

http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2007/12/founding_religion_not_establis.html

Founding Religion, Not Established Church

On the 16th of this month (Dec'07), "The U.S. House of Representatives approved HR 847 recognizing the importance of Christianity and Christmas. Would you have voted for this resolution? How would you amend it?"

I would have voted for it without suggesting any amendment.

Attacks on this legislation will center on the claim that it violates the "no establishment of religion" clause of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. It does not.

1.....The clear original intent of that clause's first part was to forbid Congress from incorporating into the federal governmental structure any STRUCTURE of religion. The issue was "bodies" (organizations, institutions), and the stricture was against Congress as a political body incorporating into the federal government any religiousbody.

2.....That limited meaning of religion is clear from the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of "establishment." To "establish" is "To place (a church or a religious body) in the position of a state church. 1558." "A church" is not a religion but an institution (a "body") within a religion.

3.....The founders' limited intent is even more clear in the historical context. Then (1791), more than half of the states of the U.S. had "established" churches (Protestant Christian denominations). Wisely, Congress precluded such "establishment" as a federal possibility.

4.....HR 847 affirms "the role played by Christians and Christianity in the founding of the United States and in the founding of western civilization"--so Congress "expresses its deepest respect to American Christians," who constitute "over three-fourths" of our population, the three-fourths who celebrate Christmas as "the birth of their savior, Jesus Christ." Christmas celebrates "God's redemption, mercy, and Grace." The resolution "expresses support for Christians" everywhere, "acknowledges the international religious and historical importance of Christmas and the Christian faith," and "rejects bigotry and persecution directed against Christians."

5.....The First Amendment aims to PREVENT Congress from "establishing" any religious institution, and HR 847 aims to PREVENT the ballooning of the First Amendment to mean that Congress must not acknowledge Christianity as America's "founding" religion. The insidious aim of this ballooning is to expand the First Amendment's clause from the separation of church and state to the separation of religion from government, an expansion consonant with the secularist revisionist version of America's "founding" as secular.

6.....Against HR 847's understanding of America's "founding," aggressive non-Christians educe the use of "founding" in the 1796 Treaty of Tripoli, whose Article 11 cancels religion as a possible cause of future conflict between that Muslim nation with its established religion and our nation expressly without one. The U.S. (and its states severally) has never "entered into any war or act of hostility against any" Muslim state, and "no pretext arising from religious opinion shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony between the two countries." The whole concept of church/state separation seemed impossible for our defeated Muslim enemy to grasp, and Article 11 does not even appear in the Arabic original (what appears instead is a letter proclaiming Allah the protector of Tripoli!).

Knowing how difficult it would be for Muslims to conceive of our world-historical unique church/state arrangement, the Treaty radically, even non-historically, dissociates religion from the origin-story of the U.S.: "the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion...[and has] in itself no enmity against the...religion of" Islam. Secularist revisionists cut this statement out of its precise psycho-political-historical context in order to paste it into their documentation toward an atheist telling of America's past in hope of an atheist American future.

7.....A half-century ago, America's greatest public intellectual of the time, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, stressed the danger of a secularist take-over of America's self-understanding, our national ID. (See his "The Christian Witness in a Secular Age," CHRISTIAN CENTURY 7.22.53.) The ominousness of this threat to the historic America mind can

be seen in the warning of a great living philosopher, *Charles Taylor*, in his *A SECULAR AGE* (HarvardUP/07), in which he says that belief in God is essential to protecting society from secularism. (As clearly visible in the 1933 Humanist Manifesto, secularism's goal is America as an atheist society, beginning with our public schools.)

America's unique contribution to the history of government is stated in the First Amendment, which **frees** religion and the federal government from each other. This double freedom was an on-the-ground reality which the Amendment put into words. That reality was and is a particular unity/diversity paradigm which avoids both the inherent TYRANNY of an established religious institution and the ANARCHY of a nation severed from its historic religious rootage and center in the Bible + the Enlightenment. The Christian religion was and is an essential element in the unique mind called "American."

This mind, the American mind, celebrates FREEDOM (so we do not exclude on the basis of religion) and ORDER (so we resist secularism as it threatens to replace our historic spiritual-intellectual unity). Increasingly, American elections will reflect this conflict between the American mind and the secularist mind.

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | DECEMBER 22, 2007; 5:30 PM ET

Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

HR 847 is emblematic of a modern American's need to wear his beliefs on his sleeves. Whether it starts from a basic personal insecurity or not, certainly there is some defensive need to assert the primacy of one set of beliefs over others at play in this Bill. If one is devoutly Christian or devoutly anything else, one scarcely needs legislation to guide one's spiritual life.

So what is the purpose of such a bill? The government does not and presumably cannot give spiritual advice (who would heed it, if it could?), the bill can only be meant to assert the primacy of one religion over all the rest in our public lives. Such a set of statements as contained in HR 847 has no place in American legislation; and the sentiments are, frankly, not in keeping with America's best traditions of tolerance. This is a bad, divisive, and unneeded piece of bigotry masquerading as something better.

POSTED BY: JEFFREY JONES | JANUARY 10, 2008 8:37 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

>>Rev Elliot is making the common mistake of taking the religion that was predominant at the time of our nation's founding and averring that it was the founding religion of our nation.

Many more than you realize believe it to be true that the founding of this country was a foretold destiny centuries earlier...by those whom God chose and the promises He set in motion for the descendants of those same people.

There has been no other country in the history of mankind that has not only been blessed with such national wealth, but has also used that same wealth to rebuild other countries or offer aid second to none. There is a fundamental reason for all of this to have happened.

And the same foretelling of our destiny also foretells of how we will, sadly, lose it in a very sudden way.

But thats not the end of the story...nor the end of the world. Just the end of this present age of man doing things 'his way'

POSTED BY: TRUTH | DECEMBER 31, 2007 3:47 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dr. Elliot - we should all live to be your age and with the same passion for their beliefs as shown in your posts and responses.

All the best in the coming year & may it be witness to many more emotionally charged and fruitful exchanges!!

POSTED BY: TERRY | DECEMBER 31, 2007 1:23 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"HAPPY NEW YEAR, EVERYONE!!!"

If it could happen, even if only for one single day, I would have PEACE everywhere, FOOD and WATER for every being, and HAPPINESS for all.

Just once!!!

POSTED BY: GABY | DECEMBER 31, 2007 12:45 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"As you doubtless know, oath-takers have the choice of "I swear" or "I affirm." No, a Bible is unnecessary but usual. Usual, because the American civilization was shaped more by the Bible than by any other book. You are right about me: as an American originalist, I'm a Bible-pusher."

Here's a thought- Stop pushing *your* book onto other people. I have read it and found some wisdom and much that contradicts itself and leaves much to be desired. The fact that much was left out by people in charge who got together and decided what 'was' and 'wasn't' the 'word of God' says to me that it was most likely written by people with an agenda. I have found no proof of the existence of any of the folks contained within, so I have no reason to feel that the bible is any 'truer' than any other mythology.

Too many people have been hurt by folks such as yourself 'pushing' that book onto other people that you cannot simply expect them to want to find anything worthwhile in what had been an instrument of torture. That's sort of like asking someone you've just hit in the face with a club to admire the artistry of the elaborate design carved into it.

It doesn't work. And trying to shove your book into everyone else's face does nothing for understanding that some people are perfectly capable of being good citizens and decent, moral people without it.

I respect your right to live/believe as you choose, and I do not call you 'unAmerican' for such a belief, misguided as it is. I call you intolerant to the extreme for calling people 'haters' and 'unAmerican' and not bothering to learn anything about those you are quick to denounce.

We need people willing to build bridges, not create more division.

Blessed be.

POSTED BY: PRIVER | DECEMBER 31, 2007 11:40 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

SUSANC

I doubt nothing of the sad story you here tell. Vine Deloria, Amerind theologian & historian, taught one of our sons in Beloit College. I remember his insisting that underneath the MORAL reading of the encounter of East Atlantic (European-developed) peoples with West Atlantic (stone-age Amerind) peoples lies the ANTHROPOLOGICAL reading. The moral reading is of mutual atrocities overwhelming earlier friendly relations: criminality. The anthropological reading is the tragedy of a people-flow in which the flow-people are technically more advanced than the flowed-over-people.

The fact of tragedy must not obscure the fact of criminality, nor vice versa.

The greater the technical gap in the people-flow, the greater the misunderstandings—so, the greater the tragedy. Take one: the greater the technical development, the faster the cultural speed. I was involved in an

experiment with whites & Mandans toward improving face-to-face communication. The fact of the slow Indian had been misread as the myth of the silent Indian. In circle conversations of equal numbers of whites & Indians, I asked the whites to count to 10 silently before wanting to speak & speaking. We discovered that 13 was the functional number for achieving balanced conversation (the Indians talking as much as the whites). Of course the whites didn't have to count for very many sessions; they acquired the habit of speaking at Indian-speed. (The purpose was mutual education without Indian-silencing white-speed white dominance—which always ends in Indian absence.)

White efforts to integrate the Indians into the general American culture were well-intended, but they were culturally ignorant & therefore frustrated—unfortunately tipping the scale from persuasion to coercion. My assumption (but not my confidence) is that respect for the Indians (including their culture), with generously listening to them, would have resulted in integration (not necessarily assimilation).

Ironically, the integration of N.American Amerinds with N.Europeans is less advanced than the integration of S.American Amerinds with S.Europeans even though the white abuse of Amerinds was even worse in S.America. A story for another day!

PRIVER

As you doubtless know, oath-takers have the choice of “I swear” or “I affirm.” No, a Bible is unnecessary but usual. Usual, because the American civilization was shaped more by the Bible than by any other book. You are right about me: as an American originalist, I'm a Bible-pusher. While no book is perfect (though orthodox Muslims claim that the Qur'an is), I believe that what God has to say to humanity comes clearer through the Bible than through any other book. That is why, for more than a half century, I have read it daily in its original languages (Hebrew/Aramaic/Greek), in Latin, & in a modern language as well as in English. For me, it is the supreme book of light, love, liberty, life. Its meta-narrative (comprehensive Story) is personal in the ontological, communal, & individual senses (i.e., God, society, self). The Story itself says that it is to live & die for (as in the case of Jesus), not a story to kill for: it is an offer honored by persuasion & violated by coercion. The Story itself is healing, but—like every good thing—it can be & has been used for hurting. My heart goes out to those who don't manage to make it through the hurting to the healing—a journey the Story itself incorporates: Jesus' resurrection was on the other side of his crucifixion.

