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Review

Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy

By Frederick Clarkson

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By Carla Binion

Online Journal Contributing Writer

April 3, 2001—In the historic Danbury letter of January 1, 1802, Thomas Jefferson wrote to Messrs. Nehemiah Dodge and Others, a Committee of the Danbury Baptist Association, in the State of Connecticut:

“Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between church and State.”

Jefferson might have winced at George W. Bush’s faith-based initiatives, a program that gives religious organizations government money in order to have them perform what used to be government-based social programs. Today as our political system lurches further to the right, with a Republican-dominated House and Senate and now a Republican president, we need tools to understand the political right, including the theocratic wing. One timely resource is Frederick Clarkson’s “Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy.”

Though Clarkson’s book was published four years ago, it is even more relevant today as an information source for activists, journalists and scholars. The first step toward making sense of the theocratic, anti-democratic right is defining the problem, and Clarkson defines it precisely in his well-documented look at a wide range of religious-right groups.

According to Clarkson, the theocratic right benefits when the public either overestimates or underestimates its influence. The issue becomes unclear if people overrate the religious right as “an unstoppable force,” or write it off as “a fringe element.”

What theocratic groups lack in numbers, they “make up in strategy and a disciplined use of resources,” says Clarkson. He quotes religious right theorist and Reconstructionist, George Grant: “Since only about 60% of the people are registered to vote and only about 35% of those actually bother to get to the polls, a candidate only needs to get the support of a small, elite group of citizens to win. It only takes about 9% to gain a governorship. And it takes a mere 7% to gain an average mayoral or city council post.” Grant added that the purpose of “Christian political action is therefore an acknowledgment of the theocracy of heaven and earth.”

This theocratic “Christian political action” played a part in the many attacks on President Bill Clinton. Anti-abortion activist Randall Terry and others “issued pamphlets claiming, among other things, that a vote for Clinton was a sin against God,” says Clarkson.

John Whitehead, a protégé of Reconstructionist founder R. J. Rushdoony, served as one of Paula Jones’ attorneys. Whitehead also wrote a book, “The Separation Illusion,” saying that because Thomas Jefferson wasn’t present when the First Amendment was written, his views on church/state separation are not relevant to understanding the religion clauses of the First Amendment.

What do theocrats want? Christian Reconstructionists, a severe bunch, want to oust democracy and replace it with a theocratic form of government based on “Biblical Law.” Some Reconstructionist leaders propose capital punishment for blasphemy, heresy and homosexuality. They argue that the Bible (their interpretation) should rule all aspects of life including government and law.

According to Clarkson, Reconstructionist David Chilton said, “The Christian goal for the world is the universal development of Biblical theocratic republics, in which every area of life is redeemed and placed under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the rule of God’s Law.” Reconstructionists R. J. Rushdoony and his son-in-law Gary North have served on the advisory board for the Council for National Policy, a right-wing think-tank that has also included among its members Jerry Falwell, Paul Weyrich, former Attorney General Ed Meese and G. W. Bush campaign adviser and former Christian Coalition leader, Ralph Reed.

Reed has tried to distance himself from Reconstructionism, but according to Clarkson, the [Christian] Coalition’s membership tabloid, the ‘Christian American,’ promoted and sold a book co-authored by Reconstructionist George Grant which advocated capital punishment for homosexuality.”

Clarkson quotes Reconstructionist Gary North, “Our ideas are now in wide circulation. They no longer depend on the skills or integrity of any one person . . . We are a decentralized movement. We cannot be taken out by a successful attack on any one of our institutional strongholds or any one of our spokesmen. Our authors may come and go (and have), but our basic worldview is now complete. We have laid down the foundations of a paradigm shift.”

North has also said that women who have abortions should be publicly executed, “along with those who advised them to abort their children.” (Clarkson’s source: Gary North, “Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism,” Institute for Christian Economics, 1989, p. 627.) Clarkson also points to the many vigilante arsons and bombings of abortion clinics, and the killing of abortion providers such as Dr. David Gunn in Pensacola, Florida.

According to Clarkson, another theocratic group, the Christian Identity movement “holds that Anglo-Saxons are the lost tribe of Israel and that blacks, Jews and other non-white or non-Christian groups constitute inferior, satanic ‘mud people’ who will ultimately be wiped out, and that God’s people, the white Aryans, will rule the world.”

Another theocratic group, Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church, has funneled millions to Republican politicians, including the Bush family. Moon, who has repeatedly publicly stated he is the Messiah, has had legions of church followers show up at Republican political rallies. He has his fingers in a wide range of political and social organizations, from U. S. universities to the World Anti-Communist League, “an international alliance of conservative, fascist and Nazi groups, governments and individuals.”

Theocratic groups sometimes receive help from powerful conservative foundations. Clarkson notes that Reconstructionist David Chilton has advocated “jury nullification,” claiming juries should find the accused not guilty if they disapprove of the law under which the accused is charged. Jury nullification is most vigorously promoted by members of the far-right, including the Fully Informed Jury Association (FIJA) of Helmsville Montana.

“Much of FIJA’s annual budget is provided by the Pittsburgh-based Carthage Foundation, which is controlled by Richard Mellon Scaife, an heir to the Mellon family fortune and the single largest bankroller

of conservative institutions in the country—from the Heritage Foundation to Paul Weyrich’s National Empowerment Television,” according to Clarkson. He adds that the Carthage Foundation gave FIJA \$25,000 each year in 1993 and 1994.

Physicist and Nobel Laureate Andrei Sakharov said, “A state is bound to be more dangerous if it is not governed openly by the people, but secretly by political forces that are not widely known or understood.” For many Americans, it is not widely understood that theocratic right-wing organizations, and certain powerful conservative foundations that support them, share a common goal: undermining democracy.

Frederick Clarkson’s “Eternal Hostility” is a reader-friendly, strongly-documented guide to understanding those organizations. With George W. Bush’s faith-based initiatives chipping away at the wall between church and state, now is the ideal time to learn from this gem of a resource.

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