithy, a sawmill, a gristmill, a general store, and an ironworks near the Yantic River (which later supplied much military and naval hardware for the Revolutionary War). Isaac, having spent much of his early life as a hardworking yeoman farmer, was physically strong and healthy, nearly six feet tall, solid and muscular. Although several of his relatives attended Yale, Isaac never went beyond grammar school, but he was articulate, intelligent, shrewd, and forceful in character. He was also a capable manager of the family's farms and businesses.

When he was a teenager Isaac was caught up in the fervor ignited by evangelist George Whitefield's dynamic preaching tour in New England. Whitefield's message set fire to hearts already primed by the brief Northampton revival led by Jonathan Edwards a few years earlier. Huge crowds turned out to hear Whitefield, whose emotional preaching during six short weeks in the early 1740s sparked a blaze that swept through the Colonies, changing not only the religious climate of the land but also its view of its relationship to the Old World. The central theme of the Great Awakening was that ordinary people could and should personally experience God's saving power in their hearts; they were to "know Christ" themselves and feel the assurance of salvation through His saving grace. Thousands of New Englanders were converted by Whitefield and the dozens of itinerant evangelists who followed in his wake. At first some of the established clergy welcomed this wave of spirituality led by the "New Lights," but their enthusiasm waned as it became apparent that the revivalists, although attempting to work "within the system," were not inclined to esteem the "Old Lights" solely because of their educational and ecclesiastical credentials. The person in the pew who had a direct experience with the Holy Spirit was no longer as willing to credit the secondhand accounts of salvation from a preacher without a similar experience, however learned he might be.

Growing criticism among the “New Lights” of the inadequacies of “unconverted clergy” as spiritual guides was answered with strong opposition from the established clergy; New England’s religious establishment soon split down the middle.

Isaac Backus experienced his “new birth” on August 24, 1741. “As I was mowing alone in the field . . . all my past life was opened plainly before me, and I saw clearly that it had been filled up with sin. I went and sat down in the shade of a tree, where my prayers and tears, my hearing of the Word of God and striving for a better heart, with all my other doings, were set before me in such a light that I perceived I could never make myself better, should I live ever so long. I saw that God had a right to do with me as He would. My soul yielded all into His hands, fell at His feet, and was silent and calm before Him. And while I sat there, I was enabled by divine light to see the perfect righteousness of Christ and the freeness and riches of His grace with such clearness that my soul wondered that others did not also come to Him who had enough for all. The Word of God and the promise of His grace appeared firmer than a rock, and I was astonished at my previous unbelief. My heavy burden was gone, tormenting fears were fled, and my joy was unspeakable.”³

New and Old Lights

Shortly after this experience, the church in Norwich was divided between the New Lights and the Old, the New Lights arguing that church membership should henceforth be limited to those who could give convincing testimony of personal salvation, and the Old Lights resisting this proposal. The two sides parted, and some of the leading families of Norwich—the Backuses, the Griswolds, the Caulkises, the Hydes, the Leffingwells, and the Tracys (Isaac’s widowed mother was a Tracy, and one of the first New Light converts)—left to form a separate church. Their decision was no light matter; separation from the parish church was a civil as well as a religious offense that could result in fines, imprisonment, posting in the stocks, and even public whipping. Anglicans, Quakers, and Baptists were by this time grudgingly tolerated in New England because of the English Toleration Act of 1689, although these groups were completely ostracized. But many of the obstinate, fanatical New Light Separates, who were newcomers to the “religious minority,” were fined and imprisoned (including members of the Backus family) for their refusal to support the parish church.

Despite their rejection by the Standing Order, the New Lights continued to grow in New England. Isaac Backus soon felt a call to preach, and though

he had until then been somewhat shy and reserved, he soon became known as a forceful and effective preacher. In 1747 he was called to pastor a new Separate congregation in Massachusetts, “The Church of Christ in the Joining Borders of Bridgewater and Middleborough,” where he was ordained on April 13 of that year.

