

Guest  
VIEW

# Rights of religious

*Foes of the conservative faithful use faulty myths to condemn*

It sometimes seems like those of us who follow politics are watching an old horror movie.

[In the background: eerie organ music. On the screen: wide shot of panic in the streets, people running, mothers carrying their children]

Announcer: Everybody lock your doors! Parents, protect your children! Because nobody is safe from ... [organ music swells] THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT!

[Sound of Peter Lorre cackling over the organ music]

To hear some commentators talk, you'd think the bogeyman you feared as a child had emerged from under your bed and appears nightly on the 700 Club (that is, when he isn't busy carrying non-Christians to the top of a skyscraper and throwing them off).

But, like the bogeyman, this imagined threat to Mom, apple pie, truth, justice and all we hold dear is a manufactured myth, propagated by those who either have been woefully misinformed or are willing to sacrifice their integrity and honesty in order to further their political agenda.

And what is this myth?

The myth is that the Religious Right is a bunch of fanatics who want to take over the country and force everybody to be just like them.

The fact is that the Religious Right are simply people of faith who exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy and whose politics tend toward the conservative side

rather than the liberal.

The myth is that the Religious Right is made up of evangelical Protestants. The fact is that the issues addressed by the Religious Right and the positions they take attract members of mainline Protestant denominations as well as evangelicals. They also attract conservatives among the Catholic and Jewish communities, as well.

The myth is that the Religious Right is a monolithic group that takes its marching orders from Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell and follows them blindly. The fact is that the Religious Right is a group of diverse individuals who are drawn together like those in any political movement: by shared concerns and common ideas for how to address them.

The myth is that the Religious Right wants to impose a theocracy on the country and the world and oppose any separation of church and state. The fact is that the Religious Right feels that theological issues are not the province or responsibility of government but rather of religious institutions. The separation of church and state is necessary not to keep a Judeo-Christian worldview from influencing the public square, but to protect the tenets of our faith from being manipulated by the government for political purposes.

Perhaps the saddest myth of all, however, is that the people who are so terribly outraged over the actions of the Religious Right are somehow involved

in a noble crusade. They claim they want to preserve the absolute separation of church and state, but the fact is that they only raise church and state concerns when it suits their agenda.

Have you ever heard anyone complain that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. should have remained quiet about God in the fight for civil rights? Have you ever heard them complain when the Catholic Church speaks out against the death penalty? Of course not, but those are issues when religious people take what is generally considered a more liberal position. If somebody were to speak out in favor of legal abortion, affirmative action or gay marriage on the basis of what their religion teaches, does anybody really believe that the supporters of these causes would ask them to be quiet?

They also claim they somehow are trying to preserve our heritage, but the strictly secular heritage they defend doesn't square with history. In the Declaration of Independence, when our founding fathers wrote that people "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights," they pointed to God as the basic foundation of their arguments. In the 1800s, when the abolitionist movement was opposing slavery, it was fueled in part by an evangelical revival known as the Great Awakening.

The notion that no religious reasoning ought to be raised in the public square is a relatively new idea and completely at odds with our national

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history.

Finally, they claim that they are trying to preserve freedom for all people, but that is not exactly true, either. During the Vietnam War, there were many who, on the basis of conscience, refused to serve in the military, and those conscientious objectors are lauded as courageous heroes. However, when Christians seek to act in accordance with their faith and their conscience, such praise is remarkably absent.

Christian landlords are being forced to rent to any couple who wish to live together or else go into some other line of work. Christian students are being told if living in the residence halls would force them to compromise living in accordance with the tenets of their faith, they should just get out and go to a Bible college.

This kind of marginalization never would be tolerated if it were directed toward groups such as blacks, women or homosexuals, but it is considered perfectly acceptable treatment of Christians.

That is not freedom.

It is the expectation that all people can believe whatever they want, but if they try to live in accordance with that

faith, they will be patently unwelcome.

This is not to claim that nothing wrong has ever been done with religious justification or by religious organizations. There were those who justified slavery or the mistreatment of American Indians on religious grounds, and they were wrong.

Some of the actions of the Christian Coalition with regard to voter guides have been, at best, questionable. There are those who would point to these exceptions and use them as a brush to tar all conservative people of faith.

However, they are wrong, just as it would be wrong to judge all Palestinians based on the PLO, all blacks based on the Black Panthers, etc.

Those who take the time to inform themselves know the difference, and it is up to them to stop the stereotypes they are perpetuating. Many of those who are so dismayed over the Religious Right would claim that we live in a democracy that is open to participation by all of its citizens.

Those of us who are conservative people of faith and who make up what is called the Religious Right are taking them at their word, and we are waiting to see if they mean any of it.

