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Theocracy Alert

The Christian Right's "reign of madness" poses a basic question for all Americans

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May 24, 2005 The slogan-makers of the evangelical Christian Right have certainly been . . ."inventive." Earlier this year they came up with "[equality tyrants](#)" to describe those advocating the equality of all citizens. And now, the folks at Article 8 Alliance—the Massachusetts group dedicated to removing the four Supreme Judicial Court justices who ruled in favor of equality for all Massachusetts citizens—have come up with "reign of madness" to describe the year since that state's constitutional guarantee of equality was enforced.

Such preposterous hyperbole is understandable since they have no legitimate arguments. Those using their own "reign of madness" to fight against "equality tyrants" have posited multiple "reasons" gay Americans should be denied equal civil rights. None of which hold up to scrutiny.

Sexual orientation is not like skin color, they argue. Anyone conversant with legitimate [scientific](#) research and [medical](#) knowledge are lending more and more credence to sexual preference being, like skin color, beyond one's control. But then again, the evangelical Christian Right doesn't buy science, evolution or any knowledge that conflicts with the "biblical worldview" succinctly expressed by Jerry Falwell: "The Bible is the inerrant . . . word of the living God. It is absolutely infallible, without error in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as well as in areas such as geography, science, history, etc."

But, for the sake of argument, even if sexual preference were purely a choice, *like one's religion*, would that justify denying homosexuals—and anyone choosing the "wrong" religion—equal civil rights?

Yes. But only in a theocracy.

Homosexuality and same-sex marriage are against "God's will," they proclaim while clutching their politicized bibles. The Bible also condemns divorce, except for adultery (Matthew 19:9). Even then, literal application of that biblical edict would condemn many, many "evangelical Christians," as the title of a September 8, 2004, Barna Group [article](#) attested: "Born Again Christians Just As Likely to Divorce As Are Non-Christians." But you don't see James Dobson, Louis Sheldon or Don Wildmon advocating a constitutional amendment to ban "irreconcilable differences," do you?

For those not familiar with the Rev. Don Wildmon, New York Times columnist Frank Rich's May 15 [column](#) well summarized the baseless, Goebbels-like propaganda from the American Family Association's leader:

Rev. Donald Wildmon [has] been whipping up homophobia long before anyone suspected SpongeBob SquarePants of being a stalking horse (or at least a stalking sea sponge) for same-sex marriage. So-called research available on the Wildmon Web site for years—and still there as of last week—asserts that 17 percent of gay men "report eating and/or rubbing themselves with the feces of their partners" and 15 percent "report sex with animals."

Mr. Rich also noted related histories:

The Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors hate groups, characterizes the religious right's anti-gay campaign as a 30-year war, dating back to the late 1970's, when the Miss America runner-up Anita Bryant championed the overturning of an anti-discrimination law protecting gay men and lesbians in Dade County, Fla., and the Rev. Jerry Falwell's newly formed Moral Majority issued a "Declaration of War" against homosexuality.

That "war" continues. In his book, *Marriage Under Fire: Why We Must Win This Battle*, Focus on the Family's James Dobson offered 11 arguments against same-sex marriage. Some of them had to do with economics: "The health care system will stagger and perhaps collapse," "Social Security will be severely stressed." Nothing could be further from the truth. In 2004, the Congressional Budget Office found that allowing same-sex couples to marry would actually boost federal income tax revenues by \$400 million per year until the end of this decade mainly because of the so-called "marriage penalty." Social security payments would rise over time, as would spending on spousal health insurance benefits for federal workers. Other expenditure items would be much lower, however, since spending on Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) would fall. The net impact, according to the CBO, would be *a federal budget savings of nearly \$1 billion per year.*

The same positive economic benefits of same-sex marriage for states' budgets were recently documented in a [study](#) prepared by the Williams Project, a think tank at UCLA School of Law, and the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies (IGLSS) at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. For example, same-sex marriage would have a significant positive effect on California's budget, "a potential gain of up to \$30 million each year." The reasons for the windfall apply to other states as well. So much for the economic argument. (For a complete response to Dobson's 11 arguments, see "Out of Focus on the Family: A response to arguments against same-sex marriage," *Popular Culture Review*, February 2005, 45-75.)

