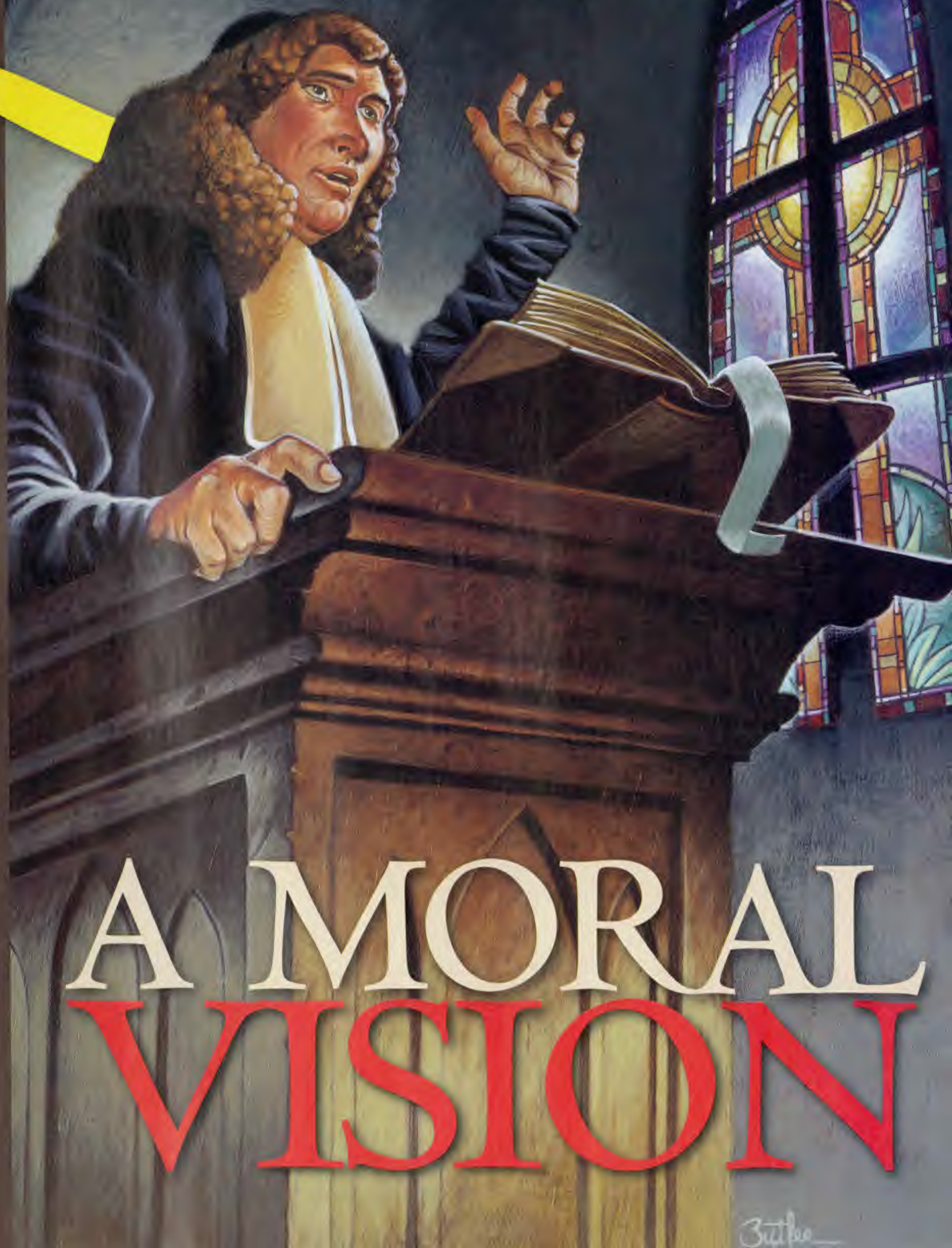




A MAGAZINE of RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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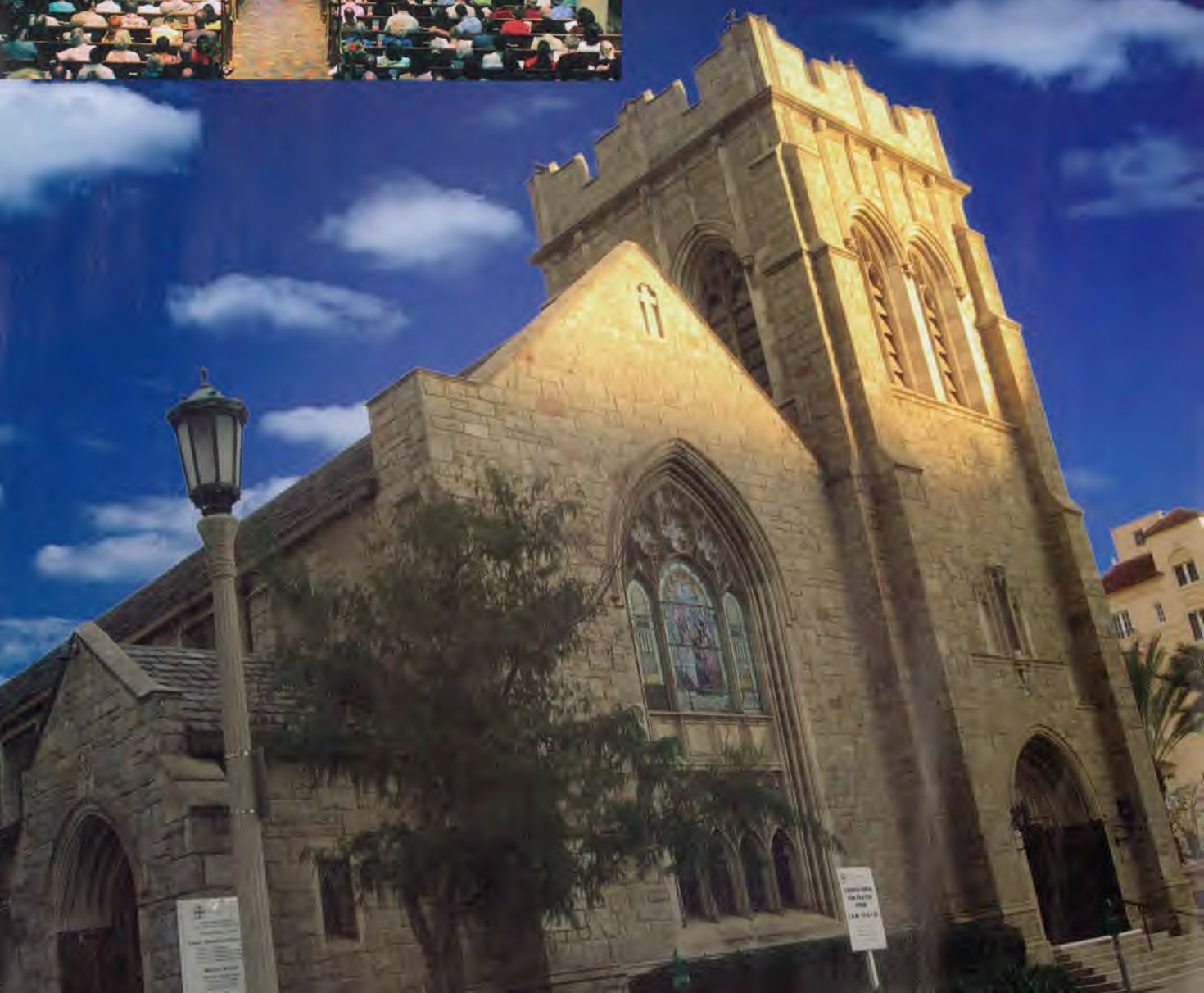
Vol. 102, No. 1
January/February
2007

A MORAL VISION

Butler

POLITIC

and



ALL POWER

the Pulpit

Political or

Partisan?

The Multi-

billion-Dollar

Question

By

FRANK PRITCHARD

The other day I heard something on the car radio that made me think that I had somehow passed through a wormhole and entered into an alternate universe. It was a National Public Radio report about a church that was in danger of having its tax-exemption status revoked because of partisan politics from the pulpit. Having always had an interest in church-state separation issues, I just assumed it was the usual fare: i.e., a right-wing pastor in Podunk openly attacking some hapless Democrat as a baby-killing, demon-worshipping, gay-loving infidel who needed to be defeated in the upcoming election to avoid God's wrath falling on America—or something of the sort. The next thing I heard was Barry Lynn, of Americans United for Separation of Church and State; again, knowing AU (and Barry), I was expecting the usual spin from him about how we need to keep churches from violating the laws regarding 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status. In other words, I just assumed that Barry Lynn and AU were the ones who had filed suit against the church, and Barry was being interviewed about his latest success.

Instead (and here's where I thought I was losing it), Barry Lynn was complaining about what the IRS was doing to this church. The gadfly of the Christian Right, the ceaseless watchdog that since the 1990s has been filing lawsuits against churches that he accuses of having crossed over the line between speaking out on issues and openly pushing a partisan agenda!

After a few more seconds of listening, I

started getting the picture. Now, not that I want to be cynical or anything, and certainly I don't want to accuse AU of having its own political bias, but once I realized that the church in question was decidedly left-wing, and about as far removed from the Christian Right as possible, did it all start making sense.

Either way, though, left-wing, right-wing, middle-left-right-wing, the story of the All Saints Church's run-in with the IRS is another example of the endless struggle that churches have regarding politics. And that's because religious organizations, especially churches, by nature are deeply involved with moral issues. Yet because so often political issues are moral in essence and tone, churches need to speak out on the political issues of the day. The million-dollar question, actually the multibillion-dollar question (since churches, by not paying taxes, have saved billions over the years), is *How can churches speak out on these issues, and yet not violate the tax code provisions that give them their exempt status?*

The All Saints Church

The All Saints Church of Pasadena, California, traces its roots to a small gathering of parishioners in a family home in 1882. It eventually incorporated as a parish in April 1886, and in 1889 the first church was con-



From left to right:
All Saints pastor emeritus
Rev. Dr. George Regas,
and current pastor
Rev. Ed Bacon.

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The All Saints Church in Pasadena, California, filled with worshipers on a typical Sunday morning.

structed on its present site, where it now has 3,500 active congregants. It is, perhaps, the largest Episcopal church west of the Mississippi. Its vision statement reads, in part: "To live out Christ's vision of unlimited love that empowers new life, not only for children, youth and adults within our membership, but with other neighbors, especially those who suffer from violence, injustice and bigotry."

The church has also been actively involved in the social issues that it feels called by God to deal with. It refers to itself as a "peace church," and its mandate calls it "to embody God's unlimited and inclusive love that embraces, liberates and empowers people. At the center of our baptismal covenant is the call to live out the universal mission of the gospel. To this end, we commit ourselves to actions of peace, justice and love that empower new life for the whole human family."

For the All Saints Church, this commitment has been manifested in overtly political ways. The previous rector was one of the first clergymen in the United States to openly come out against the apartheid regime of South

Africa (Desmond Tutu, a longtime friend of the church, has spoken at All Saints twice in 2006). The church was one of the first large ones to oppose the Vietnam War. Another rector, in 1942, stood on railroad tracks in an attempt to block trains that were bringing Japanese-Americans to internment camps after Pearl Harbor. In 1991 it was the first church in the United States to bless same-sex unions (its Web site says that it "recognizes the multiple needs of gay and lesbian Christians and is fully committed to a ministry that meets them. We welcome gays and lesbians enthusiastically into our parish life and work"). It's also pro-choice and vehemently opposed to the war in Iraq.