At that time the regular members of the parish had met and laid a tax of £500 for the building of a parish meetinghouse—in which, of course, the Separates could not in good conscience worship. But they were taxed as members (inhabitants) of the parish who, not being Baptists, Quakers, or Anglicans, were not exempt from the tax. The Separates asked to be exempted from the tax, but the parish committee refused. Isaac Backus, the Separates’ pastor, was assessed £5, which he refused to pay. On February 6, 1748, the constable came to arrest Backus, who wrote in his diary: “This morning I was seized by the officer, and he threatened to carry me to prison for the precinct rate, but glory to God, He gave me a sweet calmness and serenity of soul—not to fear him nor to treat him with any bitterness. I told him that they were going on in an unscriptural way to support the gospel and therefore I could not do anything to countenance them in such a way. He told me that if I would not pay him he was going to drag me away. There came a man and called him out and paid him the money, so that he was forced to let me go. Lord, may this trial be blest for my eternal good.”⁴ (The man who paid his fine was Captain Edson, who had formerly been a Separate, but had returned to the parish party.)

The Spiritual Quest and Inevitable Split

Other members of Backus’s congregation were not as fortunate as (or were perhaps more determined than) he. One woman, Esther White, was sent to Plymouth jail for refusing to pay a tax of nine pence to support the minister in Raynham, where she lived. She remained in prison for a year, refusing to let anyone pay the tax for her. Backus visited her several times at the jail, where they prayed together. “She told me,” he said, “that the first night she was in there she lay on the naked floor, and she said that she never imagined that the floor was so easy to lie upon before . . . and she said that she was easy to stay there as long as God saw best that she should.”⁵

Isaac Backus’s spiritual quest was not yet over. In July of 1751, after months of inner turmoil and disputation within his congregation, he announced that, having diligently searched the Scriptures, he was unable to find any mandate for infant baptism. He had come to believe that only the

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baptism of adult believers was appropriate, and on August 22 he was rebaptized by immersion. This decision split his small congregation, with part following him to form the Separate-Baptist group, one of a number of New Light Calvinistic Baptist congregations coming into being from 1742 on. As one church historian has said: "In this new movement Isaac Backus became the leading figure, and his shift from the Separate to the Baptist camp is central to the religious history of New England in these years."⁶ As Baptists, Backus and his followers were exempt from the church tax at that time, and this exemption was sometimes cited by critics as the reason for their change. Saving a few pence was trivial when compared to their loss of status in the New England community, but the zeal of the Pietists was such that, like Esther White, they could rejoice in hardship and persecution when they believed it was for the sake of the true faith.

Catch-22 and Civil Disobedience

Not all Separate-Baptist churches benefited from the exemption. Some continued to be taxed as before because the assessors considered them mere tax dodgers. The newly formed Warren Baptist Association set up a grievance committee in 1769 to deal with complaints of religious tyranny, one of which came from the Baptists of Ashfield, Massachusetts. The year before, the legislature had passed a statute requiring all inhabitants of Ashfield to support the Standing Order church and pastor despite the general exemption rule for Baptists. The grievance committee, of which Backus was the most active member, vainly petitioned the legislature for relief. So in 1771 they petitioned the king. Samuel Stennett, pastor of the Calvinistic Baptist church in Little Wild Street, London, had connections in the court of King George III. He presented the petition, and the king disallowed the Ashfield law.

The grievance committee received dozens of other complaints from all parts of Massachusetts documenting how assessors were using technicalities to deprive Baptists of the church tax exemption to which they were entitled. When Baptists went to court to obtain proper enforcement of the law, the court might rule that they should have sued the tax collector rather than the tax assessor, or vice versa. Observing this legal catch-22, a Baptist sued both the collector and assessor in 1773, "only to find when he won his case against one that the damages he had to pay for falsely suing the other were higher than those he received."⁷ This kind of treatment drove the Baptists to desperation.