JIHADIST

I respond to comments that seem to me misinformed or uninformed, & sometimes just to state a difference of opinion. Given those purposes, how can I write in a manner more acceptable to you? Or are you perhaps implying that I should have other purposes? / Wise words on “Muslim students.” Thanks. / Thanks for putting Shariah in its place. / On Islamic banking, so good to see that a Muslim got the Nobel Peace Prize for mini-capital innovation. My wife & I are supporters of Finca. / Yes to social-conscience investing. We have long been in Pax World Funds. / Yes on the complexity of Islam, Christianity, & Muslim-Christian relations. / “The American mind” has two tensions, viz. Bible+Enlightenment & State+Church. No other national mind has this explicit structure—though of course every nation has a culture-“mind.” / In suggesting comparing the American mind with the Saudi mind or the Canadian mind, you miss my point, with is sharpened in my columns last words (underlined): “conflict between the American mind and the secularist mind.” American schoolrooms of my childhood (the 1920s) had, on the front wall, nothing but portraits of Washington & Lincoln, who under the secularist surge have been reduced to old dead white men (their birthdays no longer in the American calendar). Islamist madrassas are spewing out West-haters, & America's public schools are spewing out secularists who see no need of the spiritual root of America's founders' mind (for short, “the American mind”), viz. Bible+Enlightenment theocentricity. No need: sense-making has been managed without God. Stephen Prothero is one current author aiming to increase awareness that this is the heart of America's internal cultural war. / Yes, the Qur'an's vision of governance is more democratic than one would conclude from observing today's Muslim states. As for the situation of nonMuslims in Muslim states, I must add what you know, viz. that their inferiority is structural: the inferior-status tax ceases upon conversion to Islam. And Muslims converting to any of the inferior religions are subject to death. / Yes, current American political thinking is in danger of seeing Islam, not just Islamists, as enemy (& so missing, as you say, America's real global competitors). And yes, theologians, facing the reality of competition among religions, are in danger of feeding this political misperception. / Thank you for taking so much time to enlighten me.

ANONYMOUS

Christianity as “a religion that has done nothing but attack the rightful owners of the land”? You’ve been taken in by pagan Indian & secularist propaganda, which obscures white benefits to reds. Christianity spread among the Indians, & the pagan Indians tried to kill off the Christian Indians (20 towns [founded under the ministry of John Eliot] genocided in 1675). The oldest church building on Cape Cod is Indian. Princess Evening Star (whom I knew) was a Christian (specifically, a Baptist), but after her death the propagandists converted her back to paganism!

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You have not observed my distinction between “secular” (which applies to your point) & “secularist” (which does not: secularism is an aggressive effort to eliminate the supernatural, as spelled out in the 1933 Humanist Manifesto). /

Thanks for educating me on religion/politics in Malaysia. On the principles you enunciated, I differ from you not at all: we see the same dangers & opportunities of religion/politics relationships. A global wisdom on these matters is emerging, & you as a global (East/West) man exhibit it. You are Qur’an+ (as I am Bible+): parachutes & minds are destructive if they don’t open. / You call H.R.847 a “needless resolution.” I’m ambivalent about it as a political document, but favor it as a cultural document in America’s current internal culture-war. / I quote you with appreciation & prayer: “Happy New Year to your family and you.”

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You are right about the horrendous tragedy of the collision of the white/red tectonic plates, the white slipping up over the red. (My figure of speech; I was thinking of the fact that the top of Europe’s Matterhorn is African.) / One disagreement: Columbus’ original intent was nonviolent; the violence began when his men, in his temporary absence, stole red women. (Please cool it if you don’t like my “red/white”: there are no unembattled terms of reference. My experience of the reds is that they dislike Politically Correct efforts to call them anything but “Indians.”) / Yes, Manifest Destiny was over-read as a ticket to land-grabbing. The basic conceptual difference was between red land-RESIDING and white land-OWNERSHIP. A former student of mine tried to get me to buy some land in Colombia; the contract’s stipulation was that my ownership would not entitle me to exclude the Indians from spring-&-fall passage over “my” land.

DANIEL IN THE LIONS DEN

I’m in strong agreement with you: “the promotion of Christianity as a political force and power in the world is totally and completely irrelevant” to being a Christian. But “personal belief” is not separable from “the politics of the day”—on which please see my next column.

GABY

Thanks for your ID, i.e. for telling us why you became American (viz., for Constitutional freedom). I would only add that—in light of how the Constitution came to be—you got more than you knew. Under water (& so invisible), the Hawaiian Islands are far larger than we can see above water. Your American freedom includes the right to participate or not in the religious roots of America.

It even includes the right to write God out of America’s root—the right the secularist revisionists (whom I oppose) are exercising. / And you are correct that American society is pluralist, with many streams of humanity adding to our rich tapestry of the common life.

LEPI

No, you didn’t become unAmerican when you left Christianity & “eventually embraced Paganism.” America is a big tent. Of course I’m sorry you did not deepen your understanding of Christianity & remain Christian. But my primary concern in recent columns has been that the spiritual roots of America be neither forgotten nor distorted; that is the sense in which I’m an “originalist.”

TERRA

Thanks for telling us more of your personal story. You & I probably differ little in social convictions. I'm an old battler for human rights, was messed up in the '30s for using black toilets in the Great Southland, in '39 helped temporarily shut down a graduate school for its refusal to accept black students. / My use of "national ID" is historical, a matter of knowing the whole plant, including its roots. Some of my readers have misunderstood me as classifying Americans by their degrees of participation in this historical ID. Rather, my steady concern here is double: (1) that Americans not be cut-flower, amnesiac about America's spiritual roots; & (2) that Americans do not buy into the secularist-revisionist-atheist spin on our spiritual roots. / Yes, I'm old; but most of the leaders in my concern are under age 35.

MR MARK

Rhetoric bends our words to our purposes. You are correct about the "predominant/founding" distinction. But my baseline description of the founders' mind (in my shorthand, "the American mind")—"Bible+Enlightenment"—uses neither of those terms. If you have not done so, I hope you will read Madeleine Albright's *THE MIGHTY AND THE ALMIGHTY*, on which I comment in my next column.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | DECEMBER 31, 2007 11:08 AM
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White efforts to integrate the Indians into the general American culture were well-intended but ham-handed, with (as you indicate) much coercion & (I add) to this day with little success.

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POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | DECEMBER 31, 2007 9:31 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I'm a little tired to address this in its entirety, so I will limit my responses to the following:

Firstly, in regards to your first point. "establishment" can be read as a noun in terms of a structure or organization, but also as a gerund, "the putting in place of." Therefore, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" would also apply to establishing a state religion or a "founding" religion.

Secondly, irrespective of how the Constitution ought to be interpreted in historical context, a strict separation of church and state remains necessary to the freedom and security of a free nation, as a free nation MUST be secular. Religions have a very bad track record when it comes to running countries. And endorsing any one religion gives it unprecedented power over another. Even if, as in this case, it is but a wink and a nudge, the resolution contains promise of future action.

To paraphrase, it recognizes that as Christianity is so important to the founding of the nation, it shall see to it to reduce or repudiate discrimination against Christians. (I forget the exact phrase used.) It may not be so bad to fight the discrimination of Christians, but why single them out? Especially, why single out the biggest kid on the block for special treatment? Of course, the protection of other religious positions is implicit, you say. But if the rest of the United States can manage on implicit protection, why can't Christianity, which enjoys a unparalleled popularity in American society, manage with it as well? The only purpose singling out Christianity would accomplish is to take a majority doctrine and provide it with privileged status.

POSTED BY: ANSUZMANNAZ | DECEMBER 31, 2007 9:20 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"Need I say more?"

Apparently so. Loudly and often.

POSTED BY: MAD LOVE | DECEMBER 28, 2007 2:37 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Rev Elliot is making the common mistake of taking the religion that was predominant at the time of our nation's founding and averring that it was the founding religion of our nation.

Using his logic, the horse-and-buggy was the founding transportation of our nation while hard tack and gruel were the founding diet of our nation. The only difference is that our Founding Fathers didn't feel the necessity to erect a wall of separation between the state and our transportation and diet options.

Need I say more?

POSTED BY: MR MARK | DECEMBER 28, 2007 1:22 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

National ID?

So Dr. Elliot what is our national ID? How does the rest of the world see us? how do we see ourselves?

Up until 2000 I would say we were seen as the people who believed in freedom...freedom of thought, speech, religion..We were seen as a place that allows creativity, striving to be all you could be and a nation who cared more for the character than how you prayed. MLK prayed for that for his little children...

But now...we find out that there is a National Identification..and those of us who did not fall into line as gung ho for the war in Iraq, we were called Traitors. We find out that if we are not Christians, we are UnAmerican. Corporations are counted as persons who have rights...but we non Christians are messing with this nation's National ID..what ever it is now. So shall we be segregated? Put us away like leppers before the plaque of free thought can pass onto others.

My Dad fought in WW2.. also my mom was a WAC...I was a military wife to someone that fought in Nam...I marched against the Viet Nam war..I marched for civil and voters rights...I vote and keep aware of what is going on...all those things made me very American I thought. But now I find out that because I am not Christian I am not valued as much as those who go to their neighborhood churches; no matter what else they do.

I remember those good Christians that spit on the little black kids that walked into that White school...but those "good" towns folk are true blue American. Rememeber "macaca"?George Allen going for the job of Prez of all

Americans? That good "Family Values" Christian that called an American citizen that just happened to be brown skinned, a Monkey? Nice.

But I pray to Gods who see all life as sacred...that that black, brown, red or yellow person is no different then I am...that gay man or woman is no different in value as you Mr. Elliot.

You are no different then that bigot that stood at the door with the pick ax handle to keep the "different" out of his store.Why? because they messed with the Unity of the power base. They made the folks on the sidewalk nervous...so the water fountains were labeled and the side walks were swept clear of those who had to be kept down...

I feel sorry for you Mr. Elliot..you are an old man, and probably have much good in you..But talking about a National Id...and who is American enough or who is against your type of American Unity...that is not the unity I want..or the ID that should be thought of when the word America is head.

I am American...but I have a sneaking suspicion that the founders would be frowning at your idea of what America was, and who its citizens were.

National ID, my posterior...

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | DECEMBER 28, 2007 12:08 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Hi Lepi,

Yup, I couldn't believe my eyes when I read his essay. National ID, indeed!!!!

Anon,

One should not make idle threats on the internet. Especially when its a national security issue.

POSTED BY: GABY | DECEMBER 28, 2007 10:39 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Gaby,

Bienvenue a l'association sociale des gens pas-Américains, cher.

Welcome to the un-American club, my dear.

I'm half Cajun - my dad's ancestors were Norman exiles. I'm not sure at exactly what point in my geneology my dad's progenitors settled in Louisiana. I do know that my great-grandparents spoke mostly French - very little English. My dad grew up speaking French at home, but quickly learned to speak English at school after being whipped by a teacher for speaking French.

Even though my birth certificate says I'm an American, apparently the esteemed Dr. Elliot believes that I waived my right to call myself that when I rejected Christianity and eventually embraced Paganism.

POSTED BY: LEPIDOPTERYX | DECEMBER 28, 2007 8:31 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

NO MORE MR. & MRS. NICE GUY!

You killed "ALLAH" and now Allah is no-more "AKBAR" (Not Great!)

We, not American's , not Israeli's, but ECLATi-ON(s), of Space-Ship Earth, Will annhilliate your KABBA & your AL AQSA mosque in JERUSALEM !

Please, you have 72 Hours from this post , or else!!!!

Islam will be NO MORE! Good bye KABBA! Good bye AL AQSA!

Remember, surrender Mr. Osama Bin Laden , et al, or else!

The Destruction of the Kabba, like World trade Center's will be the fault of the Bin Ladin FAMILY!