In short, it would not be a stretch to call All Saints, politically speaking, liberal.

The Sermon

Of course—liberal, conservative, reactionary—a church's political leaning is none of the IRS's business. What, then, caused the letter to be sent to the church dated July 24, 2006, with

What happens to **FREE**
speech (which some have argued
intended to **PROTECT**)
down your throat if you
of the

a list of questions that needed to be answered in order to determine whether or not All Saints violated the requirements of the 501(c)(3) code. According to the letter itself, it was a sermon by a visiting pastor, the former rector actually, that has raised the IRS concern. Said the letter: "We have received information that on October 31, 2004, the Reverend George T. Regas delivered a sermon at All Saints Church that took a position in opposition to candidate George W. Bush and in support of candidate John Kerry, two candidates for the office of the President of the United States in the 2004 election."

The sermon was delivered by Reverend Regas, the rector emeritus of All Saints, a few days before the 2004 election. It was titled "If Jesus Debated Senator Kerry and President Bush." And though right out the gate Reverend Regas said

that "I don't intend to tell you how to vote," it was clearly a very antiadministration homily.

A few excerpts from his mock debate between Jesus and Bush and Kerry:

"Yet I believe Jesus would say to Bush and Kerry: 'War is itself the most extreme form of terrorism. President Bush, you have not made dramatically clear what have been the human consequences of the war in Iraq. More than 1,100 U.S. soldiers dead, 8,000 wounded—some disabled for life—and now the latest figures say 100,000 Iraqi fighters, women, and children are dead. Oh, the cost of your war. Your fundamental premise for the massive violence of this war is that it is the proper response to the terrorist attack that took place September 11, 2001....' Jesus confronts both Senator Kerry and President Bush: 'I will tell you what I think of your war—The sin at the heart of this war against Iraq is your belief that an American life is of more value than an Iraqi life. That an American child is more precious than an Iraqi baby.... God loathes war. At the

build their nuclear arsenal in defense against you. This is morally indefensible.'"

Then, during his sermon, Reverend Regas said to the congregation: "When you go to the polls on November 2nd—vote all your values. Jesus places on your heart this question: Who is to be trusted as the world's chief peacemaker?" And then, again: "When you go into the voting booth on Tuesday, take with you all that you know about Jesus, the peacemaker. Take all that Jesus means to you. Then vote your deepest values."

The Tax Code

Reverend Regas's sermon, and the ensuing IRS letter, raise a number of questions. Though this was, unquestionably, a political sermon, was it a partisan one? Can one be political and not partisan, especially when political issues are so often partisan? And why was it preached a few days before the presidential election, which it referred to twice? At the same time, however clearly against administration policies the sermon was, what happens to free speech,

SPEECH, especially political
is the only speech the **FRAMERS**
if you're going to have the IRS come
speak **OUT** against the policies
INCUMBENT regime?

time of the trauma of September 11th you did not have to declare war. You could have said to the American people and the world, "We will respond but not in kind. We will not seek to avenge the death of innocent Americans by the death of innocent victims elsewhere, lest we become what we abhor." Jesus continues: 'Mr. President, your doctrine of preemptive war is a failed doctrine. Forcibly changing the regime of an enemy that posed no imminent threat has led to disaster.'... Jesus turns to President Bush again with deep sadness. 'Is what I hear really true? Do you really mean that you want to end a decade-old ban on developing nuclear battlefield weapons, as well as endorsing the creation of a nuclear "bunker-blast" bomb? Are you really going to resume nuclear testing? That is sheer insanity. This only encourages nations to

especially political speech (which some have argued is the only speech the framers intended to protect) if you're going to have the IRS come down your throat if you speak out against the policies of the incumbent regime?

According to the tax laws regarding the involvement of churches and political issues, houses of worship and religious leaders may address political and social issues, but federal tax law bars most nonprofit groups from endorsing or opposing candidates for public office. Churches, temples, and mosques must refrain from outright electioneering. Just what, however, is "outright"? According to Americans United, "Under the Internal Revenue Code, all IRC section 501(c)(3) organizations, including churches and religious organizations, are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly



Congregants of the All Saints Church, which proudly proclaims itself a "peace church."

participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office.”

Ulterior Motives?

The problem, however, is where does one cross the line between standing for an issue and either promoting or speaking out against a candidate who embodies that issue?

“We are a political church,” said All Saints director of Communications, Keith Holeman, “but we are not a partisan church. And we’re not against the IRS code, but we have to speak out on our core values, such as the war in Iraq. And that’s what Reverend Regas did.”

Of course, one could argue that the timing

effort by James Dobson’s Focus on the Family to mobilize “activists to work in eight battleground states to mobilize evangelical Christian churches before the November elections” could be crossing the line regarding what’s legitimate political activity for churches. Thus, one wonders, why has the IRS left the churches heavily involved with Dobson’s politicking alone, while coming down on All Saints for one Sunday morning sermon?

“What perplexes me about All Saints,” said Barry Lynn of Americans United, “is that I have never heard of a church being asked to undergo such a sweeping, broad and deep investigation on the basis of a complaint about a single sermon by a guest speaker.”


Where does one **CROSS** the line
between **STANDING** for an issue and either
promoting or speaking out **AGAINST** a
candidate who **EMBODIES** that issue?

of Reverend Regas’s sermon didn’t help matters (had the same sermon been preached two weeks *after* the election, I might not be writing this article). On the other hand, questions have been raised about the timing of the IRS notice to All Saints, which came just a few months before the midterm elections of 2006. Folks have wondered, was this some kind of warning shot by the administration to churches that might not be favorably inclined toward government policies?

In the past, particularly since the rise of the Christian Right, conservative churches have in some cases all but become campaign centers for the GOP. This was patently obvious in the past few elections. Some churches issued voter guides that showed how their own religion was in harmony with the policies of the Bush administration. Several Roman Catholic bishops suggested before the 2004 election that a vote for John Kerry would be a sin. In the run-up to the 2006 elections, Americans United sent out letters warning houses of worship that an

The Challenge

No doubt, the leaders of All Saints are perplexed about that as well. Which explains why, at a press conference on September 21, 2006, All Saints announced that it will challenge the IRS request: “The vestry of All Saints church in Pasadena, California, voted unanimously this morning to challenge legally, and in a court of law, the right of the Internal Revenue Service to proceed with either of the two summonses served on the church by the IRS last Friday. The 26-member governing board of All Saints reached its conclusion after much prayer and consultation with its congregation, clergy, and legal counsel.”

Though this is just one church, the issues remain big: how and when can churches speak out on the great moral and political issues of the day, and do so without the threat of government intimidation? For the revoking of tax-exempt status is, unmistakably, just that—intimidation. 



Beyond **DISCRIMINATION** and **PLURALISM**

But it remains true that one of the articles of the democratic belief in America is the disbelief in any state church or any equation between membership in a church and membership in the American commonwealth. This distinction is crucial to the idea of religious freedom as Americans have practiced it.

The issue of religious freedom in America thus goes beyond discrimination and also beyond the pluralism of the sects to the core principle of the separation of church and state, as embodied in the constitutional prohibition against any “establishment of religion.” Given the experience of Europe as well as that of the early Puritan settlers, the generation of Madison’s famous Remonstrance saw that an official recognition of a “religious establishment” would hamper religious freedom.

—**MAX LERNER**, *America as a Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), p. 713. Cited in *Great Quotations on Religious Freedom* (Prometheus Books, 2002), p. 149.



One of the great puzzles to foreign observers of the U.S. political and religious scene is how an overtly religious political movement can flourish in a country, which, more than any other Western nation, has maintained clear blue water between church and state and has an unequivocal, even dogmatic, attachment to the principle of religious liberty. The two tendencies seem incompatible—seem like they shouldn't both emerge from the same society. Part of the explanation is to be found by examining seventeenth-century England and the policies of the great Puritan general and statesman, Oliver Cromwell.

Part I of this article explored Cromwell's intervention in foreign nations' domestic affairs to preserve the liberties of Protestant minorities, and his role in allowing Jews to live in England after four centuries during which their presence had been illegal. However, as we will see, his commitment to religious liberty was combined with an inclination toward social repression. These two apparently contradictory impulses could flourish within the same man because they emerged from the same worldview; and that Cromwellian worldview was eventually transmitted to influential groups in North America, by whom it was preserved—and has been revived in some forms today.

So often history provides important insights into current issues. But there are important differences, too, between Cromwell and the leaders of the modern U.S. Religious Right;

were they to embrace more fully their Cromwellian legacy, it might modify their aims and make them more libertarian.

Cromwell's support for the Vaudois, Huguenots, and Jews was not an isolated incident. It was no coincidence that the poet John Milton (himself an unusually radical proponent of religious liberty) addressed a sonnet to Cromwell after his final military victories in 1651, urging him to emancipate England's Christian minorities:

"... new foes arise,
Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.
Help us to save free conscience from the paw
Of hireling wolves, whose gospel is their maw."¹

Milton knew his man. Even on his deathbed Cromwell cried out in concern at what fate might now befall "the poor protestants of the Piedmont, in Poland and other places."² Significantly, however, his concern was not just for fellow believers. Throughout his preeminence in the English Republic and his reign as Lord Protector, Cromwell consistently championed the right of *all* minority religious groups—not just Protestants—to practice their faith as they saw fit.

This was extremely unusual. Across Christendom it was taken for granted that *any* nation *must* be confessionally unitary or fall into chaos. In England, Cromwell differed from many of his fellow Calvinists. Most were Presbyterians, who, though persecuted themselves by the established national church in the 1630s, were opposed to any kind of religious

A MORAL VISION

By D. J. B. TRIM

OLIVER CROMWELL AND THE TRANSFORMED CHRISTIAN NATION...

P A R T II

liberty. Cromwell was of the so-called "Independents," fore-runners of the Congregationalists, but even they generally placed clear limits on toleration.

For example, almost no Protestant advocates of toleration, initially not even Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, favored extending toleration to Catholics. There was also extreme reluctance to allow liberty of worship to those who, although Protestant in sympathy, either were not orthodox in their Christianity, or were extreme in their social radicalism or apocalypticism: anti-Trinitarians, Quakers, "Fifth Monarchists," seventh-day Sabbatarians, "Ranters," and, at the start of the period, Baptists, although as the 1650s wore on, they were increasingly accepted into the ranks of "the godly" (as zealous Protestants called themselves).

Cromwell in theory probably espoused formal toleration only for Protestant sects, but he was adamantly opposed to any religious persecution. He thought it incompatible with Christ's example in the Gospels. He knew that today's subjects of persecution sometimes turn out to be tomorrow's Christian martyrs. Then, too, he was able to conceive that a firmly, honestly held doctrinal opinion might simply be wrong.