Isaac Backus urged a course of civil disobedience as a matter of principle. Baptists should refuse

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to pay the church tax and also refuse to present certificates of membership that might gain them exemption, because either course acknowledged the authority of civil rule in religious affairs. The Warren Association published the 62-page Backus pamphlet on this issue, the most important of the 37 tracts he published during his life⁸—*An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty Against the Oppression of the Present Day* (1773). In it he declared that "God has appointed two different kinds of government in the world which are different in their nature and ought never to be confounded together; one of which is called civil, the other ecclesiastical, government." The two had been "confounded together" by the emperor Constantine and the Papacy and had ultimately been brought to New England by the Puritans. He cited three encroachments upon religious liberty by the ecclesiastical system of Massachusetts.

1. The legislature compelled every parish to support by civil taxation an approved minister and church building.

2. The legislature required that in order for ministers to be approved, they must have either an academic (college) degree or a testimonial from a majority of the (approved) ministers in the county, thus restraining Christ's gifts by human laws.

3. Ministers were supported by compulsion of law rather than by freewill gifts, a ruling contrary to the scriptural injunction that "Christ's kingdom is NOT OF THIS WORLD" (Backus's capitalization).

No Taxation Without Representation

Backus did not hesitate to touch upon the theme then current: Parliament had no right to tax the Colonists who were not represented therein.

"Our civil legislature [are not] our representatives in religious affairs. . . . Religion is a voluntary obedience unto God which therefore force cannot promote. . . . You do not deny the right of the British parliament to impose taxes within her own realm; only complain that she extends her taxing power beyond her proper limits; and have we not as good right to say you do the same thing?"⁹

Backus wrote to Samuel Adams, then at the height of his influence as a leader of the Sons of Liberty, to urge him to champion the cause of the Baptists' religious liberty, arguing that if some remedial action was not taken soon, they would be obliged to "carry their complaints before those [the king?] who would be glad to hear that the legislature of Massachusetts deny to their fellow servants that liberty which they so earnestly insist upon for themselves."¹⁰ But Samuel Adams was not a son of religious liberty; a staunch conservative in religious

matters, he took no action on the Baptists' behalf.

The Fateful Climax

Events on a wider stage were moving toward their fateful climax. Because of the oppressions of Parliament's Coercive Acts, the Quebec and Quartering Acts, the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia in September 1774. The Warren Baptist Association elected to send Backus to Philadelphia as its agent to present its grievances to the representatives of the American colonies convened to take counsel on measures for the restoration of their civil and religious rights. James Manning, president of Brown University (on whose board of trustees Backus had sat since its inception in 1769), and Chilean Smith of Ashfield (Baptist founder of the community that had suffered the worst of Massachusetts' persecution of Baptists) accompanied Backus to Philadelphia. There, on October 14, 1774, they met with a conference of Massachusetts delegates and a few from other colonies. President Manning read a long memorial that he, Backus, and Robert Settle Jones had drawn up, declaring that religion was "a concern between God and the soul with which no human authority can intermeddle."¹¹ It recited the Baptists' grievances against Massachusetts, which provoked vehement rebuttals by John Adams and Samuel Adams. John Adams told Backus, "We might as soon expect a change in the solar system as to expect that they would give up their establishment."¹²

Unfortunately, Backus, Manning, and Smith blunted their efforts in Philadelphia by a political gaffe. In their naivete, they fell in with a group of Philadelphia Friends (Quakers) who shared their concern for religious liberty but were suspected of being Tories, opposed to the Revolution. This caused the Massachusetts delegation to suspect the Baptists of similar sympathies. Yet when the Revolutionary War broke out, the Baptists temporarily buried their grievances in the interests of the struggle for independence.

