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Theocracy Alert

Protecting marriage meets protecting The Pledge

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September 21, 2005—A relatively small [item](#). Many “gay news” sites didn’t even mention it. Obviously, no mainstream media did:

Pastors opposed to the state’s gay rights law are being advised to tone down their condemnation of homosexuality and focus as much on love and support as on sin and scripture. [Mike] Haley and Melissa Fryrear from Focus on the Family have urged a meeting of about 200 leaders from Maine’s evangelical community to stop quoting Leviticus, which refers to gay sex as an ‘abomination,’ and to avoid sayings like, ‘Love the sinner, hate the sin.’ ...

A righteous or hateful tone could steer undecided voters away, while one of kindness and compassion could help win supporters, said Mark Brewer, a political science professor at the University of Maine.

This kinder, gentler approach to discrimination is damage control necessitated by more and more Americans getting sick and tired of hearing hate wrapped in religion and the preposterous claims that inevitably follow. For example, in his 2003 book *Marriage Under Fire: Why We Must Win This Battle*, founder and chairman of Focus on the Family James Dobson—with fire and brimstone blazing—claimed that civil equality would not only “quickly destroy the traditional family,” but also bring about the end of the world: “the culture war will be over, and the world may soon become ‘as it was in the days of Noah.’”

Neither Focus on the Family nor its chairman have changed. Now they’re just sugar coated and even more hypocritical. Why were Focus on the Family representatives in Maine in the first place? “They hope to overturn a state law that would outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation.” So much for love and support for fellow citizens battling the hate called “bigotry” encouraged by religious-political leaders like James Dobson.

With “gay marriage” again in the headlines coming from [Massachusetts](#) and [California](#), I doubt [Lou Sheldon](#) and the [family-run core](#) of the Traditional Values Coalition (TVC) will tone down [their](#) rhetoric. And that’s a good thing. Disguised, sugar-coated bigotry is more insidious than Lou’s overt version.

So for Lou and the TVC as well as other hell-bent religious leaders assaulting civil equality, I have some thoughts and questions. Please feel free to reply...

You call yourselves and your cause “pro-family.” Same-sex parents are currently rearing 8 to 10 million children in the United States. Yet virtually all your efforts have been specifically designed to deny those real-world families social, cultural, legal, and economic recognition. Why? Don’t these American families count? Aren’t your actions toward these same-sex parents and their children proactively anti-family?

You say you’re dedicated to protecting the institution and the “sanctity” of marriage from those gay and lesbian Americans who wish to endorse monogamy and the institution of marriage by getting married. (FYI: The [total](#) U.S. gay/lesbian population is between 2 and 4 percent—not exactly the “legions of angry

homosexuals and lesbians determined to abolish Christian virtue and moral judgment in any form” Lou Sheldon rants about in his latest [book](#) that’s drawn little serious attention but a lot of deserved criticism.)

As I’m sure you protectors of marriage are aware, on September 8, 2004—during the height of the pre-election campaign to “save traditional marriage”—the Christian marketing-research Barna Group issued a [report](#), entitled “Born Again Christians Just As Likely to Divorce As Are Non-Christians.” It documented that “among married born again Christians, 35 percent have experienced a divorce. That figure is identical to the outcome among married adults who are not born again: 35 percent.” Barna also documented that “nearly one-quarter of the married ‘born agains’ (23 percent) get divorced two or more times.”

Echoing the words and “thought” of 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”—faith-based politician Rep. John Hostettler (R-IN), one of the sponsors reintroducing a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex nuptials, has hinted at something one would think should be foremost in the minds of the bible-based “protect marriage” crowd. In his address to the Indiana Family Institute in Evansville, Hostettler [said](#) “The picture of marriage is the picture of Christian salvation,” and that “any diminishing of that notion—whether homosexual marriage or *any other degradation of marriage*—is something we must fight in public policy” (italics mine).

What about adulterers? Shouldn’t you guardians of marriage be seeking legislation to punish them for their “degradation of marriage”? Since you’re so fond of using the Bible to damn homosexuals, shouldn’t you be reviewing scripture for the appropriate punishment for adulterers? Allow me to help: Deuteronomy 22:22 clearly states that “If a man is caught lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman as well as the woman.”