In 1650 Oliver Cromwell wrote to the leaders of the Church of Scotland—rigorously and intolerantly Presbyterian—in an effort to end war between England and Scotland, bidding them consider whether, even though they had "established themselves upon the Word of God," all that they said was

"therefore infallibly agreeable to the Word of God.... I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken."³ Although not broadminded enough to countenance the possibility that *he* might be mistaken, the whole tone of this letter, acknowledging that different people could read the same Scriptures sincerely, yet genuinely arrive at two quite different interpretations, is a million miles away from the typical medieval and early-modern attitudes toward truth and error. Even Cromwell's willingness to reason in a Christian spirit with his confessional enemies is in sharp contrast to the normal, fiercely polemical, tone of post-Reformation interconfessional "dialogue" (and arguably, too, of the strident declarations of today's so-called Religious Right).

So strong was Cromwell's horror of persecution that in practice he extended toleration, whenever he could, to *all* religious persuasions—against the opposition of many Puritan leaders, who had expected their victory in the civil wars to give them free rein. As Milton forecast in his famous poem "On the New Forcers of Conscience," they planned to use

"... the civil sword

To force our consciences that Christ set free."⁴

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But they had not reckoned on Cromwell's opposition.

Using his powers as Lord Protector, he vetoed a parliamentary bill providing for compulsory attendance at an Anglican, Baptist, or Calvinist church on Sundays. As Lord Protector he had no power of pardon, but strove to mitigate the intolerance of his associates in government. When the anti-Trinitarian spokesman John Biddle (often known as "the father of English Unitarianism") was imprisoned in the remote Scilly Isles in 1655, he received a weekly stipend of 10 shillings (a sizable sum for the time) from Cromwell's own private funds, to ameliorate the conditions of his imprisonment. Cromwell also probably helped to protect the Quaker leader James Nayler, who in October 1656 re-created Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday by riding into Bristol (Britain's second-largest city) on a donkey, while his followers laid branches in his path and cried "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth." It was probably a symbolic act, a piece of religious theater, rather than an actual claim to be Jesus Christ. But contemporaries missed any dramatic subtleties or ironies and perceived only blasphemy—"horrid blasphemy" as a parliamentary resolution characterized it, for the crime was felt to be so egregious that only Parliament could deal with it. Cromwell stayed out of the debates over how severely Nayler should be punished (in the end he was branded, flogged, and jailed), but the narrow defeat of a bill to execute the Quaker probably reflects Cromwell's influence, exercised behind the scenes.

Cromwell thought it politically impossible to extend formal liberty of worship to Roman Catholics, and he accepted a parliamentary act for the confiscation of Catholics' property. However, as he wrote to a French cardinal in December 1656, he had personally intervened to "pluck many [Catholics] out of the raging fire of persecution, which did tyrannise over their consciences and encroach by arbitrariness of power over their estates," and was determined gradually to do more to let them practice their faith.⁵ It is notable that, though it was a capital offence simply to be a Roman Catholic priest in England, only one priest was executed during the Protectorate: John Southworth (declared a saint by the Vatican in 1970). This death toll is in sharp contrast to the reigns of both James I and Charles I—generally seen as sympathetic to the plight of England's Catholic minority. It was Cromwell, the zealous Puritan, who halted the hunt for Catholic priests. Southworth was hanged, drawn and quartered under the terms of a commuted sentence from a 1630 trial, rather than subject to new proceedings. Unable to commute the sentence, Cromwell did what he could: he provided surgeons to sew the disemboweled and quartered body back together, and he returned it for burial to Douai College, the seminary for English émigré priests in the Low Countries. The only corpse of an English Catholic martyr to survive to modern times is testimony to Oliver Cromwell's opposition to religious persecution.

And yet ... despite this impressive record—despite, too, the

Each Major-General was instructed not only to suppress rebellions, enforce law and order, and maintain surveillance of disaffected persons, but also to “promote godliness and virtue and discountenance all profaneness and ungodliness.”

fact that Cromwell was the only ruler in seventeenth-century England who did *not* impose censorship on the press—he was to impose on England, briefly, the most repressive regime in its history. The 350th anniversary of the end of this episode is upon us and inevitably prompts reflection as to how it could have originated with this great champion of religious liberty.

What became known as the rule of the Major-Generals was imposed in the late summer of 1655. Cromwell, who had himself been elected three times as a member of the House of Commons, and was twice to reject proposals that he take the throne as king rather than rule as “Lord Protector,” was never happy ruling without a legislature. As Lord Protector he called two parliaments, elected on a franchise more democratic than Britain (or many American states) enjoyed again before the mid-nineteenth century. We see here again Cromwell’s commitment to liberty. But Cromwell’s regime was always underpinned by the threat of pike and musket. When Parliament resisted the government’s tax program and Cromwell’s wish to impose Reformed values on the population at large, he imposed government by his generals.

In August–September 1655, even as Menasseh Ben Israel traveled to London to request readmission for the Jews, England and Wales were divided into a dozen districts and a Major-General commissioned for each, with authority over all troops and tax-collection in his area and a wide range of other powers and instructions. They actually administered their regions only until September 1656, when the second Protectoral parliament began its sessions; in January 1657 the episode was definitively ended when Parliament rejected a bill for continuation of the Major-Generals’ rule. In this period, effectively just a year, they generated enough hostility not only to ensure that their authority was short-lived, but also to create a long-standing suspicion of standing armies that was to be transmitted from Britain to North America, where it produced

a pronounced preference for a citizen militia. It in turn produced the constitutional guarantee of the right to bear arms; the controversy this still generates is thus one of the legacies of Cromwell’s experiment in military government.

There were a number of reasons that the Major-Generals’ regime was so unpopular, but the most important was that, from the start, Cromwell intended the Major-Generals to achieve more than efficient government and enhanced security. They were also meant to enforce Puritan standards of behavior on the wider populace. Each Major-General was instructed not only to suppress rebellions, enforce law and order, and maintain surveillance of disaffected persons, but also to “promote godliness and virtue and discountenance all profaneness and ungodliness.”⁶

To achieve this, the Major-Generals worked with local communities of “the godly,” embracing both Presbyterians and the more libertarian Independents/Congregationalists, as well as some Baptists. These coalitions of the (self-proclaimed) righteous were exactly what Cromwell wanted and, with his encouragement, they set out to create a godly society.

Adulterers and fornicators were prosecuted, as well as prostitutes. The organizers and audiences of cockfights and dog-and-bear fights were fined, which accords with modern values; but those who wrestled, tossed quoits and horseshoes, or gambled, or who on Sunday (the Sabbath) raced horses or played the ancestors of football and cricket, could also find themselves in court. Celebrating traditional festivals condemned by the Puritans as “pagan,” such as May Day, and, in some parts of Britain, Christmas, might also result in arrest and legal action. Clergymen whose liturgical practices departed from those sanctioned by Calvinism were reprimanded or dismissed. The opening hours of alehouses and taverns were greatly restricted, and many were forcibly closed down. Finally and menacingly, vagabonds and beggars began to be rounded up and compul-

The separation of church and state, then, was evidence not of the demise of the Cromwellian ideal of a state that acted to promote godly behavior, but of a widespread assumption that truthful doctrine and proper actions were really promoted by the rivals to the established state church.

orarily put to work—in a few cases, even transported as slave laborers to the plantations of Virginia.

Cromwell was delighted. He told London's city council in March 1656 that the entire country had become "stronger in virtue," while six months later, addressing the opening session of the second Protectoral Parliament, he declared that the Major-Generals' efforts had been "more effectual towards the discountenancing of vice and settling of religion than anything done these fifty years."⁷ Yet for all the Lord Protector's enthusiasm, his efforts and those of the Major-Generals and local Puritans actually had a negligible effect nationwide. Drinking, debauchery, begging, football, gambling, horseracing, and Maypole dancing never stopped, because people didn't want them to stop.

The population in general did not share the vision of the religious radicals—rather, they resented and resisted it. The religious cultural revolution Cromwell sought never came close to being achieved. Instead, the mobilization of unpopular Puritan cliques to purge local society of allegedly irreligious and immoral elements only made the Major-Generals so unpopular that their rule forever tainted, in popular perception, government by the military. It also helped to discredit Puritanism in many regions of England, leading to the relocation of the vision of a godly nation, instead, to New England.

The obvious question that arises is how the same statesman who, without thought of national gain, intervened on behalf of distant, suffering minorities and constantly overrode prejudice in his own country could nevertheless impose on it such an authoritarian form of government, if only temporarily; and how he could impose such unparalleled constraints—while at the same time allowing such unprecedented liberty.

Oliver Cromwell believed that he had been called by providence, like Moses and Gideon, to lead God's people in troublesome times. It was his certainty that he knew God's

will and was the agent of providence in carrying it out that empowered him to carry out unprecedented actions such as overthrowing and executing the king, and granting religious liberty to those whom existing Protestant proponents of toleration thought outside the pale. But it is also what drove him to impose direct rule by the military and "the godly." This is why his most recent biographer sums Cromwell up as "endlessly appealing and endlessly alarming...he was true to his own vision" and would follow it wherever it led.⁸

In liberating God's people (as he believed the English to be) from the political tyranny of King Charles I, Cromwell came to feel that he should free them, too, from religious tyranny—but that included freeing them from the tyranny of sin. In working toward these goals, Cromwell was frequently frustrated, but his sense of frustration arose from his society's immorality, as well as its intolerance—both were antithetical to Christianity.

To Cromwell, liberty was important, but must not be abused. He sought to free the English people from narrow-minded, exclusivist concepts of religion, so that, in Milton's terms, no one whom "Christ set free" had their conscience "forced." Cromwell was willing to extend that same freedom even to Catholics, Jews, and licentious and blasphemous nominal Protestants, because they were more likely to be brought to true religion by Christlike kindness than by persecution. But Cromwell understood Christian liberty for the nation to include "the freedom of God's children to resist vice and embrace godliness."⁹ And so he was faced with the problem of what to do with those who abused the liberty of which he had been the political midwife—those who continued to live idolatrous, immodest, immoral, dissipated lives in defiance of all good example.

The solution to the problem was to allow liberty in one sector of people's lives because this was doing honor to God's will,



but to impose repression in another sector of people's lives because this, too, was honoring the divine purpose. Thus, *religious* emancipation went hand in hand with *social* repression.

By Cromwell's standards, however, there was no inconsistency. His liberal and illiberal sides alike arose from his vision of a transformed Christian nation. This is important to note because it helps to explain the paradox of a radical Religious Right in a country notable for its commitment to religious liberty.

After the Restoration (1660), three of Cromwell's former Major-Generals emigrated from England to the Puritan colonies of New England. We know they did not change their opinions, for on his death in 1658 one still confidently expected the imminent inauguration of rule by Christ's saints and lamented the state "of poor England whose sins are grown to a great height." We also know they had great influence in Massachusetts and Connecticut, where, a contemporary reported, they were held "in exceeding great esteem" and "looked upon as men dropped down from heaven."¹⁰ Increase Mather, the celebrated Congregationalist minister and later president of Harvard, studied theology in Britain during the Protectorate and was chaplain to a unit of Cromwell's army. He played a significant role in the North American counterpart to the Glorious Revolution (1688): the major rebellions in New York, Maryland, and the New England colonies against expansion of royal authority and restriction of religious liberty. In Massachusetts the rebellion sought, as one historian puts it, a return to "godly government based on the needs of a covenanted community"¹¹—that is, to secure both political liberty *and* a godly society. Thus, we know that Cromwellian values survived in New England after their demise in England itself.