When the new state (or commonwealth) of Massachusetts set about writing its own new constitution, the issue of religious liberty surfaced again, and Isaac Backus was again on hand to try to obtain relief for the dissenters. He wrote newspaper articles, published tracts, lobbied the delegates, and corresponded with the latter's Baptist constituents so that they could make known their views to their representatives. For two years he worked indefatigably. However, despite his efforts, Article III of the proposed state constitution moved opposite the desired direction; rather than eliminating the Congregational establishment (from which

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Baptists were exempted provided they presented satisfactory certificates of adherence to recognized Baptist bodies, an action they considered as objectionable as paying the church tax), Article III effectively established all churches by requiring all inhabitants to pay a church tax, which they could designate to whatever church they chose. Since there were no exemptions from this new law, the Baptists would be compelled to pay taxes to support their own church.

Backus and his followers worked industriously throughout the state to prevent the ratification of Article III, the general assessment provision. So effective were they that, among the 220 towns reporting, a total of 8,885 persons favored Article III, while 6,225 opposed, giving it a majority of only 59 percent, far below the required two-thirds majority. But the recommendations based on the returns were often confusingly stated, so the tellers counted as being in favor all returns that were not outright rejections, and declared the article ratified.

At Backus's urging, many Baptists refused to pay the new tax, declaring it contrary to the bill of rights contained in the same state constitution guaranteeing religious liberty for all. The first case that went to court on this plea was decided in favor of the Baptist (non)taxpayer, and Backus rejoiced. But the court of one county could not bind the courts of other counties, and subsequent decisions went against the Baptists, casting Backus into a state of discouragement about religious freedom from which he never fully recovered.¹³

Ratification and Results

Backus was elected to the Boston convention of January 1788, which was to vote on the ratification of the proposed Constitution of the United States, drawn up in Philadelphia the previous year. Though like most Baptists at that time he was initially opposed to ratification (as were Samuel Adams and John Hancock), he was open to persuasion. The discussion in the convention, in addition to the urging of President Manning, relieved his anxieties on some matters. The prohibition against religious tests for public office and against hereditary nobility seemed to him sufficient guarantees against any establishment of religion or the formation of an entrenched aristocracy. Backus decided to support ratification, the first of the 20 Baptist delegates to do so. He did not carry many of the country Baptist delegates with him, but the Constitution was ratified in Massachusetts by a vote of 187 yeas to 168 nays, a margin of 19 votes.¹⁴

In his latter years Backus made a lengthy visit to the south, where he met religious liberty allies such

as John Leland. He was astonished to discover that many leaders of society in Virginia and North Carolina were Baptists, and that it was not socially declassé to be a Baptist. He completed a four-volume history of the Baptists in New England, the standard primary sourcebook for that group and period. He summed up the situation in 1895, saying: "The liberty that [Roger Williams] was for, civil and religious, is now enjoyed in 13 of the 17 United States of America. No tax for any religious minister is imposed by [civil] authority in any of the said 13 states, and their power is much weakened in the other four."¹⁵

When Backus died in 1806, the religious establishment against which he so intensely objected was still in force, but he had helped lay the groundwork for its demise. Connecticut eliminated its establishment in 1818, and despite John Adams' prediction, Massachusetts eliminated its establishment in 1833, the last state to do so.

No state has tried to erect an establishment of religion since (except possibly Utah), partly because Congress would not admit a state to the Union without guarantees against establishment of religion, partly because the Establishment Clause of the federal First Amendment was held to

TEACHINGS OF THE SUPREME COURT

Over the past two centuries of the nation's constitutional history the Supreme Court has arrived at some conclusions about the rights of religious liberty that might have pleased, surprised, or perplexed Isaac Backus, among which are the following:

1. Civil courts will not overturn the decisions of appropriate ecclesiastical tribunals in determining control of church property (*Watson v. Jones*, 1872).
2. Claims of religious liberty do not justify polygamy (*Reynolds v. U.S.*, 1878).
3. Government may purchase welfare services for a church-related hospital without violating the Establishment Clause (*Bradfield v. Roberts*, 1899).
4. The state may not interfere with the free exercise of religion unless it can show "clear and present danger" to the public interest (*Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 1940). (This was the decision holding the Free Exercise Clause applicable to the states.)
5. The Free Exercise Clause protects a "preferred freedom" entitled to more exacting scrutiny than other rights (*Murdock v. Pennsylvania*, 1943).
6. The state cannot require orthodoxy of its citizens in matters of opinion (such as politics and religion), e.g., citizens cannot be compelled by law to salute the flag (*West Virginia State*

Board of Education v. Barnette, 1943).