We will Execute All your 73 Children & ALL of Mr. Osama's Family! et al!

WE win you loose! Ya Ya!

G-D Bless E*C*L*A*Ti-ON's!

'Chara' Islam & 'Gondoo' Islam! [Shiiiiit] Ya Ya!

O.U.R. PEOPLE are in position!

Good bye KABBA, good bye Al AQSA DOME!

This is not a game not a Test! You weill see!

Mr. Osama Bin Ladin et al, Last Time, Please

"Surrender" (DEAD or ALIVE), surrender in less than seventy two hours!!!! Ya Ya!

P.S.: Pakisatan is "The VANGUARD of ISLAM" yet ECLATi-ON(s) are the VANGUARDS of SPACE-SHIP PLANET EARTH!

This is O.U.R. Prophecy not your's Islam!

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 28, 2007 5:11 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Apparently JJ has acquired nuclear capabilities now?

Well Dr. Elliott, how do you feel now that your Islamic counterparts have decided to fight back at the evil secularist threat to the unity of the Pakistani mind? A great day for religious fundamentalists worldwide, no?

I'm siding with the secularists myself. I'm not a Muslim, but I kind of doubt Allah/Yahweh is too pleased about it either.

What is it about you children of Abraham? Why can't you just enjoy your religious views and afford the same courtesy to others?

Yes, yes, I know, calling us immoral and un-American is not the same as murdering us. But it's been done before in the name of Christianity, you know. It's all part of the same game. Are you still sure this is the road you want to lead us down?

What's that you say? Oh I see. Their religion is different from yours. Theirs is a false religion and yours is the true one.

Riiiiight..

POSTED BY: MAD LOVE | DECEMBER 28, 2007 1:56 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

BEHOLD!

Att: SAUDI ARABIA at MECCA via KABBA!

Hear ye Hear Ye, The KABBA will be destroyed in 72 Hours, unless Al Quada Surrenders! no Compromise!

Surrender Mr. Bin Laden Et al, Dead or alive!!!!!!

We, not American's , but ECLATI-ON(s) Will annihilate your KABBA & your AL AQSA mosque in JERUSALEM !

Pleas, you have 72 Hours from this post , or else!!!!

Islam will be NO MORE! Good bye KABBA! Good bye AL AQSA!

Remember, surrender Mr. Osama Bin Laden , et al, or else! The Destruction of the Kabba, like World trade Center's will be the fault of the Bin Ladin FAMILY!

We will Execute All your 73 Children Mr. Osama, et al!

Ya Ya!

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 27, 2007 7:39 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Remember, surrender Mr. Osama Bin Laden , et al, or else!

Ya Ya!

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 27, 2007 7:31 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Ya Ya! OUR Condolances to the Pakistan BHUTTO Tragedy! "i" cried today! ya.

May XTRA Photon's shine upon Pakistanian BHUTTO Legacy!

"i" Shook her father s hand [Ali] in Karachi , at Clifton Beach [EID mamarik] 1975!

Yet, Abanahazr knew that she was risking her career via PRE-APOCALYPTIC "SuperStupidStitious" thinking folk!

note: The Curse of Allah is come to PAKMAN's!

The Prophecy is 'unraveling'! We told you so & warned you!

IT is TIME!

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 27, 2007 7:19 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Christianity on the Wane

an article in the NYRB by Bill McKibbin reports that

* the number of Americans self-identifying as Christians has declined in the last ten years from 4/5s to between 2/3 and 3/4s.

*40% between the ages of 16-29 are outside christianity, and 85% of those find Christianity Hypocritical, 70% find it "insensitive to others."

The numbers seem significantly a result of Evangelicalism in the last few years.

figures from The Barna Group.

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | DECEMBER 27, 2007 6:06 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dr. Elliott,

My beliefs and your's are certainly at odds and I usually try to leave it at that. But with this piece you have once again riled me into responding.

"A half-century ago, America's greatest public intellectual of the time, Reinhold Niebuhr, stressed the danger of a secularist take-over of America's self-understanding, our national ID."

For crying out loud!!! What national ID??? America's history (not counting Native Americans) is a mere 400 years old. It's make-up comes from the Europeans, Asians, Africans all of whom either settled here or were brought here enslaved.

Yes, there were a few who came here because of religious strife at home, but the vast majority came to escape poverty, the dream of owning land, or just plain seeking adventure. In those days you didn't really have "America", you had little Italy, little Poland, little Germany, Chinatown, etc.

Even today many Americans identify themselves as Italian-American, Irish-American, German-American,

National ID???? My foot!!!

I am a non-Christian immigrant from Europe. I became an American citizen 20 years ago. I did so not because I wanted to be part of your "Christian National ID", but because I truly believed in the Constitution and the freedoms America offers.

Oh God, how could I have been so stupid. Now the likes of you will accuse me of trying to overtake your "National ID".

POSTED BY: GABY | DECEMBER 27, 2007 1:17 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

May I ask a theological question?

Suppose the number of Christians in the United States shrunk to 40 million?

Suppose it shrunk to 4 million?

Suppose it shrunk to 4,000?

Would it matter to you or to me? Wouldn't you still be a Christian? Wouldn't I still be a Christian? Whether there are 400 Christians or 400 million, wouldn't your own personal religion remain unchanged?

It is not the job of the emperor, or the king, or the president, or the Congress to assure that as many people as possible be Christian, is it?

What is different today, than in the past? Just freedom, that is all. Isn't that what we all toot as our big moral advantage over everyone else? People now do not believe less now than in the past; they are just freer now, to give voice to their doubts. You can hush up a person's voice, but you cannot hush up a person's doubts; they are always there, lingering in the soul, no matter that the political power of the day may compel you to profess, outwardly.

As far as my own personal beliefs are concerned, the promotion of Christianity as a political force and power in the world is totally and completely irrelevant.

Maybe it is important to theologians, who are employed to entwine personal belief into the politics of the day, but it is not important to me.

POSTED BY: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN | DECEMBER 27, 2007 11:38 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Anonymous comelately - very impressive vocabulary. Your mother would be proud. That's not JJ speaking real English is it?? Speaking from the heart, as it were???

Those capitals always give you away, and of course the pleasantly hostile comment following your other nasty comments - and you're not such a 'spiritual' guy after all, are you? --- JJ????

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 27, 2007 10:16 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

ANONYMOUS, NO FAGS ALLOWED!

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 27, 2007 9:36 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Thanks for the post SusanC & Yo, Dr. Elliot - who is being gullible here? You're not an apologist for Manifest Destiny are you??

The decimation of indigenous peoples really started with Columbus in Espan ola - now Haiti and the Dominican Republic. It is estimated that many millions disappeared during his tenure in that neck of the woods, to be followed later by the brutal and genocidal policies and procedures of the Spanish Conquistadors. The native populations have never faired well at the hands of invading Westerners judging by any historical references I'm familiar with. Columbus continued his policies of unkindly behavior toward the natives wherever he went in the New World.

Yes, the indians in Massachusetts referred to previously by Dr. Elliot largely died off due to disease, and they came to believe that the pilgrims had brought disease and pestilence intentionally as a strategy to take their land. In the end, dead is dead by whatever cause.

As to other indigenous populations in North America, disease and starvation killed many millions without a doubt, and some of it was indeed intentional (interesting and ugly weapon of choice) - one account has the Army handing out smallpox-infested blankets to large groups of sequestered indians, and then driving them off into the wilderness (we've always been big on confinement of the 'enemy').

Our policies of confinement and forced encampments as part of the Manifest Destiny concept certainly resulted in mass starvation. Was it intentional?? There is little doubt that it was the intention of the US government to inventually acquire all of the land held by Native Americans, as government policies of the day clearly show

(thanks again, SusanC). How many hundreds of tribes and indigenous societies from Coast to Coast and from Canada to Mexico were affected, one wonders??

And then of course repeating firearms made by Remington, Winchester, and Colt, along with the infamous Gatling gun employed by the US Army continued to trim the populations of 'defiant' and 'hostile' indians as time went on. The indians were at times formidable foes no doubt, when the battle ground was leveled. Various warring tribes occasionally got their hands on Winchester carbines, and then there was hell to pay!

But in the end, guns in the hands of the US Army quelled and finally silenced any remaining resistance, just as the earlier single shot Sharps buffalo rifle helped bring an end to the vast buffalo herds of North America (along with other well documented causes).

Some of this comes from the writings of the highly unpopular Ward Churchill, who made his academic bones writing about the history of indigenous peoples of the Americas. In spite of his stupid remarks concerning 9/11, his scholarship was never doubted (although his credentials were). But of course there's an abundance of information on this vast subject.

My guess is that most of the government beaurecrats and higher eschelon Army officers of the day were devout Protestants - Catholics and Jews being few and far between.

A fair number of folks really do believe this well documented and long-standing policy behavior on the part of the US government constitutes attempted genocide of the indigenous peoples of North America. On the other hand, others believe it's 'more complicated' than that.

Today, it's still lawyers, guns and money that rule the day - Manifest Destiny indeed.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 27, 2007 9:14 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Great post SusanC.

The Moderate, whatever gets you through the night.

POSTED BY: TJ | DECEMBER 27, 2007 7:20 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dr. Willis E Elliot,

I have some more free time again now.

Right. Having taken you everywhere in a dizzy spin in my previous post, I will now address on some of what you stated in your post to me.

You do know that a believer can be a "secularist" in wanting and ensuring religion not get into politics, and the state not to dictate what believers can and cannot believe in. Unless it create problems in the public square and to be subjected to the same laws as as secular or non-religion affiliated NGOs. After all, they are non-governmental organisations fundamentally.

I recognise and understand the "screaming" by the minorities on H.R.847 and your column on it. It has parallels in my own country. I would too if I am a member of minority and would be more shrill about it too than many posters here to get the fleeting attention and past the collective mental shrug of the majorities who think it much ado about nothing.

In arguing about Santa, when Jesus was actually born, Christmas greetings etc do drown out the more pertinent issues and puts off many believers into thinking secularists, atheists and minorities are petty-minded.

Majorities tend to take everything for granted, having assumed traditional privileges associated with the "original" group, and, consequently, comparatively easier access to everything in being a member of the demographically "bigger" and historically "original" group.

I imagine myself as a Muslim minority in the United States and United Kingdom to understand and empathise with the minorities in my and every countries in the world. Living in Europe and the United States before made that easy.

As do American religious and ethnic minorities, Non-Muslim Malaysians get really upset when the majority Malay Muslims remind them that Islam is the "official" religion of Malaysia. This is stated in the Constitution. The Head of State (Paramount Ruler), is also the Head of Islam in Malaysia just as the British Sovereign is Head of the Church of England.

This status is abused by some Malay Muslim politicians to assert that Malaysia is an Islamic state. When that happens, the "screaming" in the US is rather civil when compared to Malaysia.

The Malaysian general elections is expected to be held as early as March 2008. Issues on race and religious rights comes to the fore again. There are already several street demonstrations. The blogs' war of words are in full throttle, with the extensive use of that very specific, brief and brutal language, Manglish (Malaysian English) making it extra spicy.