Eventually, though, the American Revolution produced a polity in which church and state were separate—a separation formalized in the Bill of Rights, so that this separation is literally constituent of the United States of America. However, one reason that American colonists had come to believe that church and state *should* be separated was because "the church" meant the (Anglican) Church of England, which was unacceptable to the Puritans of New England, the Quakers in Pennsylvania, the Catholics of Maryland, and so on. The separation of church and state, then, was evidence not of the demise of the Cromwellian ideal of a state that acted to promote godly behavior, but of a widespread assumption that truthful doctrine and proper actions were really promoted by the *rivals* to the established state church. Separation of church and state of course had many roots, including the influence of a number of deists among the framers of the Constitution, but one root was actually the enduring aspiration to create a godly society—and nation.

Making the United States into a truly Christian nation continued to be an aspiration of influential American Protestants into the mid-nineteenth century. As George Marsden argues, the administrators of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Cornell, Chicago, Stanford, and Johns Hopkins—all founded as explicitly Protestant institutions—hoped to create an informal "established" American church founded in a generic, nonsectarian Protestantism that seemed the ideal common faith for an already Christian people. Evangelism went hand in hand with various reform campaigns, including those against slavery and for temperance and universal public education, as part of a wider movement for the moral

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By
JOSEPH L. CONN

ON GUARD *for* Religious Liberty

*Revolutionary-Era
Preacher John Leland
Warned Against
Politicians Who
“Make a Great Noise
About Religion”*

The Reverend John Leland was not a man to mince words when it comes to religion and politics. Candidates who advertise their personal faith, he insisted, should be avoided by the voters.

“Guard against those men who make a great noise about religion in choosing representatives,” observed Leland. “It is electioneering intrigue. If they knew the nature and worth of religion, they would

not debauch it to such shameful purposes.

“If pure religion is the criterion to denominate candidates,” he continued, “those who make a noise about it must be rejected; for their wrangle about it proves that they are void of it. Let honesty, talents and quick dispatch characterize the men of your choice.”

As America comes out of another round of elections, in which the line between faith and electioneering is being aggressively blurred, Leland’s words seem extraordinarily current. In fact, however, his comments come from an Independence Day oration he gave in Cheshire, Massachusetts, more than two centuries ago.

On July 5, 1802, Leland, a Baptist preacher and staunch religious liberty advocate, held forth on the importance of choosing public officials who will defend the Constitution and its separation of church and state. “Be always jealous of your liberty, your rights,” he thundered. “Nip the first bud of intrusion on your Constitution.... Never promote men who seek after

Joseph L. Conn writes from Silver Spring, Maryland.



a state-established religion; it is spiritual tyranny—the worst of despotism.”

“It is turnpiking the way to heaven by human law in order to establish ministerial gates to collect toll,” he continued. “It converts religion into a principle of state policy, and the gospel into merchandise. Heaven forbids the bans of marriage between churches and state; their embraces, therefore, must be unlawful.”

Today, when some prominent Baptist preachers denounce such church-state separation and urge evan-

The Baptist preacher insisted that religion is hurt more by government favor than by government oppression. Experience has informed us, he wrote, that “the fondness of magistrates to foster Christianity has done it more harm than persecutions ever did.”

Observed Leland, “Persecution, like a lion, tears the saints to death, but leaves Christianity pure; state establishment of religion, like a bear, hugs the saints but corrupts Christianity.”

Thanks to the leadership of Enlightenment thinkers

Experience has informed us, Leland wrote, that “the fondness of magistrates to foster Christianity has done it more harm than persecutions ever did.”

gelicals to “vote Christian,” Leland’s words may sound strange. But Baptists in Revolutionary-era America were in no position to try to take over the government. Persecuted minorities in many states, they fought against official preference in matters of religion.

Leland, like many of his coreligionists, believed government interference in matters of faith violated the will of God and individual freedom of conscience. According to scholar Edwin Gaustad, Leland declared that persecution, inquisition, and martyrdom all derived from one single “rotten nest-egg, which is always hatching vipers: I mean the principle of intruding the laws of men into the Kingdom of Christ.” Leland is little known to most Americans today. But he and other evangelical Christians played a critical role in establishing religious liberty and its constitutional corollary, church-state separation.

Born in Grafton, Massachusetts, on May 14, 1754, Leland said he spent his teenage years in “frolicking and foolish wickedness.” But at 18 he converted to Christianity and became an itinerant Baptist preacher. After visiting Virginia in 1775, he and his wife, Sally, moved to that state, and he soon became a prominent figure in both religious and political life.

Leland served as a member of the Baptists’ “General Committee,” a group formed in 1784 to agitate for religious liberty. He and other dissenting clergy fought alongside James Madison and Thomas Jefferson in the battle to overturn Virginia’s state-established Anglican (Episcopal) Church and ensure equal rights for all.

such as Madison and Jefferson and the grassroots organizing of devout Christian believers such as Leland, the Virginia legislature in 1786 adopted Jefferson’s Statute for Religious Freedom. That groundbreaking law served as a model for other states as they moved toward religious liberty guarantees, and it paved the way for the church-state separation safeguards in the U.S. Constitution.

According to historian Anson Phelps Stokes, “The Baptists played a large part in securing religious freedom and the abolition of the State-Church in Virginia, and Leland was their most effective advocate.”

Leland also played an important role in securing the Bill of Rights. When the Constitution was first submitted to the states in 1787, many in Virginia and other states were alarmed because it lacked a Bill of Rights. Leland and other Baptists were particularly worried that the Constitution included no guarantee of religious freedom, and they joined the rising chorus of opposition.

In an August 8, 1789, letter to President George Washington, written by Leland, the Baptists’ General Committee said its members feared that “liberty of conscience, dearer to us than property or life, was not sufficiently secured.”

Recognizing that the states might not ratify the Constitution unless these concerns were met, Madison assured Leland and the other Baptists that he would work to add a Bill of Rights if they would support ratification. The deal was accepted. Virginia ratified the Constitution, and Madison kept his promise. The First

Amendment he helped craft forbids the government to make any law "respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

In 1791 Leland moved back to his home state of Massachusetts, where he continued his religious and political work. In a pamphlet titled "The Rights of Conscience Inalienable," he advocated a free market of religious ideas.

"Government," he said, "has no more to do with the religious opinions of men than it has with the principles of mathematics. Let every man speak freely without fear, maintain the principles that he believes, worship according to his own faith, either one God, three Gods, no God or twenty Gods; and let government protect him in so doing, i.e., see that he meets with no personal abuse, or loss of property, for his religious opinions.... [I]f his doctrine is false, it will be confuted, and if it is true, (though ever so novel,) let others credit it."

Leland added, "Truth disdains the aid of law for its defense—it will stand upon its own merit. It is error, and error alone, that needs human support; and whenever men fly to the law or sword to protect their system of religion, and force it upon others, it is evident that they have something in their system that will not bear the light, and stand upon the basis of truth."

Leland did not hesitate to bring his principles into politics on behalf of religious freedom. He supported Jefferson's candidacy for president in 1800, and after his longtime ally was elected, the Baptist minister came up with a unique way to celebrate.

On New Year's Day, 1802, Leland showed up at the White House with a 1,325-pound wheel of cheese. A placard that accompanied the tribute on its way to Washington proclaimed it: "The Greatest Cheese in America for the Greatest Man in America!"

Jefferson, who was often brutally abused by establishment-minded clergy, was deeply gratified by Leland's dramatic gesture, and fragments of the cheese were reportedly still being served to Jefferson's guests two years later (although one diner found them "very far from good").

The U.S. Constitution and the broad-minded policies of Jefferson and Madison protected religious freedom at the national level, but in Leland's time (before the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment), states remained free to promote favored faiths and oppress religious minorities. Leland never accepted that discriminatory policy as just, and he relentlessly fought government-backed religious establishments in his own state as well as neighboring Connecticut.

In 1820, in his *Short Essays on Government*, Leland argued for religious liberty on the broadest possible

basis. "Government should protect every man in thinking and speaking freely, and see that one does not abuse another," he wrote. "The liberty I contend for is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest to grant indulgence; whereas all should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans and Christians."

Leland's views finally triumphed. In 1831 the Massachusetts legislature separated church and state, and two years later the action was overwhelmingly ratified by popular vote.

In 1788 Leland introduced a resolution at the Baptists' General Committee meeting in Virginia denouncing slavery as "a violent deprivation of the rights of nature and inconsistent with a republican government" and urging the use of "every legal measure to extirpate this horrid evil from the land."

Leland died on January 14, 1841. His tombstone reflects the passions of his life: "Here lies the body of John Leland, who labored 67 years to promote piety, and vindicate the civil and religious rights of all men."

Historians find the epitaph, which Leland himself composed, to be very revelatory. In *Revolution Within the Revolution*, William R. Estep says, "The order of these phrases is significant, indicating that Leland considered himself first and foremost a minister of the gospel and only secondarily a political activist."

Leland certainly did not let his civic work get in the way of his Christian evangelism. According to *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, his 15 years of preaching in Virginia involved more than 3,000 sermons, 700 baptisms, and the creation of two churches. By 1820 he estimated that he had given nearly 8,000 sermons over the course of his preaching career and had baptized 1,278.

Leland even gave sermons along the way as he hauled his mammoth cheese to Jefferson's White House. "Notwithstanding my trust, I preached all the way there and on my return," he recalled, "had large congregations; led in part by curiosity to hear the Mammoth Priest, as I was called."

Basing his views on both his theology and his political philosophy, Leland was a church-state separation purist who never veered from support of freedom. He opposed Sunday laws, all special privileges for the clergy, state-paid chaplains, and any government aid to religion. He said Baptists did not want the "mischievous dagger" of government help.

Leland gave his last sermon on January 3, 1841, just six days before his death at age 88. "Next to the salvation of the soul," he once observed, "the civil and religious rights of men have summoned my attention, more than the acquisition of wealth or seats of honor." □



THE PASSION OF MEL

By now the summer of 2006 has faded into memory, and what a summer it was! First, there was the Israel-Hezbollah war, the foiled Muslim terrorist plot to blow up airlines heading to the United States, Iran's continued defiance of United Nations' mandates to stop uranium enrichment, and the airline crash in Kentucky. And of course there was news of the downward spiral in Iraq, even to the point that the Pentagon itself warned of an impending civil war; something that could not only ignite internecine conflict in the combustible Middle East, but send the whole world economy into a depression.

And, yes,...there was Mel Gibson's drunken tirade in a police station about the Jews.