7. Religious believers cannot be required to prove the validity of their beliefs as a condition of soliciting contributions (*U.S. v. Ballard*, 1944).

8. "Neither a state nor the federal government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for church attendance or nonattendance. No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion. [Isaac would have loved that!] Neither a state nor the federal government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups and vice versa" (*Everson v. Board of Education*, 1947; reiterated in *McCullum v. Board of Education*, 1948; *Torcaso v. Watkins*, 1961; *County of Allegheny v. ACLU*, 1989).

9. Nevertheless, it is not an establishment of religion for the state to provide children attending parochial schools with bus transportation (*Everson v.*


Board of Education, 1947) or textbooks (*Cochran v. Board of Education*, 1930; *Allen v. Board of Education*, 1968).

10. Released-time religious instruction violates the Establishment Clause if held on public school premises (*McColum v. Board of Education*, 1948), but not if children are released from public schools for such instruction elsewhere (*Zorach v. Clauson*, 1952).

11. It is not an establishment of religion for the state to set aside a common day of rest that may coincide with the holy day of the majority (*McGowan v. Maryland*, 1961), even if that causes financial hardship for persons who observe another day for religious reasons (*Braunfeld v. Brown*, 1961).

12. Nevertheless, a Seventh-day Adventist cannot be deprived of unemployment compensation if he or she refuses to take a job that would require work on Saturday (*Sherbert v. Verner*, 1963), even if that person became a Sabbatarian after taking a job requiring Saturday work (*Hobbie v. Florida*, 1987), or is not a member of a recognized church teaching that doctrine (*Frazee v. Illinois*, 1989), though an employer need not violate seniority rules or expend more than a minimal amount to accommodate a Sabbatarian (*TWA v. Hardison*, 1977).

13. State-sponsored prayer and devotional Bible-reading in public schools

apply to the states through the Fourteenth Amendment (*Everson v. Board of Education*, 1947), and partly because Isaac Backus and others persuaded most of us that establishment is good for neither religion nor the state. In this long-term result lies the ultimate victory of Isaac Backus. And it is reason enough to include him among the champions of religious freedom in early America. 

FOOTNOTES

¹ This characterization is derived from Franklin H. Littell, *From State Church to Pluralism* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1962), pp. xii-xiv.

² In William Warren Sweet, *Religion in Colonial America*

(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 127.

³ William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 54.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 61.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 120.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 125, 126.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹⁵ Letter to Elder William Richards in England. In McLoughlin, p. 229.

violate the Establishment Clause (*Engel v. Vitale*, 1962; *Abington Township v. Schempp*, 1963; *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 1985).

14. The state may not burden religious practice without showing a compelling state interest that can be served in no less burdensome way (*Sherbert v. Verner*, 1963), but see item 28.

15. A person otherwise qualifying cannot be barred from public office because he or she refuses to take an oath invoking the Deity (*Torcaso v. Watkins*, 1961) or because he or she is ordained as a clergyperson (*McDaniel v. Paty*, 1978).

16. The state may not prohibit because it is offensive to some persons for religious reasons the teaching of evolution in public schools (*Epperson v. Arkansas*, 1968), nor may it require "equal treatment" of "creation science" and "evolution science" therein (*Aguillard v. Edwards*, 1987).

17. It is not an establishment of religion for the state to exempt from property taxation houses of worship (along with educational and charitable properties) (*Walz v. Tax Commission*, 1970).

18. There are three tests of establishment: whether (1) the purpose of a law is secular, (2) its primary effect is not to advance or hinder religion (*Abington v. Schempp*, 1963), and (3) it does not result in excessive entanglement of government and religion (*Walz v. Tax Commission*, 1970; all three elements combine in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971, et seq.).

