

ONLINE JOURNAL™

www.onlinejournal.com

Theocracy Alert

Force in faith; faith enforced

By Benjamin J. Uticone

Online Journal Contributing Writer

I am treated as evil by people who claim that they are being oppressed because they are not allowed to force me to practice what they do. —D. Dale Gulledge

June 7, 2005—America is supposedly a land of religious freedom. The First Amendment to the Constitution, as a matter of fact, states that the government cannot establish a state sponsored religion, nor can it prevent anyone from exercising their religion as they see fit. But it seems these days that certain religious groups are tired of letting people live and worship (or not worship) as they choose.

Prayer, it seems, is no longer good enough. The new places of worship for these people are the courthouse, the school board meeting, and the floors of the House and Senate. Anybody who does not see that public policy is gaining an increasingly sectarian flavor must not be watching the news.

The media circus around Terri Schiavo, as well as George W. Bush's inconceivable aversion to the promising and potentially life saving science of embryonic stem cell research, are only two of countless examples of how certain people in positions of power are trying to impose a particular religious view on all of us, whether we share those beliefs or not.

During a recent media spectacle over judicial nominations where leaders of the religious right shamelessly attempted to put a moral spin on a purely political issue, one of the key speakers was William Donohue, president of the Catholic League. Responding to concerns of encroaching theocracy, the Donohue decided to be flippant, saying, "What are we, the Taliban?" Yeah Bill. Except for headscarves and differing opinions on the topic of pork, you pretty much are. Oh, and by the way, Mr. Donohue, maybe you ought to spend less time telling people in AIDS ravaged Africa to not use condoms, and more time making sure that your priests aren't raping children.

One example that sticks out in my mind of America's march toward theocracy is the growing movement to grant legal protection to pharmacists who refuse, on religious grounds, to dispense prescription birth control. A number of bills are floating around right now, and eventually I expect a number of states or perhaps the whole nation to adopt one or more of such policies. Some of the weaker bills require the pharmacist to direct the prescription holder to another pharmacist, one who is willing to fill said prescription. Stronger bills, however, make no such requirement and some of the more radical ones don't even prohibit the pharmacist from refusing to give the prescription slip back to the patient.

In the USA a person cannot be discriminated against for their religion as it pertains to job opportunities. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act makes that clear. But there are limits. If an individual's personal beliefs make them unable to carry out the required duties of their position, then they should resign. If we open this door and allow health care professionals to withhold treatments based on their own religious convictions, then we open the door for Jehovah's Witnesses health care providers to refuse to give their patients blood transfusions or for Orthodox Hindu doctors to refuse to touch patients of the opposite sex.

Another very recent example of religious discrimination popped up in Indianapolis, when a couple filed for divorce. The couple happened to be of the earth-based religion known as Wicca. The court awarded them

joint custody of their 9-year-old son, but the judge added to the dissolution decree that both parents must refrain from exposing their child in any way to what the judge called “non-mainstream religious beliefs and rituals.”

The court essentially stated that the parents of this child do not have the right to share their religious beliefs with their son. Though the case itself is most certainly a red herring, I notice the conspicuous absence of certain voices which should be raised in protest. Where are all the evangelical leaders who attended “Justice Sunday?” If there has ever been a case of an “activist judge” assaulting individual religious liberty, this is it. Or is it that the religious liberties of non-Judeo-Christians do not merit their attention? Make no mistake; in a country ruled by the radical religious right, religious freedom may exist on paper, but those who so vocally claim to be standing up for religious liberty, waving a bible in one hand and shredding the constitution with the other, would in all likelihood turn a blind eye to incidents like this one.

I’ve honestly never understood the drive some people feel to force others to believe and practice as they do. In a way I’m glad I don’t understand it. Maybe it’s because it’s not virtue and decency that such people are really after, but power, control over their fellow men.

The plans that these groups and their leaders have for America have no more to do with morality than the iron fisted reigns of Cardinal Richelieu, the Ayatollah Khomeini, or the historical atrocities of Tomas De Torquemada’s *auto-da-fé*. By opposing such people we are not defending sinfulness or discriminating against people of faith. What we are doing is protecting our right to keep our own faith, or lack thereof, and not to have it dictated to us by people who don’t share our values.

Believe as you wish. Practice as you wish. Be as religious as you like anywhere you like. But keep it out of my doctor’s office, my courts, my science classrooms and especially my bedroom. Whatever faith you profess or how you choose to profess it is your business. Don’t make it mine.