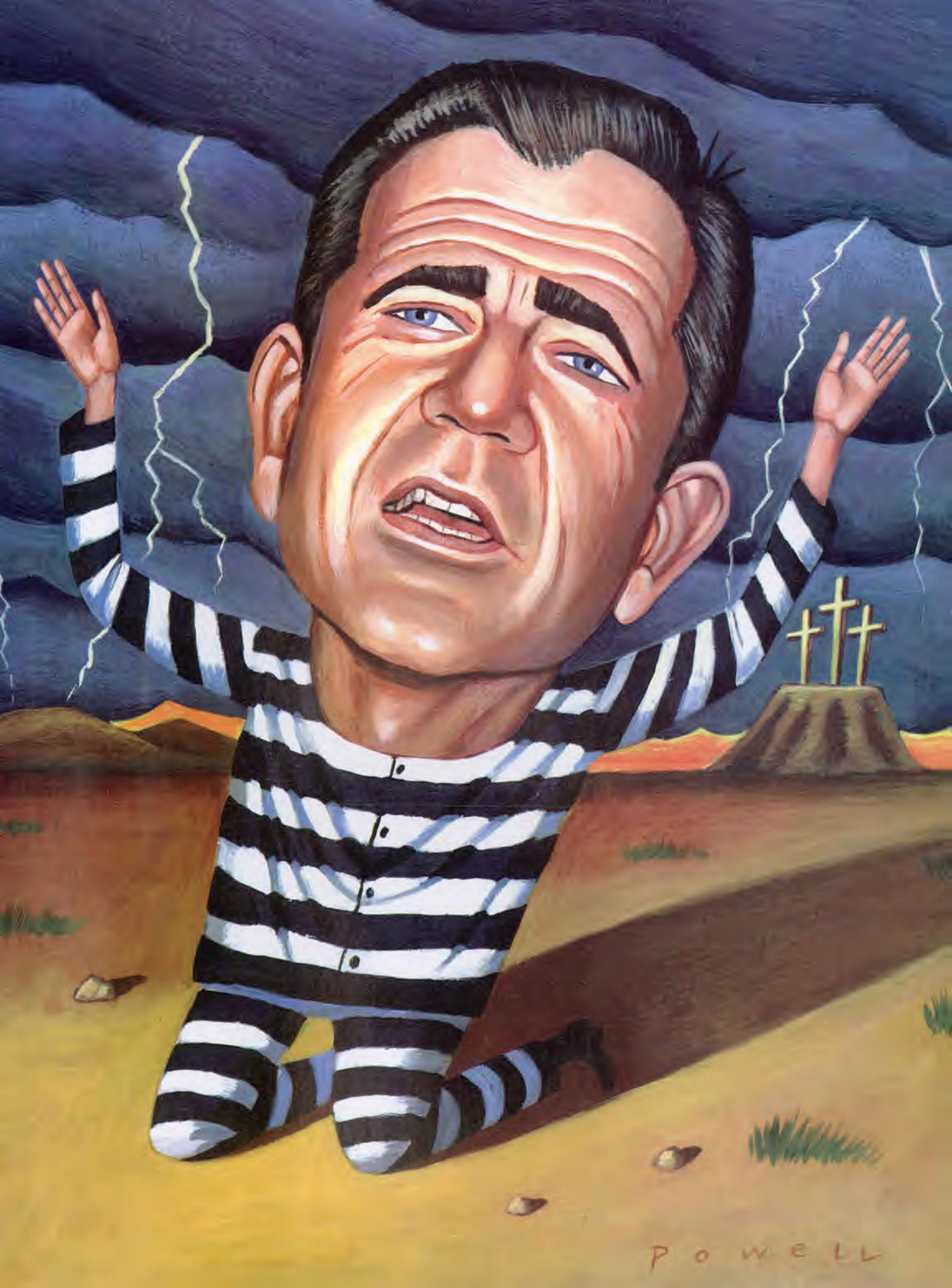
Now that there's a little distance on the Gibson thing, and "passions" have cooled, maybe we can take another look at it.

For starters, we should remember that Gibson was in jail for drunken driving, not for making anti-Semitic remarks. However egregious the results can sometimes be, freedom of speech and freedom of religion include the kind of speech and kind of religion we hate and even find horrifically offensive. If free speech includes everything from Nazis marching in Illinois, to flag burning, then certainly it must include a famous actor/director's tirade in a drunk tank.

Gibson's case, however, was a bit different. For movie directors, timing is crucial, and Mel couldn't have picked a "better" time to utter the worn-out canard about Jews starting wars. After all, the Israel-Hezbollah war had just begun, and though

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By CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN





*This is
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little doubt exists as to who started the war and who the bad guys were (after all, even the European Union has labeled Hezbollah a terror group), whenever things heat up in the Middle East with Israel, the atmosphere can get tense and sensitive, and so Gibson's rant was in peculiarly bad taste.

But on another level, here was the man who had produced *The Passion of the Christ*—one of the most widely viewed movies in history about Jesus. I saw the movie twice, and I came away impressed about just how hard Gibson tried to make it not anti-Semitic. Though I don't know his mind, it was as if Gibson, being sensitive to the problem that this story has caused, purposely tried to make it as anti-inflammatory as possible.

You wouldn't have known that by reading some of the reviews, however. The worst was Leon Wieseltier's cover article in the *New Republic* titled "Crimes of the Passion," in which he excoriated the movie, especially one scene that had Caiaphas, the high priest who had condemned Jesus, coming out to see Him hang on the cross. Wieseltier went apoplectic, arguing that the Gospels never put Caiaphas there at the cross. Of course they didn't, Leon, but they put other priests there, and by making Caiaphas the one who does appear, instead of others, Gibson helped stem the damage, limiting Jewish culpability by limiting the number of priests involved.

If Wieseltier was upset about scenes that weren't in the Gospels, he should have complained about the fictitious dialogue between the Jew who had carried Christ's cross and became a follower of Jesus (and hence one of the film's good guys) and the Roman soldier who cursed him as a Jew—another attempt by Gibson, it seemed to me, to show Jews on both sides of the divide.

As Gibson himself said about the movie, and the Jews: "To be certain, neither I nor my film is anti-Semitic.... The *Passion* is a movie meant to inspire, not offend.... My intention in bringing it to the screen is to create a lasting work of art and engender serious thought among audiences of diverse faith backgrounds (or none) who have varying familiarity with this story.

"If the intense scrutiny during my 25 years in public life revealed I had ever persecuted or discriminated against anyone based on race or creed, I would be all too willing to make amends. But there is no such record.

"Nor do I hate anybody—certainly not the Jews.... They are my friends and associates, both in my work and social life. Thankfully, treasured friendships forged over decades are not easily shaken by nasty innuendo.

"Anti-Semitism is not only contrary to my personal beliefs, it is also contrary to the core message of my movie.... For those concerned about the content of this film,

know that it conforms to the narratives of Christ's passion and death found in the four Gospels of the New Testament.... This is a movie about faith, hope, love and forgiveness—something sorely needed in these turbulent times."

Of course, after Gibson's drunken debacle, those of us who had been passionately defending the movie against the charges of anti-Semitism were put in a hard spot. My mother, who had been offended by the movie from the start (though I don't think she saw it) had called me up and said, "So you still think Gibson doesn't hate Jews?" What could I say, other than that if he does, it didn't come through in the flick, though it's going to be a lot harder convincing people of that now than before.

So, is Mel an anti-Semite? I've read Jewish people who are his friends and who say that he's not, that he's never shown any proclivity that way, though few could doubt that his 85-year-old father, Hutton Gibson, is. The old man caused a furor when, right before the movie came out, he talked about how exaggerated Jewish deaths in the Holocaust were (It's all—maybe not all fiction—but most of it is), and how the Jews were involved in a worldwide conspiracy to create "one world religion and one world government." Not exactly the best prerelease publicity for a movie already tainted, however unfairly, with the charge of anti-Semitism.

On the other hand, if Mel Gibson were an anti-Semite, so what? It still didn't come through in the movie, despite the complaints to the contrary. And even if he were, he wouldn't be the first and, unfortunately, not the last. This is America, and we are allowed to hold views that are hateful and racist and anti-Semitic. We are even allowed to express those views, too. This is what living in a free society is all about. There are lines, and the lines need to be drawn, and the essence of deciding what our freedoms do and do not include is, ultimately, knowing where to draw those lines. Fortunately for all of us, including Mel Gibson, those lines haven't been drawn—except with some notable exceptions—on what we write or say, even in the drunk tank.

At the same time, in such a highly competitive society as ours, folks have to be prepared to deal with the consequences of such expression, and Gibson faced an onslaught of publicity and media attention that left him, no doubt, pummeled. Is his career ruined? I hope not. I hope the Jewish community will take him at his word, and accept his apology. For his part, it would do an immense amount of good to openly and powerfully repudiate his father's views. Not his father—just his father's views. He certainly should have done that by now.

In the end, what Gibson's tirade has shown is that freedom comes with a cost, and as our noble experiment has proved over and over again through the past 200 years, that cost has been more than worth it. □

They say Jewish bankers were responsible for putting Hitler in power? Did you know the Jews were behind the Communist conspiracy to subdue the West? Did you hear that HIV was spread in Chicago by Jewish doctors purposely infecting children with the virus? Did you know that the Jews are engaged in a plot to take over the government and economy of Japan? Did you know that the Jews were behind 9/11; in fact, just before the attack, 4,000 Jews who normally worked in the Twin Towers didn't show up for work that day?

Blaming Jews for all sorts of evil is nothing

THE PROTOCOLS *of* Hate

By
WAYNE
SHORT

could take them seriously. Unfortunately, many have. As Rabbi Joseph Teluskin once wrote: "Thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands, of Jews have died because of this infamous forgery." And though the book itself, long ago easily discredited as a hoax, has pretty much faded in the West, with the exception of the radical right, it's being highly touted in many parts of the Arab world. It was even the basis of a TV series in Egypt a few years ago.

The Protocols Plot

Purported to be the secret minutes of the 1897 Basel Congress of the World Zionist Organization, the protocols tell of a Jewish plan for world dominion. As the protocols themselves state, the Jews first want to ruin the morals of the Gentiles: "The peoples of the GOYIM are bemused with alcoholic liquors; their youth has grown stupid on classicism and from early immorality, into which it has been inducted by our special agents—by tutors, lackeys, governesses in the houses of the wealthy, by clerks and others, by our women in the places of dissipa-

"A lie can travel halfway around the world, while truth puts on its shoes."—MARK TWAIN

new. Prejudice and a search for scapegoats have demonized a number of minorities through the years. But the vilification of Jews has a longer track than most. In the Middle Ages the Jews were accused of starting the Black Death by poisoning the wells, or for killing Gentile children and mixing their blood with the Passover matzo. You name it, the Jews have been accused of doing it. A drunken Mel Gibson in 2006 even accused them of starting all wars!

Of all the accusations, there's one that for the past century has refused to die, and it's the most absurd of all: the Jews are in a plot to take over the world and place it under the Hindu god Vishnu.

This accusation raises a number of questions such as why would the Jews be involved in a thousands-of-year-old conspiracy to place the world under an Eastern deity? Yet the larger question looms: Where did such a ludicrous idea arise, and why do some folks still believe it?

The answer is easy. It's called *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, an 80-page forgery of such silliness it's hard to believe that anyone

tion frequented by the GOYIM."

As part of their diabolical plot, they take over the world press: "The part played by the Press is to keep pointing our requirements supposed to be indispensable, to give voice to the complaints of the people, to express and to create discontent. It is in the Press that the triumph of freedom of speech finds its incarnation. But the GOYIM States have not known how to make use of this force; and it has fallen into our hands. Through the Press we have gained the power to influence while remaining ourselves in the shade; thanks to the Press we have got the GOLD in our hands, notwithstanding that we have had to gather it out of the oceans of blood and tears. But it has paid us, though we have sacrificed many of our people. Each victim on our side is worth in the sight of God a thousand GOYIM."

According to the book, the Jews were behind some of the more disdainful philosophical trends, all designed to ruin and degrade the Gentiles:

Wayne Short is a journalist who writes from Baltimore, Maryland.