19. Various forms of aid to parochial

schools would require constant state surveillance to determine that solely secular purpose and effect were present, and such surveillance would entail excessive entanglement of government and religion; therefore such aid cannot pass the test of establishment (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 1971, et seq.).

20. Nevertheless, similar aid can be given to church-related colleges because they are not "pervasively sectarian" and their students are more mature and therefore less susceptible to religious indoctrination (*Tilton v. Richardson*, 1971; *Hunt v. McNair*, 1973; *Roemer v. Board of Public Works*, 1976).

21. Congress did not authorize the National Labor Relations Board to supervise elections for labor representation among lay teachers in Roman Catholic parochial schools since that would interfere with the church's control of its schools (*NLRB v. Catholic Bishop of Chicago*, 1979).

22. Congress did not violate the Establishment Clause when it created an exception from the law prohibiting private employers from discriminating on the basis of religion in order to permit religious bodies to hire their own members in preference to others (*Corporation of the Presiding Bishop v. Amos*, 1987).

23. A person cannot be deprived of unemployment compensation if for religious reasons he refuses to work on armaments, even if other members of the same faith do not find such work objectionable (*Thomas v. Review Board*,

1981).

24. State educational institutions cannot prohibit students from holding meetings of student-sponsored clubs on campus because of the (religious) content of their speech (higher public education: *Widmar v. Vincent*, 1981; secondary public education: *Board of Education v. Mergens*, 1990).

25. The state may not delegate governmental responsibilities to churches (*Larkin v. Grendel's Den*, 1982).

26. It is not an establishment of religion for a state legislature to employ a legislative chaplain to lead the legislators in prayer (*Marsh v. Chambers*, 1983).

27. It is not an establishment of religion for a municipality to display a Christian nativity scene as part of a larger, mainly secular holiday array of decorations (*Lynch v. Donnelly*, 1984), but it is if the nativity scene is displayed alone at the seat of government, since that is tantamount to a governmental endorsement of a particular religion—Christianity—at the expense of other religions (*County of Allegheny v. ACLU*, 1989).

28. The Free Exercise Clause does not justify violation of neutral laws of general applicability that do not target religion or religious practice, and government does not need to justify burdening religious practice by such laws if they are a rational means of carrying out legitimate governmental ends (*Employment Division v. Smith*, 1990, in effect nullifying the principle of *Sherbert v. Verner*, 1963, supra at 14).

—D.M.K.



THE VEILING OF CHRIST

CIRCA 1993

BY ROBERT C. QUILLIN

Gathered in the chilly night air outside Bloomingdale High School in southwest Michigan, about 175 protestors held lit candles and sang hymns. Flickering flames illuminated the frosted lyrics of "Onward Christian Soldiers," "Amazing Grace," and "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." A local Baptist minister led the group in a prayer for revival in America. He asked the Lord to let the revival "begin here, at Bloomingdale High."

At 11:50 p.m., school board president James Dickerson allowed the protestors into the school through a side entrance. He asked them not to sing hymns once inside and to extinguish their candles.

At 11:59 they watched silently as school board members James Dickerson and George Fritz stood on ladders and gently placed a red velvet cloth with

An Oil Painting of Jesus in a Public School Ignites a Church-State Controversy

white lace over an oil painting of Jesus Christ, which had hung on the wall for thirty years. They then tacked the velvet down with velcro while the crowd sang "My Country 'Tis of Thee." After thanking the school board for al-

lowing them to watch the covering, the protestors left, singing "God Bless America," with an emphasis on *God*. Television and radio news teams caught it all.

This "veiling" of Christ capped months of legal battles for the Bloomingdale school. On February 3 U.S. district judge Benjamin Gibson—relying on the recent *Wiseman* decision—ordered Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ* removed from the public school hall, citing it as a violation of the First Amendment ban on the establishment of religion. Though the defense argued that the picture was of a historical rather than a religious figure, Gibson

Should the majority rule in a situation involving religious belief?