But for obsessive-compulsive homophobic longevity, the Rev. Louis Sheldon earns the highest marks. Since 1972 he's been attacking gay Americans as relentlessly and as viciously as possible. For example, On July 31, 2004, his Traditional Values Coalition web site featured their "Top Ten Reports":

1. Homosexuals Recruit Public School Children
2. Homosexuality 101: A Primer
3. Homosexual Propaganda Campaign Based on Hitler's 'Big Lie' Technique
4. A Gender Identity Disorder Goes Mainstream
5. Homosexual Behavior Fuels AIDS and STD Epidemic
6. Homosexual Sex = Death from HIV Infection
7. Traditional Values Coalition Exposes Homosexual Agenda
8. Judicial Tyranny
9. Homosexual Child Molesters
10. Federal AIDS Dollars Fund Homosexual Proms And Fisting Seminars

What's clear from this malodorous list of titles is Sheldon's obsession with using the most vile stereotypes, myths and the distortions they demand in order to demean, smear and stigmatize in any way

possible gay and lesbian Americans. Sheldon's theocratic goal is also self-evident: deny those Americans anything resembling equal civil rights or equal protection under the law.

It's been one year since civil marriage was available to all citizens of Massachusetts, and five years since Vermont recognized same-sex civil unions. None—that's *none*—of the wild doomsday predictions of the evangelical Christian Right have come to pass. Men and women still marry, the sky has not fallen, and neither society nor the economy has collapsed. What has happened, however, is that self-proclaimed spokesmen for God such as James Dobson, Louis Sheldon and Don Wildmon—with encouragement from Karl Rove and the Republican politicians they control—have used “gay Americans” much the same way the Nazis used Jews (and homosexuals) to foster hatred and discrimination that they could then use to advance their own political agenda. That, by now, should be [abundantly clear](#).

One can see outside only what's inside. Louis Sheldon's statement that “gays are like Hitler and the Gestapo” was an accurate self-description of himself and his Traditional Values Coalition, as well as his political cohorts. The [claim](#) by ethically-challenged Tom DeLay that “He [God] is using me, all the time, everywhere, to stand up for a biblical worldview in everything that I do and everywhere I am. He is training me” is really quite blasphemous and should be an insult to all true “Christians.” It should also be a wake-up call for everyone. What does Mr. DeLay think “He” is “training” him for?

Fanatical religious leaders and their corrupt politicians aside, there's a basic question that must be asked: Why, when America has insisted for decades that an enlightened society must be inclusive and that a rational culture embraces differences as a source of strength—and after half a century of sometimes feverish efforts to enfranchise virtually every minority group in America—why are “gay rights” even an issue?

Perhaps answers begin in the fact that contemporary America is not yet an enlightened society or a rational culture, but a nation frightened by the application of its own political rhetoric: equal access to and treatment under the law for *every* American citizen. Karl Rove understood that and, with the help of Dobson, Sheldon and Wildmon, used it to turn Americans against Americans.

The reselection of George W. Bush, “the uniter,” divided the country as never before. “Red” states rushed to pass constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage and civil unions. Indeed, any measure that sought to recognize gay Americans and their *families* (including the 8 to 10 million children being reared in same-sex households) was rapaciously attacked by the allegedly “pro-family” evangelical Christian Right, despite the fact that the Gospels call upon the faithful to work toward a more ethical and just society, and especially to work toward the inclusion of the disenfranchised.

Religious fanaticism has long been a part of America. The Puritans sought “religious freedom,” but then used religion to damn their own in the Salem Witch Trials. James Dobson and Louis Sheldon would have made fine magistrates in 1692 and, together with Don Wildmon, could have set themselves up as the Court of Oyer and Terminer. Irrational faith-based prejudices and scripted morality were used against virtually every new group of immigrants, especially those who came unwillingly aboard slave ships. You think we'd have learned by now . . .

The historical good news is that religious fanatics always burn themselves out. The bad news is that before they do, they can do a lot of damage. The time of liberty, justice and equality for all Americans *will* come, inevitably. Then the “leaders” of the evangelical Christian Right will be exposed for what they are. Future generations will read about them in history books and—with knotted brows—ask “why?”

Executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Matt Foreman [said](#) it well . . .

Rather than reframing the debate away from moral values, we must embrace them. Or more precisely, the utter immorality of the escalating attacks against LGBT people. And, equally, the utter immorality in the failure of so many people of good will to stand with us.

. . .

People of good will can either rise up to speak for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans, or look back upon themselves 20 years from now with deserved shame.

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