Viewed in
the West
pretty much
for what it is,
a ridiculous
fabrication,
in many Arab
lands it's taken
seriously.

"Think carefully of the successes we arranged for Darwinism, Marxism, Nietzscheism. To us Jews, at any rate, it should be plain to see what a disintegrating importance these directives have had upon the minds of the GOYIM."

Plus, too, the learned Elders plan to put the world in an economic crisis, from which they will emerge rulers: "We shall create by all the secret subterranean methods open to us and with the aid of gold, which is all in our hands, A UNIVERSAL ECONOMIC CRISIS WHEREBY WE SHALL THROW UPON THE STREETS WHOLE MOBS OF WORKERS SIMULTANEOUSLY IN ALL THE COUNTRIES OF EUROPE. These mobs will rush delightedly to shed the blood of those whom, in the simplicity of their ignorance, they have envied from their cradles, and whose property they will then be able to loot."

And, finally, the climax of the Jewish conspiracy: "Our kingdom will be an apologia of divinity, the divinity of Vishnu, in whom is found its personification."

The Origins and Spread

Much as has been written over the years regarding the origins of *The Protocols*. It was, apparently, concocted in the early 1900s by the Russian secret police, plagiarized from a book called *Dialogue in Hell Between Machiavelli and Montesquieu* by a French lawyer, Maurice Joly, in 1865. Though Joly's book had nothing to do with the Jews, whoever wrote *The Protocols* simply took Joly's work and gave it an anti-Jewish slant.

By the early 1920s, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* had become an international best seller. Henry Ford, of car fame, was a big promoter, and even had the *Protocols* serialized in his newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent*. He then published the series in a book that sold about a half million in the United States alone. The sad thing was, many folks took it seriously, too.


"Those who feel libeled by the *Protocols*," said Norman Jaques, M.P., in Canadian House of Commons in 1943, "have the most obvious remedy in the world; all they have to do is to ruse and denounce the policy of them, instead of denying the authorship....But when you come to read them, how can any reasonable man deny the truth of what is contained in them?"

The *Protocols* had another admirer, Adolf Hitler, who cited the document as proof that his anti-Jewish campaign was necessary to protect

Germans from the Jewish menace. As he wrote in *Mein Kampf*: "To what extent the whole existence of this people is based on a continuous lie is shown incomparably by the *Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion*, so infinitely hated by the Jews. They are based on a forgery, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* moans and screams once every week: the best proof that they are authentic. What many Jews may do unconsciously is here consciously exposed. And that is what matters. It is completely indifferent from what Jewish brain these disclosures originate; the important thing is that with positively terrifying certainty they reveal the nature and activity of the Jewish people and expose their inner contexts as well as their ultimate final aims. The best criticism applied to them, however, is reality. Anyone who examines the historical development of the last hundred years from the standpoint of this book will at once understand the screaming of the Jewish press. For once this book has become the common property of a people, the Jewish menace may be considered as broken."

The Protocols Today

After the carnage of World War II, the vast promotion of the book greatly ceased, particularly in the West, though it never stopped being read, believed, and spread around the world—from Russia to Latin America—even if much less than before. While it's viewed in the West pretty much for what it is, a ridiculous fabrication, in many Arab lands it's taken seriously. In Egypt in 2002, a 41-part TV series, "Horseman Without a Horse," told about a turn-of-the-century Egyptian journalist who, using numerous disguises, uncovers the truth about the *Protocols*. The forgery is very popular in Syria, where the government-controlled TV have run shows promoting it as true. In 1997 the two-volume eighth edition of the *Protocols* was published by Syria's Mustafa Tlass' publishing house and sold at the Damascus International Book Fair. At the 2005 Cairo International Book Fair, a new 2005 edition of the *Protocols* was on display.

What's the future for the book? Who knows, though one thing is sure: We should never underestimate the power of a lie. If the idea of a book promoting a Jewish conspiracy to place the world under the dominion of a regime that will be "an apologia of divinity, the divinity of Vishnu," could survive, even thrive, through much of the twentieth century, then no doubt it will be around through much of the twenty-first as well. 

This past summer saw the release of a fifth book from radical right-wing author Ann Coulter. Since then, *Godless: The Church of Liberalism* has probably raised more hackles than all her other books combined. The day of its release she was interviewed by Matt Lauer of NBC's *The Today Show*. The conversation began as a civil debate, but quickly accelerated into a jousting match over Coulter's incendiary statements about widows of 9/11 victims who pushed for the creation of a 9/11 commission to investigate the cause of the attacks. Going in for the kill, Lauer quoted *Godless* verbatim:

"These self-obsessed women seem genuinely unaware that 9/11 was an attack on our nation, and acted as if the terrorist attack only happened to them. They believe the entire country was required to marinate in their exquisite personal agony. Apparently denouncing Bush was an important part of their closure process. These broads are mil-

lionaires lionized on TV and in articles about them, revelling in their status as celebrities and stalked by griefarrazis. I've never seen people enjoying their husbands' deaths so much."

Due largely to Lauer's interview, the model-thin, blond-coiffed Coulter soon adorned the covers of the *Daily News*, the *New York Post*, and the *National Enquirer*. Her book shot to number one on Amazon.com within a few days. While her assertion that the widows are millionaires is unsupportable, her own profits have well-exceeded that mark. Pointing her Midas-touch, accusatory finger at their supposed millions has earned her veritable millions. In her own words in response to the explosion of controversy surrounding the passage read in the *Today* interview: "We can keep this party going all summer... people become curious...and they buy the book and the message gets out."¹

Question: Is Ann Coulter an entertainment shock-jock, dishing up con-

troversy for mammon's sake, or a Republican straight shooter who at times insightfully calls the bluff of liberal politicians?

The answer is probably Yes, Yes.

The "mean girl of the moment"² made a point in her diatribe against the 9/11 widows. While conservatives are not completely above the practice, liberals seem especially adept at granting automatic moral authority to victims.

Jennifer J. Schwirzer is a freelance author living in Wyndmoor, Pennsylvania.

Analyzing the Cult of Ann Coulter...

MONEY &

MEANNESS



By
JENNIFER J.
SCHWIRZER

Consider Cindy Sheehan, who, after losing her son in Iraq, camped outside President George W. Bush's Texas ranch and demanded an interview, launching her career as America's "peace mom." Ironic, considering the fact that her son died a war hero and was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star Medal with V for Valor and the Purple Heart. In her vitriolic way, Ann Coulter was pointing out that the problem with antiwar proponents like the peace mom is that one is hesitant to argue with the bereaved. Even Los Angeles *Times* columnist Tim Rutten, who compared *Godless* to pornography, agreed that there is an argument here.³ In one of her less venomous moments, Coulter says it this way: "Don't put up someone I'm not allowed to respond to without questioning the authenticity of their grief."⁴ That's a respectful objection to a potentially manipulative practice. If Ann had expressed it that way in the book, it would have gone down in publishing history without provoking so much as a raised eyebrow.

And that may be the point. She wouldn't have moved product with that respectful, dignified approach. When she elected to use the "art of outrageousness," she created a hum that was heard around the world. And whatever her motives were, the ensuing controversy was good for business. Ms. Coulter seems to have bought heavily into the adage that there is no such thing as bad publicity. According to that philosophy, one can freely sabotage characters, judge motives, and insult persons, without so much as a blush of shame. It's all part of the shout-and-denounce game that has an appeal not unlike that of professional wrestling—but more civilized. Or is it? You decide after taste-testing Ann Coulter's pen at its most poisonous:

More on the 9/11 widows: "How do we know their husbands weren't planning to divorce these harpies? Now that their shelf life is dwindling, they'd better hurry up and appear in *Playboy*."⁵

On Democrats: "Even Islamic terrorists don't hate America like liberals

do. If they had that much energy, they'd have indoor plumbing by now."⁶

On women at the Democratic National Convention: "My pretty-girl allies stick out like a sore thumb amongst the corn-fed, no make-up, natural fiber, no-bra needing, sandal-wearing, hirsute, somewhat fragrant hippie chick



ing Al Franken's book, *Rush Limbaugh Is a Big, Fat Idiot*, appeared on the scene in 1996, followed by *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*, in 2003.

Perhaps the most prominent liberal media pundit is Michael Moore. Moore presents himself as the everyday-Joe leftie with his finger on the pulse of the common man—a facade that speaks metaphorically, in that the very form of *Fahrenheit 9/11* is a façade. Until the phenomenon of media provocation rose to its current heights, documentaries were understood to be factual,

*When power, influence,
aside the love of God and man,
integrity has*

pie wagons they call 'women' at the Democratic National Convention."⁷ (Ms. Coulter was replaced as a columnist for *USA Today* after refusing to edit this comment, and dropped by the *National Review* for anti-Muslim statements.)⁸

On her method of soul-winning: "We know who the homicidal maniacs are. They are the ones cheering and dancing right now. We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity."⁹

In reaction to the New York *Times* ignoring her books: "My only regret with Timothy McVeigh is he did not go to the New York *Times* Building."¹⁰

Coulter is an example of the growing phenomenon of "new entertainment," which features the use of political extremes as a source of laughter and adrenaline. This is relatively new to the American scene, beginning in the 1990s with such media characters as Rush Limbaugh. Nor is the phenomenon confined to conservatives. Left-lean-

and dramas fictional. Moore spawned a mutation that retains the form that has historically signaled "fact" to the brains of media consumers, but in reality takes liberties with the truth.

Likewise Ann Coulter. Analysts and commentators toil diligently to dissect her charisma into bite-size, digestible pieces. They scratch their heads over her immense popularity, and gaze dizzily as her book sales soar. Ann offers a pretty smile and says, "I'm not surprised by the book's sales success. All my books have been huge best sellers, so I'm beginning to suspect that there's some interest out there in what I have to say."¹¹ According to her, her claim to fame is that she speaks truth into the blitz of liberal lies, and is appropriately commended for it.

But does Ann Coulter speak truthfully? She has been christened with labels that range from "cunning satirist" to "comic genius."¹² Apparently some wonder if she believes her own script, the common perception among oppo-

nents being that Ann is more about showmanship and spectacle than she is about politics. Most likely, she would rebut with "provocation is the essence of persuasion,"¹³ but we would feel compelled to ask, "persuasion to buy into your *politics* or your *book*?" Most likely, she'd say there was no difference.

Could it be that in this age of accelerating printing presses, 24-hour cable TV, increasing radio options, and the ever-expanding Internet blogosphere, that it takes shock-jock tactics to rise above the ruckus? Could it be that more thoughtful, less rudeness-reliant conservative thinkers like George F.

pro-life, intelligent design, and family values message rocket to the top of the media industry? But there is one small problem: she speaketh like the devil for the Lord.

What saith Ann's religion of her acerbic tongue? "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless" (James 1:26). And what of her angry accusations? "Let your gentleness be known to all men" (Philippians 4:5, WEB). What of her distain for opponents? "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44).

and book sales push a fatal compromise of religious taken place.

Will are less marketable and therefore less heard? A frightening thought, to be sure. Does Ann realize this competition factor and, keeping her eye single to the delivery of her message, nobly do whatever it takes to get the truth out to the world? Or are her eyes single to dollar signs and sales profile charts? We can't know for certain what's in her heart.