Would a court decision requiring that the picture be taken down represent hostility to religion? Should students forced by law to attend school have to see a picture of Jesus or any other religious leader on the wall? What is the role of religion in public schools, if any?

ruled that the picture's "true objective is to promote religion." The Bloomingdale school board appealed Gibson's decision to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati. On February 19, in deference to the impending higher court ruling, Gibson revised his decision, allowing the religious painting to remain but ordering that it be covered March 1. So one minute before March 1, the picture—with pomp and ceremony—disappeared from view.

Said Dickerson, "It's a sad day for the country when we have to censor one picture from a school. The First Amendment says that the state shouldn't establish or prevent a religion. The picture was given 30 years ago. I find it hard to believe anyone is establishing anything. I can't see the justice of satisfying the rights of a minority by sacrificing the rights of the majority."

Two students, Eric Pensinger and Frank Hardester, viewed the situation differently. Though Hardester had earlier complained to Principal Roger Tuinstra about displaying the painting of Christ in a public school building, the 1992 valedictorian graduated and thus couldn't pursue the matter. At Hardester's urging, however, his best friend, Eric Pensinger, a senior, filed a formal complaint late in 1992.

Said the 17-year-old Pensinger: "The same right that gives them the right to practice their religion gives me the right not to practice a religion. There's a place for religion, and it's not in public school. When I go into the school and see that big picture, it puts it into my head that that's the way I should believe." Pensinger said that he had been trying to get the picture removed since his freshman year.

Pensinger's complaint was not well received in Bloomingdale, a rural, mostly Protestant town of 500. In November, citing strong constituent support among the population, the school board, after two hearings, voted 6-0 to retain the picture. The American Civil Liberties Union, claiming that exhibiting the sectarian painting in a public school violated the establishment clause, took Pensinger's side. The Rutherford Institute, a conservative

Christian organization, agreed to represent the Bloomingdale school board.

Wrote John Whitehead of the Rutherford Institute: "School officials argue that to take down the picture would be an act of censorship on the part of the school board. According to the law, the government must be neutral toward religion—not hostile."

Bloomingdale school board superintendent Tom Hoke said that the board had "received hundreds of letters from all over the United States" supporting their decision to keep the picture up. Local residents took their positions as well.

"These assassins of Jesus Christ," wrote B. A. Crawford, pastor of the Grace Apostolic Tabernacle of South Haven, "are really brave to cry that this is unlawful and offends them. If His picture offends them, they should come to our church and feel Him. Then they would really be offended."

"It's been up for 30 years," said Norma Bales of Bloomington. "I don't think it's violating any amendments. I don't think religion is being forced upon anyone. We are not asking anyone to worship the picture. Christ was a living man, and we have the right to have it there."

"Our Lord has called us to stand and fight," said the chairman of Bloomingdale Fights Back, a non-profit organization set up to raise funds for the board's legal fees.

Nevertheless, some want the picture down.

"The courts are right!" wrote Pastor Joseph Neiman of the St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Paw Paw. "The Bloomingdale Public School picture of Jesus should be removed."

Editors at the *Herald-Palladium* in Benton Harbor supported the decision to remove the picture: "Gibson's ruling, enforcing a separation of church and state, is a protection of religious freedom for all of us."

Since the controversy began, Pensinger, a self-proclaimed agnostic, has been accused of being a devil worshiper, a charge he calls "a crock." He's even been sent a picture of the devil and he's had offers to have his soul saved.

Opposite page:
School board president (on ladder) James Dickerson and board member George Fritz (right) prepare to cover the picture, with help from board treasurer Robert Remington.

Robert C. Quillin is pastor of the Bangor, Covert, and South Haven, Michigan, Seventh-day Adventist churches. He resides in South Haven.



Above left:
Frank Hardester being interviewed on television after his alleged shoving incident.

Above right:
Television cameramen record midnight prayer and candlelight vigil at B.H.S. as demonstrators sing hymns.