The issues are complicated by the fact that in general, one's race is also associated with a religion - Malays are Muslims, Chinese are mostly Buddhists, and Indians are mostly Hindus. It is like all Caucasians are Christians, all African-Americans are Muslims, and all Hispanics are Jewish. If anyone thinks issues of race and religion is complicated in the United States, they should live in Malaysia for a bit to experience how it is cooked up and mismanaged by politicians and the government.

It is not religious or "church" leaders that are manipulating ethnic and religious differences and causing rifts among the groups. It is politicians using the codeword "race". E.g. the supremacy of the "Malay race" in Malaysia, implying the supremacy of Islam too. No one really gets that far with that, as other races/religious groups as well as many Malay Muslims themselves challenged them on that.

Diversity of people may make unity seems difficulty, but all are citizens arguing on their stake in their own country, and what it means to be "Malaysian" rather than Malay, Chinese, Indian, Eurasian etc. I hope this debate will never end as it keeps us all thinking on who we are, and what we want to be as people and nation.

Like most Malaysians, I have a mistrust of politicians who speak on race and religion in tones that are obviously pandering. Just as I am wary of religious leaders talking about politics, economics or foreign affairs. We all want politicians should stay out of religion and leave it to people and religious groups. Just we want religious groups to stay out of state affairs unless consulted on issues that relates to religion and requires the input and support of various religious groups.

But, then, the fact remains that religious entities, organisations and leaders, when they get behind human rights NGOs, most effectively roused and mobilise the public against the failures and excesses of the government. It is not so much the religious wanting to dictate the government, but to ensure those governing are ethical, moral and just in public policy formulation and implementation.

On the Constitution, unlike Americans, most Malaysians don't think theirs is cast in stone and can be amended by a minimum two third majority vote in Parliament. The Constitution is regarded as a "living" document that may be changed in content as required to adapt and adjust to new realities. Including perhaps, sometime in the future, Malaysians deciding to do away with its rotating head of state system, and to abolish the traditional royal houses too.

I don't see the Qur'an as closed to any kind of interpretation Muslims want at the personal level or by the ulema and to continue to discuss or debate on it. I don't see the Shariah as being closed to revisions, amendments or to completely do away with on certain aspects. Hence, there is no reason I should think my country's Constitution and laws could not be subject to change.

I am not an "originalist" hardliner in insisting the "original" prevail to the end of time. Let it be a historical fact on what is the "original". I am more of an "interpreter", a "revisionist", an "adapter", an "adopter". Any which way to meet the changing needs and demands of society and to move forward.

Like you, I don't want my government to tell me what to think, do or should not do, or what to believe on my faith. The Five Pillars said it all already for all Muslims. Islam may be the "official" religion, but God forbid if they come out with a version of Islam that suits them and ram it down the public's throat. That is most unIslamic as "organised" Islam is by consensus and consent of the community on what is best for the community.

As everyone knows, politicians demeaned, sullied, tainted and muddied, abused and manipulated religion and faith for their own ends. Including passing this needless resolution. May the religious folks always keep governments and atheists on their toes on morals, ethics and values. Just as atheists reminds believers on the excesses of their organised religion and unreasonable demands in the public sphere.

Happy New Year to your family and you.

Thank you and best regards.

"J"

POSTED BY: JIHADIST | DECEMBER 27, 2007 4:39 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Someone in the government asked YOU to rebury the American Indian remains?

That shows right there that there's a LONG way to go before we as a country even BEGIN to live up to the promise of what America is supposed to be about.

In so doing, there is no honor in being buried by a person of a religion that has done nothing but attack the rightful owners of the land, who they claim to be 'respecting' by burying them in a ritual that has little to nothing to do with whatever religion they practiced.

We should be doing all we can to be THANKING the Natives for use of their land, and learning from them about their world, which is close to lost to history. We should be honoring them, not putting them aside as if they have nothing to contribute to our society. It's their land and we are merely interlopers.

And you call ME gullible? I find it laughable that when you cannot find actual evidence for your assertions you resort to name calling. What are you so afraid of?

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 27, 2007 12:02 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dr. Willis E Elliot,

I am still hoping you'd speak to posters here as a "general public" and not as students in your lecture hall.:)

Thank you for your response to my post addressed to Paganplace. No non-American nor non-Christian can truly understand the American or Christian mind. Just as Americans can never fully grasp a non-American mind or a Christian to grasp a Muslim mind.

One's personal belief, whether Christian or Muslim or atheist or pagan, is part of one, and comprise the totality of one as an individual.

And now, as I'm on leave, let me take you in different directions, different time zones and different perspectives. A discussion light and shallow and I won't bother to go over my text.

On Muslim students

You stated : None of my Muslim students at the University of Hawaii complained that my teaching of Islam was unfair to them or to their religion.

Of course not. We don't complain to our professors how they taught us on anything. Most impolite. Much more when we studied in the west, being in another country and as "guests" or "visitors".

If your Muslim students are from Southeast Asia, it is impolite for them to argue with those who are older and seen as wiser as they are students, still learning.

Muslim students from the sub-continent may be more argumentative. Muslim students from the Middle East may disagree in class, but politely and respectfully.

Of course, all Muslim students take what is taught by western scholars to them on Islam and Muslims in a detached manner. They argue more passionate with Muslim scholars in universities in Muslim countries. After all, as they are Muslims, they should know better.

Most importantly, Muslim students have to pass exams as per what they are taught and asked to read.

Contemporary Muslims and Islam

To read and understand Islam and Muslim nowadays, one has to read what the most popular ulema, Muslim, writers, thinkers, scholars, speakers are saying in countries from Morocco to Indonesia.

Each and every Muslim majority country have different Muslim personalities that appealed to the populace the most. These are the people one should give attention to, not, say Tarik Ramadan, who is based in Europe.

It is stated, to the point of cliché, that Islam and Muslims are not monolithic. The only thing all Muslims agree on to are the Five Pillars of Islam. Everything else, including Shariah, is differently interpreted and applied in Muslim states, and, of course, flavoured by the countries' particular history and culture.

Your Muslim students in Hawaii knows this and let a generalised and simplified version of Islam and Muslims be taught or compared for convenience. No point complaining about a westerner who is not Muslim teaching about Islam and Muslims and based everything literally on the Qur'an and Shariah, or on Middle Eastern history and experience, and Middle Eastern Muslims solely.

Muslims are increasingly looking at their Islam and Muslims not from the prisms of western scholars, but from Islamic scholars and thinkers through the ages and reading up on current Muslim thought on Islam and Muslims by Muslims themselves.

Functional Islam

One aspect of western scholarship on Islam and Muslim is that, like Wall Streeters, they do have a herd mentality. There are thousands of books on Jihad and terrorism, the aspect that least affect many Muslims directly in the wider Muslim world.

One aspect of functional Islam and Shariah that are not taught at all in western universities but which is bringing positive changes in the Islamic world is Islamic banking and financial services. That is what I do, and which I will venture here a bit and very simply to the point of over-simplification.

I shifted from conventional banking to Islamic banking due to personal convictions that happily coincided with Islamic principles on business and finance - to be just and ethical in devising and offering financial instruments and services to people.

Islamic banking and financial services largely developed outside state initiated formulations and dictates. But, of course, the state, noting that Islamic banking and financial services is attractive and viable, pulls up all to standardise and comply with the necessary banking regulations.

This is an example of practicing what one believe in, letting it be accepted or rejected in the marketplace of ideas and business, and giving people free choice to use Islamic banking and financial services or conventional ones.

Ethics, values and personal convictions

Which brings to the question of ethics and values. Non-Muslims may not understand at all or be personally averse to Islam as a faith, and Muslims as a group of believers. But that did not stop such non-Muslims from being in Islamic banking and financial services.

The interest of non-Mulsim leaders in Britain and Singapore to make London and Singapore as world centres for Islamic banking is laudable in their "openness" and "tolerance" of an aspect of Islamic jurisprudence and Shariah-compliant banking business. But is it one manifestations of some non-Muslims in loving the believer's money but not the believer and his religion?

Some 50% of my clients of Islamic banking and financial services are non-Muslims. The world is more complicated that anyone would think on Islam and Christianity or Islam vs Christianity.

A Buddhist or Hindu or Christian take Islamic banking and financial services not because they are good Muslims, but because they prefer the terms offered, or they are averse to their money being invested in businesses dealing with tobacco, gambling, arms manufacturing, alcohol, etc.

The west and Islam

Western and Christian scholars and experts on Islam and Muslims are well aware Islam is not as dogmatic, and Muslims are more diverse than they can grasp or teach anyone comprehensively. Everything is reduced to generalities. A Turkish Muslim is different from a Saudi Muslim, as a Saudi Muslim is different from an Iranian and Malaysian Muslim.

Muslims and Christians/Christianity

A Muslim hardly look at Christians and Christianity as one monolithic group. They may be upset at the United States not because it is a "Christian nation", but due to other reasons. One is hard pressed to find a Muslim who is upset with the Swiss or the Estonians because they are Christians. Or with the Canadians and New Zealanders because their heritage is Anglo-Saxon Protestant/Judeo-Christian + Enlightenment. Or because Christians forged these countries, and Christianity influence the public and private sphere greatly. There is also no one from any church or faith in these countries asserting that the "Canadian mind" or the "New Zealand" must acknowledge Christianity as an important component.

Rather than comparing Christian and Christianity based America with, Saudi Arabia, perhaps better to compare with other Anglo-Saxon nations such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand that were also colonised by the British - "American mind" compared to "Australian mind" or "Canadian mind" or "New Zealander mind".

It is amusing to see comparisons made with a nation that many Muslims around the world do not regard as the epitome of Muslim governance to be by consensus of the community, to be just and not oppressive as stipulated in the Qur'an. Surely America and American Christians are not that desperate?

Perhaps better to compare Saudi Arabia with Iran or Turkey or Indonesia - all Muslim states with different system of governance rather than with the United States.

Governance in Islam

Excellent effort to give credit for the US Constitution and Bill of Rights as Christian when many Founding Fathers are less than enthusiastic Christians.

Which brings me to governance in Islam that the US Constitution and Bill of Right is compared to. And namely with Iran (the first true theocratic state in Islam), or Saudi Arabia, which even Muslims of many other Muslim countries regard as rather medieval.

By the Suras of the Qur'an, the form of governance called for is by governance by consensus of the people, a form of governance that is just, free from corruption and not oppressive of people. By the Suras of the Qur'an and by classical and historical practice in Islam, non-Muslims minorities are to be left alone to practice their faith, given freedom to organise themselves and determine on their own communities' affairs according to their beliefs.

Of course, like the US Constitution and Bill of Rights, it is always disputed on meaning and intent and in actual practice.

Muslim enemies of America

In Muslim states that have corrupt and ineffective governments, that has no fair and free elections, one always hear them and their flunkies saying Islam is incompatible with democracy. Or if there is democracy and elections held, the Muslim fanatics will be voted in. One wonder why these fanatics would have such appeal.

Or that their countries will become theocratic states and there be no freedom and democracy, when freedom is curtailed and democracy rooted in a form of authoritarianism. Why would the Muslims in their countries become fanatics? Dying to remove them from power?