But according to her, at least, she knows what's in ours. A modern-day Pharisee, Ann Coulter judges others down to the substrata of their most hidden motives (see above quotes) while her own flagrant sins go unrepented of. Using her Cornell-educated cranium, she crunches her opponents with rapid-fire smarts and logic that is often irrefutable. She is high in the affections of conservative Christians, given their dismay with our culture's rapidly thickening moral turpitude. "I'm a Christian first and a mean-spirited, bigoted conservative second," she says, "and don't you ever forget it."¹⁴ How much more could Christians ask than to have their

Are the enemies feeling the love? One article title says it all: "If Ann Coulter's a Christian, I'll Be Damned."¹⁵ A Christianity that makes hell look good should at least be inspected for possible rottenness. When power, influence, and book sales push aside the love of God and man, a fatal compromise of religious integrity has taken place. It's only a matter of time before gangrene sets in. In today's marketplace, religious values are blended with politics and made merchandise. Like the holy wars of old, kingdoms are at stake. Then, the weapons were swords and arrows. Today, they are words. But the thirst for conquest can be the same in this day of verbal weaponry as it was when Pope Urban II launched the first crusade in 1095.

Let's not fool ourselves. The sin of journalistic violence has risen to ridiculous heights, profit margins notwithstanding. The same religion that condemns the murder of an innocent baby condemns the murder of a reputation.

Those who reject evolution should act like human beings, not apes. Family values are about loving your fellow man, not hating your heathen neighbor. And don't you ever forget it. ☐

In printing this opinion piece Liberty is not intending to descend into the abyss of hate talk that more and more passes for public debate. Rather we think it important for our readers to take a cold sober look at the genre and reflect on what is lost to freedom and, indeed religious freedom, when crude error and crude faith are enlisted in public debate. The very existence of the Ann Coulters and the Al Franken and others of their tribe may well demonstrate the vitality of our free society. But their message may signal a moral sickness that oozes malignancy for America's religious heritage. EDITOR.

¹ George Gurley, "Ann Coulter Ecstatic: Enemies Stoke Sales 'They're Like My Pets,'" *New York Observer*, July 3, 2006, p. 2.

² *Ibid.*

³ Larry King and John Roberts, "CNN Larry King Live," *Cable News Network Transcripts*, June 12, 2006, p. 6.

⁴ Matt Lauer, "Ann Coulter Discusses Her New Book," *NBC News Transcripts, National Broadcasting Co., Inc.*, June 6, 2006, p. 5.

⁵ George Gurley, "Ann Coulter Ecstatic: Enemies Stoke Sales 'They're Like My Pets,'" *New York Observer*, July 3, 2006, p. 2.

⁶ Jonathan Pitts, "Ann Coulter: She's the Hammer, Liberals Her Nail," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 30, 2006, p. 3C.

⁷ Ann Coulter, "Put the Speakers in a Cage," *WorldNet Daily Commentary*, July 26, 2004, retrieved from http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=39644

⁸ The Associated Press, "Ann Coulter: 'Outrageously' Successful," June 13, 2006.

⁹ The *New York Post*, "Axed Pundit Blasts Her Editor," October 3, 2001, p. 10.

¹⁰ George Gurley, "Coultergeist," *The New York Observer*, August 26, 2002.

¹¹ Jonathan Pitts, "Ann Coulter: She's the Hammer, Liberals Her Nail," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 30, 2006, p. 3C.

¹² George Gurley, "Ann Coulter Ecstatic: Enemies Stoke Sales 'They're Like My Pets,'" *New York Observer*, July 3, 2006, p. 2.

¹³ Jonathan Pitts, "Ann Coulter: She's the Hammer, Liberals Her Nail," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 30, 2006, p. 3C.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Tony Norman, "If Ann Coulter's a Christian, I'll Be Damned," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 9, 2006.

A MORAL VISION

Continued from page 13

transformation of American society.¹² The baton of the campaign for a godly nation was handed on in the early twentieth century with the series of booklets entitled *The Fundamentals* (1910–1915), from which Fundamentalism takes its name. These tracts were not only militant in their defense of biblical infallibility; they also urged the need to save Christian civilization in North America from decadence.

Thus, the conservative Christian coalition in the United States in the past 30 years has followed a well-trodden path, originating in the mid-seventeenth century. Many of the issues that impelled Cromwell to social intolerance and repression also drive the Religious Right. Its leaders and supporters, like Cromwell, feel anger at the prevalence and escalation of what seems immoral and irreligious in their nation; that anger is heightened by their belief that the United States was meant to be “one nation under God.” Like Cromwell, to transform the nation they want the reformist will of “the godly” to be backed up by the coercive power of the state. Of course, in twenty-first-century America, unlike seventeenth-century England, that option is not easily legally available. However, because today’s politically active conservative Christians, like Cromwell, are certain that their aims are in keeping with God’s purpose, they are more willing to regard laws (even constitutional liberties) as mere obstacles to be overcome, rather than as fundamental freedoms. And like Cromwell (and their more recent nineteenth-century predecessors), they have created a broad-based coalition, transcending denominational particularity, and embracing even anti-Trinitarians, such as Mormons, in order to obtain their goals.

And yet, for all these comparisons, there are also notable contrasts. Cromwell differs from today’s would-be forcers of conscience not least in what the historian John Morrill sums up as “his sense of himself as the unworthy and suffering ser-



vant of a stern Lord.” Cromwell was careless of his personal appearance, refused to become king, and genuinely wanted to return to his farm, but felt called by God to a public role. There is no comparison with those who bask in the adulation of large political rallies or televised megacongregations (and who thereby do no credit to the many genuinely Christian and humble conservative Evangelicals). At the end of his life Cromwell could say and mean: “If here I may serve my God either by my doing or by my suffering, I shall be most glad.”¹³ Too many of today’s evangelists or pastors turned lobbyists or politicians are keen to *do* and to *do* to others, forgetting that as Christians we may instead be called to suffer, whether actually or metaphorically.

One must also question how far the leaders of the Religious Right are committed to religious freedom. Support from conservative Christian congressmen for the Workplace Religious Freedom Act (in face of opposition from the ACLU!) demonstrates respect for different faiths. But, as we have seen, many of Cromwell’s contemporaries had a *limited* commitment to toleration; what they lacked was Cromwell’s resolve to protect and defend not just those whose doctrines differed from his, but those whose beliefs and practices he found detestable. Since the 1990s, prominent Christian conservatives—judges, evangelists, legislators—have made it clear that they regard America’s statutory separation of state and church as against the intentions of the Founding Fathers



and thus ripe to be undone.¹⁴ What might be the results if the First Amendment were to be repealed or radically reinterpreted by the courts? Studies have shown that, despite the Bill of Rights' protection of equal opportunities, members of religious minorities in America have often felt obliged to "hide (or change) their beliefs and denominational memberships, and minimize the expression of distinctive religious practices."¹⁵ Given this extensive practical intolerance, if the political representatives of conservative Christianity *could* place outright legal limits on the distinctive practices of those whose concept of faith is unpalatably different to their own, would "moral renewal" be all they would seek? Might Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, Seventh-day Adventists, "Moonies," or members of "new religious movements" find some restraints put on their freedom to practice their faith or to proselytize? The experience of anti-"cult" legislation in Europe in the 1990s shows how easily religious minorities can be demonized and subjected to repressive legislation. Do the leaders of the Religious Right share Cromwell's commitment to "pluck from the fire of persecution" even confessional enemies—say so-called Christian homosexuals? Their rhetoric to date suggests they do not.

While in some ways Oliver Cromwell stands as a model for religious libertarians, his exceptionalism in championing the rights of minorities at home and abroad must not blind us to his enthusiasm for enforcing certain patterns of

behavior. The Cromwellian legacy, then, is an ambivalent one. As so often where there is great certainty of belief, there also can be great intolerance. But Cromwell was committed, ultimately, to allowing freedom of thought and worship even to those whose views he abhorred. Those who seek to weaken the constitutional commitment to religious liberty in order to impose their values on the population at large are only living up to the least admirable and least successful side of the Cromwellian legacy. □

¹ "To the Lord General Cromwell on the Proposals of Certain Ministers..." (1652), lines 11-14.

² Quoted in John Morrill, "Cromwell, Oliver," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), p. 346.

³ *Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. Wilbur Cortez Abbott, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1937-1947), 2:303.

⁴ "On the New Forcers of Conscience Under the Long Parliament" (1646), lines 5, 6.

⁵ *Writings and Speeches*, 4:368.

⁶ Quoted in Christopher Durston, *Cromwell's Major-Generals: Godly Government During the English Revolution* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 22 (spelling modernized).

⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁸ Morrill, p. 351.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

¹⁰ Quoted in Durston, 44, 236 (spelling modernized).

¹¹ David S. Lovejoy, "Two American Revolutions, 1689 and 1776," in J.G.A. Pocock (ed.), *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 255.

¹² George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹³ Morrill, 352 [emphasis mine].

¹⁴ E.g., "Obiter," *Liberty*, May-June 2000; Michael Peabody, "Toward a Medieval Model: Deconstructing the Constitution Restoration Act," *Liberty*, March-April 2006.

¹⁵ Gloria T. Beckley and Paul Burstein, "Religious Pluralism, Equal Opportunity and the State," *The Western Political Quarterly* 44.4 (March 1991), 185.

The Dividing Line of History

With all the attacks on Christianity in recent years, ACLU lawyers threatening public schools that display Christmas trees or refer to Christmas as anything other than the holiday season, attacks on the words "under God" in our national pledge, and the words "In God We Trust" on our currency, it comes as no surprise that the international method of dating history would come under attack at some point.

For about 1,700 years we have used the initials BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, or the year of the Lord) as the dividing line for history. But this method of dating time may soon be obsolete.

The Kentucky Board of Education has voted to include in its curriculum a new secular system of dating the calendar BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era). This new method replaces the birth of Christ as the dividing point in history. Kentucky educators say they will include all four acronyms in the curriculum because students need to know them in case they encounter them on college placement tests.

Kentucky schools are paving the way for other schools in America to follow suit, but they aren't the first to question the use of BC and AD as a dating method. Australia's Department of Education made the switch to BCE/CE in 2005, replacing BC/AD altogether.

Jewish and Christian scholars developed BCE/CE for cross-cultural dialogue, and the National Geographic Society and the U.S. Naval Observatory have already been using the new terminology to date time for quite a while. Even the history channel has begun using the new dating method for non-Christian religious topics.

The method for dating time is essentially the same: The new system changes 2006 AD to 2006 CE. The only difference is that the initials used to refer to the year have changed so that there's no reference to Christ. Some theologians, however, are referring to BCE as Before the Christian Era and CE as the Christian Era. Others interpret the initials as Before the Current Era and the Current Era.

Many Christians are outraged at the prospect of changing the way we date history. The American Family Association (AFA) says: It opens the door for the ACLU to find a liberal activist judge who will forcefully remove the use of BC and AD. The ACLU types will claim that the use of BC and AD is a violation of the First Amendment because it dates history based on the birth of Christ.

How should Christians respond to replacing the birth of Christ as the dividing line of history? Let's look at the rationale behind the change. One of the rationalizations for using the new system rather than BC/AD is because many (even conservative) scholars believe that Christ was born 3-4 BC. The AD dating came years after Christ had actually lived. But BCE/CE doesn't correct this problem; it merely changes the wording so there is no longer a year of the Lord. Christ is mentioned by name or not. We will still be using the Gregorian calendar with Christ at the center, and no word changes can alter that fact.