No doubt more than a few of those multiple divorces among born-again Christians reported by the Barna Group involved adultery. They all grossly violated Matthew 19:6: “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Hostettler said, “The picture of marriage is the picture of Christian salvation.” All you bible-based religious-political lobbyists constantly maintain your motivation is to bring people to “Christian salvation,” so why aren’t you calling for a Federal Divorce Amendment, as well as amendments to state constitutions to ban divorce and additional legislation to enable the execution of adulterers as demanded by Deuteronomy 22:22 and supported by Matthew 19:6?

Furthermore, shouldn’t you be campaigning *against* equality for women as directed by the apostle Paul in First Timothy? He instructed Christians “suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” because “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, was in the transgression.” Or are your theocratic applications of so-called “biblical truths” as self-serving and hollow as your rationale for protecting the phrase “under God” in The Pledge of Allegiance?

To what are those reciting The Pledge pledging allegiance? Despite (or because of) Jerry Falwell’s yammering about “religious references indicate the true chronicle of our nation,” a brief look at The Pledge’s history is in order.

Dr. John W. Baer [provides](#) “A Short History” of The Pledge of Allegiance:

Francis Bellamy (1855 - 1931), a Baptist minister, wrote the original Pledge in August 1892. He was a Christian Socialist. In his Pledge, he is expressing the ideas of his first cousin, Edward Bellamy, author of the American socialist utopian novels, *Looking Backward* (1888) and *Equality* (1897).

Francis Bellamy in his sermons and lectures and Edward Bellamy in his novels and articles described in detail how the middle class could create a planned economy with

political, social and economic equality for all. The government would run a peacetime economy similar to our present military industrial complex.

What was the original pledge Bellamy wrote?

I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

This secular pledge to a secular nation was published before it was actually used in an 1892 public school quadricentennial celebration of Columbus Day. As Dr. Baer noted, Bellamy “considered placing the word, ‘equality,’ in his Pledge, but knew that the state superintendents of education on his committee were against equality for women and African Americans.”

Why aren't those groups incensed by the recent 9th Circuit Court's ruling acknowledging that bit of history? Could it be because they are the ones currently arguing so vehemently against “equality” for gay and lesbian Americans?

One of the most obsessively vehement of those groups is none other than the Traditional Values Coalition, founded and chaired by the Rev. Lou Sheldon. As previously mentioned, the Traditional Values Coalition is a family affair. TVC's executive director is Sheldon's daughter Andrea Lafferty, a former Reagan administration official. Her husband James is a TVC “consultant.” He was a former press secretary for Tom DeLay.

By mid-morning on September 15, the Traditional Values Coalition was already using The Pledge controversy as a way to gather [financial pledges](#) for their organization and its campaigns against the word and concept Bellamy wanted to add to the original Pledge: “equality.” (Not surprisingly, TVC also has [a problem](#) with an African American woman by the name of Rosa Parks.)

So who added the words “under God,” and when were they added? Congress did, in 1954, after an intense lobbying campaign by the [Knights of Columbus](#) (one of the participants in the current litigation). As Dr. Baer noted, “The Pledge was now both a patriotic oath and a public prayer.” But there's more to it than that.

What does the phrase “under God” actually mean? According to the eleventh edition (2003) of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, the word “under” can be used as an adjective, an adverb, or a preposition. In The Pledge, it's most likely intended as a preposition, one of the definitions for which is “subject to the authority, control, guidance, or instruction of.”

Judge Lawrence Karlton ruled that The Pledge's reference to one nation “under God” violated school children's right to be “free from a coercive requirement to affirm God.” He was correct, linguistically and morally, especially since so many “religious leaders” recently claimed hurricane Katrina was that same [“God's” wrath](#) purposely guided and intended to destroy New Orleans and kill hundreds of people—and untold thousands of totally innocent animals—because of alleged “sins.” Everyone should be free from such a [malicious](#) “God” and its “religion.”

If The Pledge of Allegiance is to the secular republic called the United States, there is absolutely no reason to mention the “God” of certain religions while ignoring other religions' concepts of Divinity, especially in multicultural twenty-first century America. If the Pledge is to a theocratic state—the Christian one the Religious Right so adamantly advocates—then “under God” is appropriate. Similarly, in a secular nation “with liberty and justice for all” has meaning. In a theocratic state, those words not only lack meaning, they're subversive... just as “subversive” as Sheldon's, Dobson's, Falwell's and the other leaders of the American Taliban claim civil marriage equality would be.