Why would these Muslim fanatics regard America as their enemies just because America is only supporting these regimes for America's economic and security interests? Surely these Muslim fanatics can be made to understand that their interests and well-being have to be sacrificed for world peace and security?

This a an unnecessarily long and simplified way of saying Christian scholars and American foreign policy makers and implementers have got it wrong and will continue to get it wrong about Islam and Muslims. Meanwhile, EU, Russia, China and India are rising.

Real challenges to America

If America and Americans are able to decouple religion i.e. Christianity from its foreign policy in falsely regarding and politicking Islam and Muslims as its enemy instead of focusing on groups such as Al Qaeda, then perhaps, there will be more a more clear-eyed and objective world-view instead of one coloured in seeing Islam as a competing faith.

India, China, EU and Russia are the real new challenges to America's unilateral dominance in this century. This is tangible and real and out of the depth and understanding of theologians who regard faiths as competitions but not economic, military and political influence and clout.

Thank you and best regards

"J"

POSTED BY: JIHADIST | DECEMBER 27, 2007 12:00 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"I dealt previously with the Treaty of Tripoli, which you over-read. / Washington-to-Jews is a well-stated statement of America's freedom of conscience. It should not be over-read as that America has no founding religion, the religion recognized every time in a civil oath-ceremony a Bible is sworn upon."

It is NOT a religion that is 'recognized' or sworn upon. Just because someone hands you a Bible, doesn't mean that they expect a religious practice. Exactly what religion are you practicing with that? None.

And no, I wouldn't swear on a book I don't believe in. You want me to swear to tell the truth? Bring me a copy of the Constitution and I will gladly swear to uphold my end of the deal.

SusanC: Nobody could have stated it any better than you. Thank you for that.

In my research also, I have come across a lot of markers that have been placed across this country as the site of 'Indian massacres' of white people which actually never took place, and instead were placed there as tourist attractants- and even the people living in those areas have been spoonfed pure fiction. They'll repeat the stories even though they never even happened.

The thing is, the good 'Dr.' here has built his whole argument about people who don't follow the Bible as being 'unAmerican' and 'bible haters'- which is divisive, bigoted and ultimately indefensible.. especially when he starts trying to talk about things that he knows nothing about.

POSTED BY: PRIVER | DECEMBER 26, 2007 11:26 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I am a Reservation-born First American whose first language was a dialect of Athapascan. Many years ago I granted myself a two-year hiatus during which time I "researched" Apache history and culture. My research entailed reading hundreds of archived newspapers, church records, old army documents, municipal records, library collections, private document collections, treaties, Federal statutes, State laws and reservation histories in the southwest and in the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora. Additionally, I had numerous conversations with several Apache elders in their own language. The oral histories were fascinating, though some events were apocryphal, I am sure. They were nonetheless interesting in that they presented a part of our history from a Native perspective.

The above being said, I make no claims to possessing even a fraction of the expertise with regard to American Indians that has been demonstrated by some on this board.

I would suggest, however, that those wishing to make broad statements about American Indians might first want to familiarize themselves with some of the specifics of our history.

One could begin with the reference in the Declaration of Independence to those pesky "merciless Indian savages" who had the audacity to defend the lands they had lived on for thousands of years prior to the arrival of those benevolent, christian Europeans.

Then one could continue with the following:

-- The rather presumptuous Indian Proclamation of the First Continental Congress (1783) which states, "The United States in Congress assembled have the sole and exclusive right and power of regulating trade and managing all affairs with the Indians," a proclamation that set in place the precedent by which Natives were eventually denied religious freedom by the Federal Government;

-- The 1819 Indian Civilization Fund Act, the primary intent of which was -- with considerable support from "christian" organizations -- to create a fund to reform and "civilize" the Indian peoples in accordance with christian religio-cultural norms imposed upon them by the Federal Government;

-- The Annual Reports of the Federal Board of Commissioners of Indian Affairs from 1832 to 1934 which contain numerous references to the "christianization" of Natives as well as to measures taken to prohibit Natives from practicing their religions. The first report of the Board noted that its duties were "to educate the Indians in industry, the arts of civilization, and the principles of Christianity." The board was given joint control with the Secretary of the Interior over congressional funds appropriated for dealing with the Indian agencies. Christian missionaries of most major denominations were given government support for the founding of missions in conjunction with 73 Federal Agencies on Indian reservation lands;

- The Indian Removal Act of 1832 which caused First Americans to be dislodged from lands that had been sacred to them for thousands of years.
- The 1851 Indian Appropriations Act which, along with other laws, set in motion the establishment of the Reservation System, one of the purposes of which was to place Indians in concentration camps so that they could be more easily controlled;
- The 1872 report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs which stated that agents from most Protestant denominations had been appointed "to assume charge of the intellectual and moral education of the Indians." By this time, Native children were being removed from their families, often by force, and shipped to christian (those "family values" folks) missionary schools where they were denied the rights to speak Native languages, wear Native clothing or practice any form of Native religion. Corporal punishment and sexual abuse of Native children at these schools was not uncommon.
- The Indian Religious Crimes Code developed in 1883 by Secretary of the Interior Henry Teller as a means of prohibiting Native American ceremonial activities under pain of imprisonment;
- The 1892 "Rules for Indian Courts" of the Commission of Indian Affairs which established a series of criminal offenses aimed at stamping out Native American religious practices;
- Records of 19th-century Army tribunals convened to try Native Americans for a variety of crimes, including the practice of Native religions, frequently without the benefit of defense counsel and often without the right to call witnesses.

Because of the numerous federal and state statutes, laws, directives and edicts (the above are just a smattering), the First Amendment to the Constitution did not apply to First Americans.

A personal aside: As a child, I was technically prohibited by Federal law from participating in an event central to our culture, the Sunrise ceremony. In spite of this prohibition, my parents and clan held a secret abbreviated version of the ceremony for me.

Not until 1978 when the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed in Congress (over the almost vehement objections of many "good christians") were American Indians permitted to once again practice their religions.

I could go on for hundreds of pages concerning this subject, but perhaps the above examples will serve as a starting point for anyone interested in the history of American Indians. I have not even touched upon the numerous massacres of American Indians who made the mistake of defending their lands from foreign invaders nor have touched upon the bible-based justifications and rationalizations for the theft by brutal force and subterfuge of the lands on which Indians had lived for so long. And I won't even go into such atrocities as the pubic scalps and tobacco pouches made from the breasts of Native women that were so proudly displayed by some Europeans.

In closing, I will leave you with a story, most likely apocryphal, that I find rather amusing:

Many years ago a mission preacher came to the Rez on his first assignment. After a few months, the locals gave him the honorific name, "Walking Eagle." The Rev was very proud of his "injun" name and had it printed on the mission stationery and put on the sign in front of the mission. What he apparently never realized was that he was called "Walking Eagle" because he was so full of s--t that he couldn't fly.

POSTED BY: SUSANC | DECEMBER 26, 2007 10:58 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dear TJ,

"Gee Anon. That sounds a wee bit like genocide. In my opinion, that's the legacy of Christianity in the new world. Genocide."

History is just not that simple.

The native Americans were not, for the most part, murdered by the immigrant Europeans. The Pilgrims set down on one shore to find hostile natives who drove them off. They settled into the territory of a tribe that had lost over ninety percent of its population to the diseases that traveled with the Europeans which had no effective defenders. There was a "biocide", but no genocide, at least not at the ferocity that the Atheists perpetrated in the twentieth century in Europe and Asia.

If the native tribes had not been destroyed by disease, the Pilgrims would have had to go back home, or negotiated altogether different terms.

POSTED BY: THE MODERATE | DECEMBER 26, 2007 9:23 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dear Willis,

"Attacks on this legislation will center on the claim that it violates the "no establishment of religion" clause of the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. It does not."

One point:

HR 847 is not legislation. It is a non-binding resolution of support. These things have no force of law.

Otherwise you offer a fine essay. Thank you.

Many of the Atheist religion do think that this some how violates "Separation of Church and State". But you are right that the neither the Establishment Clause or the Free exercise Clause are in any way violated, nor even Skirted by these non-binding resolutions.

BTW, there are other similar resolutions on Sikhs, Jains, and Moslems. They are really just, Christmas, Ramadan, and Dawali greetings from Congress to the various American groups.

POSTED BY: THE MODERATE | DECEMBER 26, 2007 8:59 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I've grateful to all who try to (re-)educate me, & I'm learning more than I report. My responses to you are (1) to try to clear up such misunderstandings as I think I'm unwittingly responsible for & (2) to continue to witness as to how I see things in the human heart, in history, in the universe, & in the heart of God. Tall order? Of course. But being human includes being an account-giver, a storyteller; and being religious is living within a mega-story, a comprehensive way of seeing the world & living in it.

My mega-story is BIBLICAL, the predominant mega-narrative of America & "the West." It's no accident that in the U.S., oaths of office & of court are taken to this day, with few exceptions, with one's hand on the Bible. Until the 1963 U.S. Supreme Ct. action forbidding the devotional reading of the Bible in our public schools, America's children were continuously exposed to our culture's bibliocentricity. Since then, they have been inwardly formed by a counter-narrative. Result? In the American populace, these two world-narratives have been at war (the Greeks have a word for story-wars: "logomachy").

This STORY-WAR is the dominant dynamic in American culture, including politics. Some read the electoral struggle for power otherwise. Currently, on each side the distortions of the enemy position are horrendous & dangerous. I can't recognize myself in the distorted picture some of you have of my position. But I can & do hope & pray for more clarity & civility on both sides.

The wider context is the STORY-WAR between "the West" & other cultures, especially the Islamic.

How we need clarity in this battle of the books, Bible & Qur'an having very different concepts of unity & liberty! Love requires us to put the best face on others (as well as on ourselves), but truth requires us to

face the truth about others (as well as about ourselves). (None of my Muslim students at the University of Hawaii complained that my teaching of Islam was unfair to them or to their religion.)

JOET

says that I believe “christianity is required for order to exist.” Some spiritual-intellectual core is required for order to exist in any human society, but not necessarily Christianity. In our society, the BIBLE has been the visible icon of the magnetic-centripetal center—visible (as I said) in oaths of office & of court.

I reported that without that visible center in my older sister’s opening of her third-grade school day (1963-6, when she retired), her classroom—peaceful for the previous 30 years—was “chaos & anarchy.” You over-read that as “anarchy if christians can’t make kids pray in third grade.” None of the nonChristian parents of her children ever complained that she was doing that! She required only a respectful silence, the same as in American public oath-ceremonies involving the Bible. / You say “respect and remember our heritage,” then add that I think it should be “imposed”: when we teach America’s children to “respect and remember” anything, we are imposing it on them. We punish them with low grades if they resist the imposition. / You suggest “a resolution appreciating minority religions.” Good idea, the problem being how to do it in a manner recognizing but not accenting their minority status.

PRIVER

I dealt previously with the Treaty of Tripoli, which you over-read. / Washington-to-Jews is a well-stated statement of America’s freedom of conscience. It should not be over-read as that America has no founding religion, the religion recognized every time in a civil oath-ceremony a Bible is sworn upon.