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# Anatomy of apathy

*Primary's pathetic outcome perturbs potential voter*



Politics suck.

That has been my opinion on public officials for most of my life — including the last three years, since I was first eligible to vote. In an act of mild rebellion, I have never voted in any election, to protest the futility of politics.

With the recent presidential race, though, politics began to seem less futile. McCain's victory in New Hampshire seemed to promise that a candidate, running on a relative shoestring and with a platform against the established politics of Washington, actually might have a chance.

Then he lost in South Carolina.

The story from there looks less than promising. With the last of the few states' primaries that allow independents and Democrats to vote in Republican primaries, McCain will have to find his support in the Republican party. Unfortunately, the Republican party, fearing change, isn't too likely to jump to McCain's side in future primaries. Ultimately, the Republican nomination may very well be Bush.

If McCain had lost to another candidate without lavish funds or without the backing of most established Republican politicians, I might not feel the need to return to cynicism. But Bush's tactics in his race to win South Carolina were despicable.

Immediately after New Hampshire, Bush knew he was in trou-

ble. McCain used Bush's substantial backing in Washington and throughout the country against him as irrefutable proof that Bush was a politician concerned with maintaining business as usual. So Bush billed himself as a reformer for the first time in his campaign since McCain was a significant challenger.

Of course, he also billed himself as a staunch conservative, to capture the Religious Right vote and also as an outsider, to capture the very votes that belonged to his opponents, especially McCain.

As the campaign dragged on in South Carolina, Bush became more worried, dumping millions into television ads attacking McCain. Since Bush ran on his own funds and did not accept federal matching money, spending caps didn't apply to him. But, these spending caps did apply to McCain. Bush's campaign inferred without proper reason that McCain blew those caps.

Later on, Bush adopted a "campaign finance reform" policy of his own, in an attempt to steal thunder from McCain's poster issue against established politics. Of course, this policy was tailor-made to criticize McCain's own activities. He attempted to

demonize McCain's past actions with a policy that would never pass, even if Bush were elected president. Surely Bush knew that his idea of campaign

finance reform wouldn't fly. He just needed the policy to make McCain look bad.

If all these actions don't show Bush to be a career politician, I don't know what else one would need. Clearly, he panders to the convenient issue of the moment in order to get more votes. In this respect, he is just like Bill Clinton — feeling out the polls, feeling out what will get the most votes and changing accordingly.

Which is why McCain was a breath of fresh air. For once, it seemed there was a politician who wasn't politicking. His ideas were rebellious, he admitted to mistakes, he defended his questionable actions without blanket denials. He was a Republican, with basically Republican views, but he was willing to be swayed by what he thought was right.

He seemed strangely human. So after the victory in New Hampshire, I was inspired by this man's work. It seemed, for once, that a politician who didn't play the same old game, or really, who campaigned against the same old game, actually might get votes. It seemed such a man actually might be elected. It seemed that politics weren't futile, that it was time for a change, and McCain embodied that change.

But then Bush won in South Carolina.

And it's not just that he won, but that he won by playing obvious dirty tricks. The voters of South Carolina showed that they didn't care they were voting for a man as slick as Texas

oil. They distrusted McCain, and they believed the television commercials that Bush so aggressively pushed. They voted for politics as usual.

While McCain's substantial successes in the face of an established adversary exhibit hope for the rest of the campaign, one can't help but wonder if the rest of the country won't vote similarly. There is no reason to think that South Carolinians are more or less ignorant or stodgy than the rest of the country's citizens.

So it seems that, even when the opposition is organized as well as can be expected, the established moneybags still rule. Bush has a family of politicians to support him — his father, former president George Bush, and his brother, Jeb Bush, governor of Florida, have all campaigned heavily for their kinsman. He has a large number of supporters throughout the old guard of the Republican Party.

The same thing is happening in the Democratic campaign. Gore is soundly trouncing Bradley. Bradley's hopes were less bright than McCain's, perhaps, but it's another case of the entrenched politician standing safely away from the opposition.

Is it any wonder, then, that potential voters like me stay at home come election day? When it seems that politics is nothing more than a perpetual motion machine, sustaining itself despite our attempts to jar it off course, why should we bother? Even when we do move, our motion is stopped. Even when the rebels make their voices heard, the powers-that-be over-shout them.

I wanted to write a column lauding McCain and encouraging the vote. I wanted to give a jump-start to the sleeping apathy that has descended on my generation.

But I guess I don't see the point anymore.

**AH, BACK TO  
REGULAR  
HUMANOID  
POLITICAL  
ACTIVITIES.**



Melanie Falk/DN

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