So in answer to the question should we replace the birth of Christ as the dividing line of history? The answer is BCE/CE doesn't replace the birth of Christ. Jesus is alive and well and living in the Common Era. No one can

ever change that!

J. TAYLOR LUDWIG

St. Louis, Missouri



Christians in Name, Not Practice

In Sept/Oct issue's first article, did anyone else notice one of the reasons Iraqi

Christians are hated by Islamists? "They operate a disproportionate share of Iraq's liquor, music, and beauty shops," which trade is considered sinful to many Muslims. The next sentence is a telling one also: "Iraq was once awash in pop music CDs sold by Christian vendors."

Does a true Christian sell snares of mind-and-soul-numbing alcohol, or worldly, sensual music, or self-focused beauty? The Bible teaches a polar opposite. Does a sensible minority Christian sell products or offer services that the persecuting majority culture finds reprehensible? No—nor is that a good way to win converts, either! What a witness!

JEAN HANDWERK

Via e-mail

A very good point. Christians who do not exemplify their faith more easily give cause to prejudice.—Editor.

Me First

The "Desperate Faithful" article by Kaplan (*Liberty*, September/October, 2006) was published featuring the statement "Even though the Christian presence in Iraq predates the arrival of Islam, in the Iraqi Muslim imagination, Christians will always be emissaries of the West." Substitute the words "Jewish" for "Christian" and "Israel" for "Iraq" and the same

truth prevails. Funny how history is ignored by the fanatic.

ARTHUR M. COHEN

Los Angeles, California



Deal With Causes

I just read "How Noble Experiments Fail" (July/August 2006) and gained a lot of insight from it. I have debated

the issues of alcohol and drug legalization for many years. While I recognize the damage that both can cause, I also realize that a total ban on both is group punishment. We punish the majority who can responsibly use alcohol, and possibly drugs, for actions of a minority who can't. Also, total prohibition of both amounts to attacking the supply while ignoring the demand, in which case you get the increased crime that occurred during Prohibition and the complete failure of the current war on drugs. Success at reducing the damage of alcohol and drugs hinges on reducing the demand for both. In fact, if we could eliminate demand, we would need no controls on supply.

Keep up the good work!
Roger D. McKinney
Broken Arrow, Oklahoma

Editorial Promoter's Moral Code

Your editorial in the July/August 2006 *Liberty* on the Ten Commandment Code was great. The only thing I think you should have added was that it is the role of the churches, the home, and private religious schools to promote the Ten Commandments. It is my perception that a major reason for our moral problems is that in general these three entities have done a very poor job of promoting God's great moral

code. Government should leave that job to them. It should be religion neutral.

I just wanted to add that the Letter to the Editor about Intelligent Design by Robert Orrick in that same issue was outstanding.

DONALD E. CASEBOLT, M.D.
Farmington, New Mexico

A Right to Imbibe?

The argument that our country's last attempt at prohibition was a miserable failure due partly to lack of enforcement has merit ("How Noble Experiments Fail," *Liberty*, July/August, 2006); however, any suggestion that we should try again with greater focus and fervor is reminiscent of socialists who argue that socialism would work if only the right people were in place to properly manage and execute it. It ignores the basic fact that socialism, and likewise prohibition, are incongruent with human nature, and therefore doomed to fail.

Second, pointing to Barrow, Alaska, as a prohibition success story is somewhat disingenuous. Schwizer herself admits that "such a ban was easy to enforce," because of Barrow's remoteness. Let's see the same "experiment" conducted in, say, a small midwestern town of comparable size within a reasonable driving distance of a major metropolitan area. Would the ban be easy to enforce? Certainly not. But, more important, prices of the banned substance would remain reasonable on the black market, and it would likely flourish.

Last, the author's argument that "no man is an island" carries some weight in a debate about personal responsibility. However, self-harm is the other side of the freedom

coin. The right to buy, sell, and imbibe alcohol is no different than the self-evident rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These rights are among those endowed to us by our Creator. And one would think that writers for *Liberty* magazine would realize that fact.

JERRY A. PIPES
St. Louis, Missouri

Are we really caught on the horns of a religious liberty dilemma in equating the God-given rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness with the right to buy, sell, and imbibe alcohol? I think not. The powers to regulate commerce rightly reside in civil government and the obligation of a society to regulate the risk of harm is not really questioned. Moral rights such as religious expression are quite another matter. —Editor.



Thought-provoking

I first want to tell you that I have found your magazine to be an invaluable resource for me in my fight to preserve

the independence of the court system here in Kansas. *Liberty* is thought-provoking, and I appreciate the historical perspective that your articles give the current battles we are fighting.

I have a couple of questions that I hope you can answer for me. I am a district court judge here in Kansas, and your magazine comes to me in my office. I don't know how it is that I have come to receive the magazine for so many years, but I will be retiring in a couple more years and would like to continue receiving it. At the point at which I retire, will

I be able to subscribe to have it sent to my home?

Second, and this is really the most important question: On the back of this month's edition, there is a quote from Daniel Webster: "If the Constitution be picked away by piecemeal, it is gone—and gone as effectively as if some military despot had grasped it at once, trampled it beneath his feet, and scattered its loose leaves in the wild winds." I will be addressing the Kansas Bar Association in early June on the topic of keeping politics out of

the courts, and I plan to focus on the constitutional imperatives of keeping our courts independent. I would like to use that quote to open my speech. Can you give me any more information about where the quote came from? Was it in a writing by Webster, or did it appear in a speech? I'd like to be able to use the quote and give the source.

Thanks for any help you can give me, and thanks for the good work of your magazine.

JANICE D. RUSSELL
Kansas City, Kansas

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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.

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Liberty (ISSN 0024-2055) is published bimonthly by the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600. Periodicals postage paid at Hagerstown, MD. POSTMASTER send changes of address to Liberty, P.O. Box 1119, Hagerstown, MD 21741-1119. Copyright © 2006 by the North American Division.

Printed by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, 55 West Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, MD 21741-1119. Subscription price: U.S. \$7.95 per year. Single copy: U.S. \$1.50. Price may vary where national currencies differ. For subscription information or changes, please call 1 (800) 456-3991. Vol. 102, No. 1, January/February, 2007.

TEMPTING Fate

Way back when we first heard the war drums for an invasion of Iraq, I had an interesting email exchange with a nationally known television pundit who has written for *Liberty* in the past. "You need to write something for us before the crusaders are marching through downtown Baghdad," I wrote tongue in cheek, with a broad hint that the affair had more than a touch of religious zeal to it. His reply was swift and terse: "Not crusaders—liberators." It's not often you get such reflex optimism from media types! My rejoinder sounds more than a little prophetic as I retype it: "We need to make sure that we are not liberating people from a secular dictatorship and enabling a fundamentalist tyranny." That ended our exchange, but not the chain of events that have belatedly shocked the majority of Americans, and led to an electoral overturn last November.

Conventional wisdom now is that the so-called neocons are

in dismay and retreat. I wouldn't hold my breathe on that one, as their worldview is Gothic enough to gain even more validation through rejection. But what is certain is that their conservative Christian auxiliaries are reeling and more than a little confused. And my heart aches to see fellow Christians so used and abused.

The previous national election has long been touted as one defined by the moral issues voter—it was a wave that Christian Conservatives confidently surfed into dominance on. They seemed immune to embarrassment as political champions like Tom Delay dragged the banners of faith in his personal tide pool of factionalism. They even kept quiet as indicted influence peddlers implicated Ralph Reed more by mockery than shared venality. They bit their lips as a top evangelical leader got outed for male massage and drug use. They sat quietly by as talk show surrogates tried to equate the surreal scandal of a conservative legislator in charge of national efforts to control internet porn, but caught instant-messaging enticements to under-aged male pages with a now long past "meaning of

is" scandal. Sin is sin, and pointing to others' sins tends to add to the offence.

For the popular view the coup de grace for conservative religious political pretensions came with release of one-time White House insider David Kuo's book "Tempting Faith."

I wonder if that mighty man of war King David of Old Testament fame had to endure as much public ridicule as seems to be now falling on the more adventuresome of the political Christian groups. But of course he did! David had more than a few blots on his record—taking bathing beauty Bathsheba from a rooftop paled next to the sin of liquidating her husband—even as he just as easily begged God for forgiveness. Probably the most telling evidence of contemporary perception of David's foibles was an incident that occurred as he fled Jerusalem during the coup attempt by his son Absalom. A man named Shimei came out and threw stones at David and his retinue, shouting "Come out thou bloody man, and



◀ Lord Protector of England Oliver Cromwell and his friend John Milton, author of "Paradise Lost."

may have dredged up even more reminders of corruption—are seized upon by the true crusader as further evidence of the need to stay the course.

This issue of *Liberty* completes a two-part analysis of the English civil war and the religious rule of Oliver Cromwell. He has long been a favorite historical figure of mine and his age has much to say to ours. After all it was the first English Republic and it did embody a groundswell yearning of religious activists for a more Godly governance. It's just a shame that it led to regicide, religious war, intrusive behavioral regulations, sectarian infighting and an eventual disillusionment with the ideal.

It is a shameful thing for Christians when we do anything that brings the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ up for public ridicule.



Lincoln E. Steed
Editor,
Liberty Magazine

Please address letters to the editor to
Lincoln.Steed@nad.adventist.org

thou man of Belial [the devil]." 2 Samuel 16: 7. David took it as deserved, and went on to be reinstated to power and favor with God.

It's hard to know what to make of Kuo's book. He is ostensibly a true believer in the aims of the political religious right. He certainly does not question the Faith Based Initiative itself—the program that he was charged to advance—even though it was a bold challenge to previous court determinations of a wall of separation between church and state erected by the First Amendment to the Constitution. Sometimes, he was told, reclaiming America for God necessitates playing hardball, and David Kuo was in.

What seems to have set Kuo off to write the book is his discovery of cynicism is government! He discovered that not that much money was actually getting to the churches—this is a revelation I am inclined to put down to sour grapes on his part not to any

sudden illumination. Years ago I picked up from a close reading of the plan that the Initiative was actually being sold to the political faithful as a way to do as much or more for the needy with less money—it was a cost-saving exercise as well as a sop to the faith lobby! Who themselves did not mind as much as they might have in more responsible times, because Dominionist views have warped Christian consciousness enough to allow for the ever present poor; many of whom must be poor because they are not Godly enough!!!

The central issue to the book is laughter: behind closed doors snickers by the power brokers that the religious right could be so easily bought off. That they believed the rhetoric of support, and voted to enable another more secular agenda. Hello! Welcome to hardball politics and vindication of the argument that secular power too easily corrupts the purest goals of faith.

After the Kuo book, after the

debacle of November 2007, after the suddenly allowed patriotism of calls to wind the war down, after all the moral disasters, it might seem that we have heard the last of a politically ambitious Christian agenda to reclaim America. I for one pray that the movement would turn inward for a long enough moment to reconsecrate itself to the ideals of Christ; and then work within society to bring a revival of practical Christian virtues. And I will keep praying those prayers for this country.

However some tactics die hard and are resistant to reality. Democracy as we live it here is still well hidden in the Middle East—remarkably resistant to our efforts to flush it out by force. So, too, the parallel efforts to re-Christianize our own society by political implements—while they

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