BEGONE

The First Amendment does not say “government shall not establish religion.” It doesn’t deal with religion or a religion. It’s a statement about the relation between institutions, political (“state”) & religious (“church”). Expanding this (as in your version) is ignorant, malicious, or revolutionary. / You refer to a particularly ignorant attacker of the Bible, namely, “hoax-buster.” Your intent is clear, & the depth of your ignorance is in your statement (twice!) that the Bible is “a proved hoax”; & your solution is to “keep religion private,” something which would be new in the American way.

PAGANPLACE

Of course what I say “can go wrong,” be misused! True of everybody who says anything with implications of how we human beings should behave & believe.

MO

Everybody’s Bible (including Jefferson’s) is less than the whole Bible. Regular readers of the Bible, if they use both the appreciative & the critical dimensions of their mind, will find themselves, in talking with it, sometimes talking back at it. No problem! It’s a perpetual invitation to talk beyond it, in conversation-communion with God, who is its central subject.

HARVEYHS

You say “no mention of Jesus,” but the Constitution ends with “the year of our Lord” (warmer than the literal translation of “anno domini,” which is only “the year of the Lord”). A number follows, indicating the birth-year of this “Lord,” Jesus. The signatures immediately follow, & none of the signers is known to have objected to “our Lord.” Of course one may debunk this as merely conventional; but even as a convention, the phrase signals that Christianity is the religion within the sphere of which America’s founders did their founding.

JIHADIST

Thank you for your generous understanding. / Yes, “American intellectual heritage” is better than “the American mind” in separating “was” from “should” if we can agree on “was,” i.e. what was the originating American mind, which I describe as Bible+Enlightenment. But the problem is that we can’t: secularists revision the originating American mind as Enlightenment-minus-Bible.

Because secularism (beginning its aggressive public-school campaign in 1933 [The Humanist Manifesto]) “may be saving America from divisiveness and discords,” those of us who are concerned that the originating American mind not be forgotten have the task of saving America from falling into a traitorous, God-amnesiac unity. Since secularism meets the basic definitions of a religion (as the U.S. Supreme Court has recognized), the battle for “what shall we tell the children” is a civil war of religion in the U.S. This war can be expected to become more intense. Witness the screaming, in this thread, against H.R.847 & my column on it.

The complexity of this religious war is visible in the false simplicity of your description of the two sides. You speak of us originalists as “ye olde traditionalist Americans”: we see ourselves as dedicated to maintaining America’s unique state/church arrangement in opposition to the present slippage toward just one more type of atheist (secularist) state. And you speak of the “secularist mind” as though the category included all “forward thinking Americans” (of whom I am one of many NOT in the “secularist” category).

MARGARET

Washington-to-the-Jews gives me occasion to comment that as a professor of Hebrew & Greek in Christian theological seminaries, I was at pains to honor the Jewish component (the Hebrew Scriptures, Christianly called the Old Testament) along with the Christian component (the New Testament). A Jewish president of the U.S. would be, in this sense, biblical—meeting my definition of the American mind as “Bible+Enlightenment.” (The Bible is composed of two religions expressive of one spirituality.)

ANTONY JESUS. J

You say “Without Jesus there is no civilization.” Since there were civilizations before Jesus, & are nonChristian civilizations, I must qualify your statement—qualify, not deny: ours is the only civilization emergent from the revelation of God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, & there wasn’t & isn’t any other civilization I’d prefer to have lived in or to live in. / I thank you for your Christian witness.

ROY

Thank you for agreeing that Huckabee’s “glowing bookcase” was not, on his part, a deliberate “Holy” cross. (I don’t know about that camera operator.) / I can understand your declaring yourself an “enemy” of mine: you seem to have so little understanding of me & my religion & what I’m trying to do in my “On Faith” columns & comments.

M.C.

Your comments are refreshing, & I can agree with them almost wholeheartedly. Yes, the founders saw themselves as participants in a “civic” religion, the earliest form of our “civil religion”—though you do not agree with me that that religion was compounded of Bible+Enlightenment. Yes, the heritages of Greek & Rome were alive within them (as they should be within us: every day I read the Bible in Greek & Latin [as well as in Hebrew & German]): it’s visible (as you say) in the stately architecture of the primary buildings of state in Wash.D.C. Yes, the Constitution is not about religion but about the civic duties of “We the people.” And yes on the First Amendment’s separation on the institutions of “church” & “state.”

But no to your assertion that the Constitution (+ Bill of Rights) expresses the only unity (“No other unity in American history”). You are confusing the American GOVERNMENT (which proclaims political unity) & the American PEOPLE (whose intellectual-spiritual unity was & is in Bible [the Book used in oath-taking] + Enlightenment—a unity inclusive of those rebellious, contrarian founders [even Jefferson, who in the Declaration intoned “a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence,” which became officially in 1956 “In God We Trust”]).

DANIEL

Glad you brought up the Baptists. Some historians are now inclined to assert that the most significant founder of America as a civilization (not as a federal government) was Roger Williams, the Baptist preacher who founded Rhode Island. I was ordained as a Baptist preacher more than 67 years ago, & have long been humbly proud of our Baptist contributions to “liberty and justice for all.” / Nobody “speak[s] for all Baptists.” We are at all cultural levels & of the full range of Christian theological opinions (I am both evangelical

& liberal, a libergelical), & some of us have “standing” (full clergy-recognition) in other denominations (I, the liberal United Church of Christ). / If H.R.847 is “silly,” it is counter-silly to the silliness of the secularist revisioning of America’s founding.

ANONYMOUS

You & I “promote democracy for all,” but you think I only for some. Democracy should not be confused with egalitarian multiculturalism, the ideology that one culture/religion is as good as another—all are of equal value. / Romanticizing Native American “democracy” cannot obscure the fact that the major motive of amphictyonies such as the Iroquois was to dampen the internecine slaughter, the sometimes genocidal efforts of one tribe to eliminate another. In 1675, the Native Americans committed genocide against 20 of their towns because those towns were Christian (the “praying towns” which formed from the missionary work of John Eliot); & the announced intention of the Amerind “King Philip” in that war was the genocide of all Europeans.

GENE

Good going. Aren’t you amazed at the successes of those determined to obscure the pro-human successes of Christianity through two millenia? “TJ” (the post immediately after yours) presents some (comparatively feeble) stretchers in the effort to cancel your assertions about Christianity’s beneficences.

ANONYMOUS

I was for several years the official reburier of Amerind bones accidentally dug up on Cape Cod (bones of Wampanoags, the tribe that welcomed the 1620 Pilgrims). Few Amerinds were killed by the English until the 1675 effort of the Amerinds to commit genocide against the English. Amerind deaths from European diseases (brought by traders before & after 1620) accounted by almost all the Amerind deaths.

Multiculturalism led to the federal government’s gift of millions of \$ to revive the Amerind culture & religion since WW2. Unfortunately, the revival included Amerind propaganda-lies against the English. You are a carrier of at least some of this lying. You have “most of the 30,000” Wampanoags “murdered” by the English....”more than 300,000 Native Americans...slaughtered....200 year history spent killing off the original Americans....” Don’t be so gullible.

TJ

Another gullible chimes in: “the legacy of Christianity in the new world. Genocide.”

LOCO-MOCO

Your “merely” is intriguing: H.R.847 was “merely...to pander to the fundamentalist base.” Disliking the resolution, you do your best to insult the hundreds who voted for it (only six voted against it). I should think that a number of motives were involved, including a hardening against jihadism (Islamism). You reveal your predisposition by calling yourself “progressive.”

NORRIE HOYT

The fact that “legislative resolutions” are not (as you claim) “useless” is disproved by the fact that they lean toward, & some of them eventuate in, legislation.

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | DECEMBER 26, 2007 8:35 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

JJ - all kidding aside. You're kind of a scary guy. The intense capitalization of letters gives you away. You're holding a one way conversation with yourself, in a code only you comprehend. What do you suppose that means to your audience?

And who could you hope to engage with such a confabulated mish-mash of past, present and future mythology anyway??

So much for my input. You're on your own kiddo.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 26, 2007 7:44 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Gaby -

You're right as rain. JJ's tendency to take control of the threads for his own purposes is con-wise manipulation at it's most obvious. Once a con-artist always a con-artist as the saying goes.

Those that sincerely enjoy the repartee of honest discussion are forced to deal with interjections from the most insincere of posters - egocentric, if clever rants from a frustrated conman.

It's a shame that such individuals have no real convictions (no pun intended) because lots of real talent and energy is misspent trying to draw meagre attention to a crippled personality with a pitifully under-endowed sense of self-respect. In my line of work I've witnessed it all too frequently.

In a different world, they could have done some real good somewhere.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 26, 2007 5:25 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Anonymous:

"If you're vaguely interested in the origins of JJ's incessant and elliptical postings, just google Harry Theriault and the Church of the New Song to discover that ECLAT ET AL was actually created by said Mr. Theriault circa 1978 while a federal prisoner in the Marion Illinois facility. What his crime was at that time is unclear."

Hey, Anon, if Joseph Smith was able to establish a religion wich now has millions of followers, why not Theriault and JJ???

Then again, we also had the great American-made religions of David Koresh and Jim Jones and we all know how those ended.

POSTED BY: GABY | DECEMBER 26, 2007 4:25 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

A New Years revelation for one and all. If you're vaguely interested in the origins of JJ's incessant and elliptical postings, just google Harry Theriault and the Church of the New Song to discover that ECLAT ET AL was actually created by said Mr. Theriault circa 1978 while a federal prisoner in the Marion Illinois facility. What his crime was at that time is unclear.

His status as the 2nd Messiah during that period was greeted with some skepticism by prision officials, especially when requests for special religious favors and dispensations were forthcoming - these were probably not granted. While scam artists are not unknown in prisons throughout the land, Messiahs are still uncommon behind bars.

We may have Mr. Theriault here with us today under a pseudonym, but who can say for sure??

Don't send donations and perhaps someone should inform Mr. Romney that he is a major player in this new age revelation.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 26, 2007 3:38 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Dr. Elliott,

All legislative resolutions are useless, if not nonsensical.

Please see my comment on this topic at Susan Jacoby's current thread, with its account of what happened to a Miss America Pageant resolution.

May you enjoy a very happy 2008.

POSTED BY: NORRIE HOYT | DECEMBER 26, 2007 10:25 AM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"Separation of Church and State" does not appear anywhere in the U.S. Constitution. However, stated in the "Bill of Rights" in the First Amendment to the Constitution is the following:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

The point of such an amendment is twofold.

First, it ensures that religious beliefs - private or organized - are removed from attempted government control. This is the reason why the government cannot tell either you or your church what to believe or to teach.

Second, it ensures that the government does not get involved with enforcing, mandating, or promoting particular religious doctrines.

POSTED BY: SAM ADAMS | DECEMBER 25, 2007 10:45 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I'd never dispute Dr. Elliott's expertise in his chosen field. But he really ought to draw the line at constitutional interpretation and historical exegeses therefrom. If even Scalia can't get it right, how can Elliott hope to?

This amendment essentially has nothing to do with Christmas per se. It is merely a chest-thumping exercise whose only purpose is to pander to the fundamentalist base. As a progressive Christian, I find it lamentable.

POSTED BY: LOCO_MOCO | DECEMBER 25, 2007 8:09 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Gene wrote: "Terra asks, 'Exactly what did the bible or Christianity bring to civilization?'