Controversial portrait of Jesus beside B.H.S. mascot "The Fighting Cardinal" in hallway.

"I get a lot of letters," he said, "telling me to read the Bible and telling me my mom's bringing me up wrong."

Nevertheless, Pensinger is determined to fight it out in the courts, and so are school officials.

"A local school," said Bloomingdale principal Robert Tuinstra, "should be able to do what the citizens want."

The board's decision contrasts with a Lansing, Michigan, school board ruling less than two weeks earlier. The issue began when a 17-year-old Muslim student was ordered to remove his prayer cap on Eastern High School premises because of its religious significance, even though the school had pictures of Jesus Christ and the virgin Mary hanging on its walls. After students filed a petition to remove the paintings, the Lansing school board voted to order principals to remove any painting with religious overtones from the schools.

Bloomingdale's "Fighting Cardinals" reacted differently. After Judge Gibson's initial decision that the picture must come down, 40 Bloomingdale students were allowed to protest by staging a sit-in during the lunch hour. They held picket signs in the hallway in front of the picture. Thirty students who refused to return to class were suspended for two days, not because of their attitude about the picture, but because they refused to return to

class.

"Yeah, it was worth getting suspended for," said sophomore Tia Shorter. "It's freedom of religion. We didn't think we were being heard enough."

In an attempt to get around Gibson's ruling, school board member James Thomas went to the high school about a week before the March 1 deadline, intending to cover the painting with Saran Wrap. The picture would be covered but still visible. Told, however, that, according to the judge's criterion, it must be covered with "an opaque covering that prevents the picture from being seen from any angle," Thomas backed off.

Thus, on the night of February 28, protestors gathered for the "opaque" veiling of Christ. Though Eric Pensinger wasn't there, Frank Hardester, who first complained about the picture, was—to videotape the event. He said that some participants called him names; others promised that they would pray for him. He claimed that a local pastor shoved him as he was videotaping. Hardester said that all he and Pensinger wanted was for the school to practice what their teachers taught them about respecting the Constitution and the laws of the nation.

"If the school says that it's all right to break the law," he said, "then it teaches kids to violate the law as well."



THE ALBIGENSES

BY JACQUES FREI




f environmentalists had existed in the days of the Inquisition, they would have labeled the Albigenses an endangered species. Between A.D. 1150 and 1250 the members of this Christian sect inhabited Albi and its surrounding region in southern France. But that was before papal armies were commissioned to exterminate the heretics. And that happened after it was demonstrated that the Albigenses would not be turned from their faith by arguments.

Power. Fire. Blood. A crusade. These were the means employed by the Roman Catholic Church. In 1209 a papal army besieged the city of Béziers, where Albigenses and Catholics had coexisted for centuries. When the faithful were commanded to surrender 222 heretics (probably with their families), they refused. When commanded to surrender the town, they refused again. The papal army had a solution, however. "Kill them all, God will recognize His own." On that day throughout the Albigensian territories, according to Arnaud-Amaury's (chief of the crusade) report to the pope, almost 20,000 were killed. The number included the Catholics who chose death rather than to betray their Albigensian friends.

In Minerve is a monument to the martyrs. When the town fell to a papal army, the inhabitants were promised life if they would submit to the Roman Catholic Church. In excess of 140 preferred death. Together they were burned alive.

In Lavour the same day, 400 lost their lives in the flames. Montségur—an eagle aerie, a castle, a bare rocky mountain redoubt—was besieged for nine months. More than 200 who refused to submit were burned at the stake. A monument remains at the foot of the mountain.

These facts are taken from the records of the victors. It is only from those records that we know even something of what the Albigenses believed. The Inquisition destroyed all written records of this martyred group. 

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to suppress minority thinking and
minority expression would tend
to freeze society and prevent
progress . . . Now more than ever
we must keep in the forefront of
our minds the fact that whenever
we take away the liberties of
those whom we hate, we are
opening the way to loss of liberty
for those we love."

Wendell L. Willkie, American industrialist, politician (1892-1944).