Um, let's start with orphanages. Then hospitals. Universities. The idea of basic human rights (something Christians derive from their Jewish roots). Even science, which at its root depends on the concept of a rational, orderly universe created by a rational, orderly Creator.

What has atheism given to the world? Lenin. Stalin. Mao. Pol Pot ..."

Perhaps you have better sources, but a 5-minute Wikipedia search yielded numerous citations disproving most of what you've asserted. If it wouldn't be too much trouble, could you please cite references and/or specific examples. I'd be especially interested in any commonly accepted version of the scientific method based on a "rational, orderly Creator" of the universe.

Thanks and Merry Christmas

POSTED BY: NEAL: | DECEMBER 25, 2007 7:54 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Gee Anon. That sounds a wee bit like genocide. In my opinion, that's the legacy of Christianity in the new world. Genocide.

POSTED BY: TJ | DECEMBER 25, 2007 7:09 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Yes, Christianity is a beautiful thing. By 1675 most of the 30,000 members of the tribe of Native Americans that welcomed the pilgrims at Plymouth rock and generously showed the newcomers how to live, were dead - murdered most ungenerously by those same newcomers. By 1900 more than 300,000 Native Americans had been slaughtered and run off of their land, their once-magnificent culture and societies in ruins. The reservations are what we have left as a reminder of our Christian ways from the days of the great land grab - quite a piece of missionary work.

Surely something went very wrong with God's divine plan??

In my thinking, 'Like Father, like Son' does not hold up to scrutiny in this Christian theology business. How does the God of Wrath give rise to the Son of Love??

It will take alot of orphanages and gambling casinos to make up for a 200 year history spent killing off the original Americans.

Something to remember in the New Year as our spineless Congress valiantly and most piously celebrates our 'Christian' culture for the sake of politics.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 25, 2007 6:55 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Orphanages? No. How about the Greeks?

Hospitals? No. How about the Egyptians?

Universities? No. How about the Buddhists and Muslims?

Human rights? Like having the right to own slaves? Please.

Science? No. While science does makes the assumption that the universe obeys the same laws everywhere, a creator is not needed and never has been. There is ample evidence of science being practiced long before the ancient Hebrews committed their wanton acts of plagiarism and flights of fancy in the OT.

Do you have any more propaganda to feed us as if it were the truth Gene?

POSTED BY: TJ | DECEMBER 25, 2007 6:36 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Terra asks, "Exactly what did the bible or Christianity bring to civilization?"

Um, let's start with orphanages. Then hospitals. Universities. The idea of basic human rights (something Christians derive from their Jewish roots). Even science, which at its root depends on the concept of a rational, orderly universe created by a rational, orderly Creator.

What has atheism given to the world? Lenin. Stalin. Mao. Pol Pot ...

POSTED BY: GENE | DECEMBER 25, 2007 5:48 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

The Dr's fundamental premise of an 'American mind' is flawed from the start. It's ALL imported.

You really want to get a TRUE American mind, then talk to a full blooded Native American who was here and knew how to conduct a democracy long before any of our ancestors showed up.

We can learn much from them that can promote democracy for all, not just the ones the Dr. agrees with.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 25, 2007 5:20 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

It is embarrassing to read such misdirected and uniformed historical dribble from one who presents himself as a thoughtful representative of Christianity. Who was your church history professor in seminary? He should be fired and all Baptist should rise up in revolt against one like you who would so foolishly surrender your treasured faith independence to such silliness as this bill represents. You may be a Baptist but you certainly do not speak for all Baptist. Thank God for that!

POSTED BY: DANIEL | DECEMBER 25, 2007 5:03 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Antony,

Exactly what did the bible or Christianity bring to civilization?

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | DECEMBER 25, 2007 4:41 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Many of the comments here cause me to weep for our lost republic. If Thomas Jefferson saw Americans thinking that before Christ there was no civilization, or that liberty requires a Christian political order, he would pack up and move to France. Ignorance is the nicest word I can use to describe such ill-informed opinions. If America has any founding religion, it is a civic one. The monuments in our national capitol are meant to recapture Greek and Roman civilization, not a medieval embrace of barbarism and religion, and I say this as a well-churched Christian. The Constitution begins "We the People," not "In the Name of the Father..." and you forget that fact to the detriment of us all. Religion and theology have an undeniable place in history and society, but republican politics is a secular sphere of human life, it treats people as citizens, nothing more, nothing less. To what "spiritual-intellectual unity" do you refer if not to the sovereignty of the people as such and their representative institutions? No other unity in American history exists, racial, cultural, or religious. There are far too many divisions and diversities and mixings in that history to chose one as the grounding of the political order. Jefferson said that he had sworn upon the altar of god eternal hostility against any form of tyranny over the mind of man, and he said that in a response to a letter from a friend asking him why organized Christian churches were opposed to his presidential campaign, and he said he admitted he was as big a threat to their dominance of politics as they said he was, and was proud of it. It is my fervent hope, even prayer, that we can remember what politics is and its distinction from spirituality. If we cannot, then the republican experiment has failed.

POSTED BY: M.C. | DECEMBER 25, 2007 3:32 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

P.S. "Dr." Elliot, count me in as one of your enemies in your holy war against "secularists" Although I don't consider myself a "secularist", I would rather be on their side than on the side of your holier-than-thou pompousness. As your sworn enemy, you later may be able to waterboard me in Jesus name. Happy Holidays!

POSTED BY: ROY | DECEMBER 25, 2007 3:30 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Why would Christ need a Congressional resolution recognizing His importance and the importance of his Birth? Considering the make up of Congress, this is not the best reference Christ could have.

It's neochristians who market their neocon presidential candidate using Christmas and their Holy glowing bookcase that need this bill to reaffirm their importance and domination in their own private Jesuslandia.

Do I need a resolution from anyone recognizing my importance? Only if I'm extremely egotistical and neurotic.

POSTED BY: ROY | DECEMBER 25, 2007 3:23 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I deeply support the views of Mr. Elliott. Christianity has been the foundation for the civilization which we are witnessing today both in Europe and America. The words of Christ has enlightened even the non-Christian world. The Bible is the basis for many achievements of the human race. Just look at History. In many countries, there have been darkness before the arrival of the word of Christ and there was a complete change after people understood and lived the word of Christ. It is a historical fact. Without Jesus, there is no civilization.

POSTED BY: ANTONY JESUS. J | DECEMBER 25, 2007 2:57 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Washington's Address to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, 18 August 1790

"Gentlemen.

While I receive, with much satisfaction, your Address replete with expressions of affection and esteem; I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you, that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, from all classes of Citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and a happy people.

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy."

For further explanation of the historical context and significance of this exchange between Washington and the Newport congregation read link below:

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/bigotry.html>

POSTED BY: MARGARET | DECEMBER 25, 2007 2:42 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Mitt's primary appeal is to beings from an alternate universe, and I think they're in a minority. What, me worry?? Happy every day that the GOP nitwits remains out of office!

Congress needs to get back to work and stop being stupid. They were elected to solve real problems - what a bunch of lame brains.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 25, 2007 2:40 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Welcome back, Jihadist! I've missed your skillful commentary, such as your post above. I cannot understand why so learned a man as Dr. Elliot can be so blind to the harm his desire for "unity" would bring.

I'm not sure what he means by an "American Mind", but I know what is part of the American Psyche:

"I don't say I'm no better than anybody else,
But I'll be damned if I ain't jist as good!"

Oklahoma!

POSTED BY: WICCAN | DECEMBER 25, 2007 2:05 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Interesting, the Age of Aquaris led to George and Dick; now proclamations of the country being a good born again nation of the jew known as Jesus; the birth of this jew was fortunately moved up several months to avoid conflicts with his torture and murder, most likely he was declared an enemy combatant so it was all legal. There was a collateral benefit in it provided a boost to sales of religious trinkets and other consumable products at a down time in the business cycle; the jews have always been admired for their business before pleasure attitude!

POSTED BY: CHAOTICIAN | DECEMBER 25, 2007 11:44 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Hello, hello Paganplace:)

I see you're still upset by Dr. Willis E Elliot's current essay and previous essays. I am not making light of it. I've been following a bit on discussion and debate on the "establishment clause" and such. Not that I understood anything or everything on it. But, anyone can comment.

Certainly no one is disputing the fact that Christians and Christianity shaped America and American governance, culture and values. According to some American historians, it also is the basis of Manifest Destiny. I hope that it is also not a cause of the so-called American exceptionalism whatever that is. Unique it is, as every country is by its own history, political, religious and human experience.

Dr. Elliot calls for no tyranny of an "established" religious institution. It would be a challenge to "establish" any in the United States with so many different and competing churches. Ironically, the "anarchy" of competing religious entities prevents any from dominating the state. Wise of the Founding Fathers to foresee this and leave religion and religious entities alone so to speak. Actually, keeping them at arms' length from state affairs.

But on the "American mind", is it really necessary and pertinent for a Pagan or Buddhist American to have Christianity as an essential component in their American mind? One can read Voltaire and still not be a Christian. One need not be an American or religious or non-religious person to celebrate and value freedom. And, rather than say "American mind", why not American intellectual heritage? Mind gives the notion of being fixed and no room for change, as in fixed mind and mind-set. Intellectual heritage gives an impression of flexibility and adaptability. He may mean that, no?

Dr. Elliot also talks about "order" that may be disrupted if secularism takes hold. Secularism seems to be code for atheism or irreligiosity or marginalisation of religions, not proponents and advocates of separation of church and state. It would seem that he is quite concerned Christianity is forgotten or subsumed as the primary source and bedrock of America's historic spiritual-intellectual unity.

But history is history, and today's events is history in the making and will be tomorrow's history. The secularists may be the ones who may be saving America from divisiveness and discords in an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic America where every group wants for itself what others are accorded in the public square.

Americans of non-Caucasian or non-Christian heritage may read the history of America being forged by Christians, and Christianity infusing everything in America. But they do seem to have other ideas. The increasingly assertive voices of diverse groups are not challenging historical facts, but calling attention to them as also the past, present and future contributors to the American mind as well as in shaping its political and cultural landscape. This is the America of this century going into its 300th year in 2076.

Dr. Elliot is perhaps right in concluding American elections may reflect the "conflict" between the "American mind" (ye olde traditionalist Americans who look back in nostalgia and forward in anger and confusion) and the "secularist mind" (ye neo forward thinking Americans who look at now, see what is happening and coming in future and seek to address it).

If one is a minority, one has to be of "secularist mind" protect oneself from the tyranny of the majority, and to ensure that one is as American as "they" are in spite of not being Christian. And to state that one don't have to be a Christian to be considered as having an "American mind", or to inherit and contribute to America's intellectual, political and cultural canvas.

Dr. Willis E Elliot's essays are very interesting and educational reading to glean a highly educated "American Christian mind".

Best regards

"J"

POSTED BY: JIHADIST | DECEMBER 25, 2007 11:24 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

It's interesting that Congress considers Christianity so important to America yet neither Christianity or Jesus Christ is mentioned in any of our country's founding documents. Yes references to our creator, etc., but no mention of Jesus whatsoever. So much for how important Christianity is.

POSTED BY: HARVEYH5 | DECEMBER 25, 2007 9:48 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

I mean, see, Mo, ...and Reverend, ... the real trick about democracy is for 'We the people,'

Not to chicken out.

Not to freak out.

No matter how appealing someone makes freaking out look compared to dealing with what's on our plate to deal with.

This is no time to lose it. It's only gonna get worse if you let 'Caesar' tell you to blame people who don't 'think the right thing.'

But for now, have your visions of sugarplums. Once upon a time, people really were into those, I'm given to understand. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 25, 2007 3:58 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

But, hey, Mo, far be it from me to say, but I seem to remember being taught that your Jesus explicitly said to 'give to Caesar what is Caesar's' ...which you could take as a reason not to get in a twist about Jeffersonian democracy any time you like.

Just some kind of random idea that didn't come out of a couple centuries of America or anything.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 25, 2007 3:45 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Not sure what you're getting at, there, Mo, but, interestingly enough, it seems that even acts of Congress affirming the holiday don't seem to stop non-Christian postal workers from having to try and make up for everyone else being absent with no particular compensation.

How.... Holy.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 25, 2007 3:30 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

theory of relativism.
2 minds = 1/2 mind

the split personality between the bible of christianity and the bible of jefferson will cause the ruine of the u s of america, no more no less than the god/ceaser 2 minds of the roman empire.

jesus or jefferson??? jefferson and jefferson will never mix.

may the creator god of this universe save humanity and this universe from people with 2 minds syndrom.

POSTED BY: MO | DECEMBER 25, 2007 1:31 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

See, Reverend Elliott, one thing I *do* take literally out of your Bible is right from your Jesus' lips:

"They shall know you by your fruits."

I've observed the fruits of what you teach. Firsthand. In detail, and triplicate.

Would you like the pink copy?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 25, 2007 12:35 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Though, for the Reverend Elliott's benefit, should he randomly get a reading comprehension skill in his stocking this morning, I point out out JJ here as an example of the 'fruits' of his teachings.

Here we have a gentleman who believes he sees 'the light' on a daily basis, yet, on the good Reverend's thread, he believes everyone in the country is a 'foreigner' to be *expunged.*

He does us the *service,* Rev. Elliott, of showing how what you say can go *wrong.*

Just like your 'savior' says.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 25, 2007 12:28 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Ya, ya.

Getting something out of that, spud?

Cause i get the feeling you ain't someone whose holiday actually happened a couple days ago.

I think you're alone, and looking for someone to blame.

Is it really me you want to blame, JJ?

How do you see this playing out?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 25, 2007 12:11 AM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Ya Ya!

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | DECEMBER 24, 2007 9:08 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"Down with Imported religion in Sweet sweet U.S. of A. Now! ya Ya!"

Hoka hey? Watanka, evohe? :)

It's all 'imported religion,' unless you wanna talk to the land, JJ.

Then again the Lakota are now trying to secede, after all this public piety's about *totally* bled the 'non-immigrants' white.

Can just see Bush Sr calling Bush Jr:

"You lost *half of five states?* Nice going, Shrub."

The God you speak of isn't even indigenous to the people who *came* here and did all that horror to the native peoples they met, never mind the likes of the Irish.

Kinda like when I lived in Texas and then-Gov. Bush was trying to disenfranchise me as an American both on the counts of being non-Christian and being non-straight, and the 'native texans' were all in a twist about 'foreign influence,' so they had all these 'Don't mess with Texas' stickers, ...I wanted one in the same font that said, 'But it's so *easy*' :)

Seriously, JJ. Apart from Gaby, who keeps cautioning you against all this stuff you spew, *you're* the one with a fringe religion (of one) that's based entirely on ideas imported thrice removed from the New World.

You really wanna push that?

Frankly, a lot of American Christians are in for a big surprise (and are in fact continually-surprised, when they find out their idea of Christianity is *totally unrecognizeable* to people living where it's supposed to be from.

So,you had a point?

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | DECEMBER 24, 2007 9:05 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

from The Independent UK.

Dawkins to lecture in US Bible Belt

By Jonathan Brown

Published: 24 December 2007

Richard Dawkins, the scourge of pseudo-science, Christianity and homeopathy, is to step up his campaign for rational thinking with a series of high-profile lectures deep in the heart of the American Bible Belt.

The Oxford University professor travels to the US next year as part of his battle to promote evolutionary theory in the face of a backlash against the concept in the world's most-advanced industrial nation.

He is to address a series of 2,000-seater venues in the American heartlands. The tour will coincide with the publication of his best-seller *The God Delusion* in paperback in the US in January and act as a prelude to a series of global events to mark the bicentenary of Charles Darwin in 2009.

Professor Dawkins has charities in his own name on both sides of the Atlantic to promote reason and science. He has said that it is in the US, where 50 per cent of the population believes the universe is less than 10,000 years old, that the Enlightenment is most threatened.

However, he said he did not expect audiences to be too tough on his atheist beliefs and that many thanked him for speaking out. "The Bible Belt is a lot less monolithic than it portrays itself. I have a feeling that there is rather a large groundswell of people who agree with me," he said.

POSTED BY: DREW | DECEMBER 24, 2007 7:01 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Rev Elliott:

Interpretation seems to be at the center of religion including the interpretation of the 1st amendment. What part of the "government shall not establish religion" don't you understand?

If the government recognizes a particular religion isn't that the first step to establishing that religion? The fact that there are thousands of "Christian" religions and the government isn't picking one in particular doesn't remove the establishment possibilities of recognition. The congress has gone well beyond recognition hasn't it?

Throughout the history of the nation the government has recognized religions including but not limited to "the" Christian religion. That's a fact but it does not make it constitutional. For many years the government recognized other unconstitutional things, segregation for one. All "Christians" are doing is what southerners did, point out what they have been doing with the misguided notion doing it makes it constitutional. One little supreme court finding and boom.

What <http://www.hoax-buster.org> says is here to stay. The Bible, the basis in fact for all three great faiths is no longer a mystery accountable as some "faith-able" message from God. The Bible is a proved hoax. That's a little too shocking to be accepted out of hand but will never go away. The facts are on hoax buster's side. It's just a matter of the academic community "getting over it" being scooped by a certified nobody from noname U. Of course we can continue to live the lie but we know better than doing that forever. And there really is the matter of eternal life isn't there? Eternal life according to a hoax can hardly be deemed to be reliable.

There's nothing wrong with people believing in supernatural beings, the supernatural in general or organizing themselves into religions. There's something terribly wrong with folks being taxed and that tax money turned over to religion operators. "No taxation without representation"! Who do you want represented at your church to make demands on how "their" tax money is spent? In short, keep religion private. I know the Bible demands the missionary but don't forget it's a proved hoax.

Now rethink involving the congress in religion. It's not good for religion. It's not productive for the congress. And above all else it's unconstitutional. That which is unconstitutional will eventually be banned. You don't need that.

Merry Christmas to you and yours and have a happy and prosperous new year.

Eh, you know, seeing this: Bad precedent:

“expresses its deepest respect to American Christians,” who constitute “over three-fourths” of our population, the three-fourths who celebrate Christmas as “the birth of their savior, Jesus Christ.” Christmas celebrates “God’s redemption, mercy, and Grace.””

Say Christians became a minority, or, a majority of them didn't agree with either the celebration or theological statement, there.

Would this law then be the state endorsing either that theology or the idea that the state should express 'majority' will over all other religions?

Bad precedent.

Frankly, the idea that three quarters of the nation are religious Christians is in fact based on the same poll data that had been previously used to alarm devout Christians about a majority of Americans considering themselves 'Spiritual, not religious,' ...having taken some of these polls, myself, the answers tend to count *me* among believing Christians, between the phrasing of the questions, and further how political people go on to *interpret the presented answers.*

As for the 'Christian Nation' Dominionist revisionism, we've discussed it before, and no matter how often it's debunked, some will just repeat it with thin justifications.

Frankly, I wouldn't mind asserting the importance of Christmas as an American holiday, however, the text of this seems to support exclusionism and false history,politicizing and polarizing the very thing it's supposed to be supporting.

That's no way to 'keep Christmas,' in my opinion.

Fact is, those who have historically opposed Christmas celebrations have in fact done som on the basis the holiday wasn't Christian *enough.*

My amendment to HR 847:

As per many NT exegetes to include Professors John D. Crossan, Marcus Borg and Paula Fredriksen there is "No Historic Reason for the Christian Christmas Season".

There was no Virgin birth. See, http://wiki.faithfutures.org/index.php/026_Jesus_Virginally_Conceived

And there was no Star of Bethlem. http://wiki.faithfutures.org/index.php/369_Star_of_Revelation

"Professor Gerd Lüdemann"

Commenting on the infancy narratives overall, Luedemann [Jesus, 124-29] concludes that Luke and Matthew represent "two equally unhistorical narratives." He cites the occurrence of a miraculous heavenly sign at key points in the life of Mithridates VI in a history written by Justinus (active in the reign of Augustus, 2 BCE to 14 CE). "

Professor/Father John P. Meier of Notre Dame

"Meier [Marginal Jew I,211ff and 376] considers these traditions to be "largely products of early Christian reflection on the salvific meaning of Jesus in the light of OT prophecies" and concludes that their historicity is "highly questionable."

Of course any Congressional resolution about the Jewish faith would be amended as follows:

Abraham founder/father of three major religions was probably a mythical character. If he was real, he was at best a combination of at least three men. 1.5 million Conservative Jews and their rabbis have relegated Abraham to the myth pile along with most if not all the OT. See the simpletoremember.com/vitals/ConservativeTorah website.

Of course any Congressional resolution about Islam would be amended as follows:

Mohammed was an illiterate, womanizing, warmongering, hallucinating Arab who also had embellishing/hallucinating/plagiarizing scribal biographers who not only added "angels" aka "pretty wingy thingies" and flying chariots to the koran but also a militaristic agenda to support the plundering and looting of the lands of non-believers.

This agenda continues as shown by the conduct of the seven Muslim doctors in the UK, the 9/11 terrorists, the 24/7 Sunni suicide/roadside/market/mosque bombers, the 24/7 Shiite suicide/roadside/market/mosque bombers, the Islamic train bombers in the UK and Spain, the Bali crazies, the Kenya crazies, the Pakistani koranics, the Palestine suicide bombers/rocketeers, the Lebanese nutcases, the Taliban nut jobs, and the Filipino koranics.

And who funds these acts of terror? The Islamic Shiite terror and torture theocracy of Iran aka the Third Axis of Evil and also the Sunni "Wannabees" of Saudi Arabia.

And Merry Reality to all!!!!!!

POSTED BY: CONCERNED THE CHRISTIAN NOW LIBERATED | DECEMBER 24, 2007 3:17 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

My, my,

The Congress of the United States actually wrote all that?

The Congress dost protest too much, me thinks.

and that following on the White House generosity of:

"let the health of the nations children be covered by prayer."

Good Christians all.

POSTED BY: PROV. CANDLELIGHT | DECEMBER 24, 2007 2:28 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

The thing about it is, it's a false premise.

America is not founded on Christianity, as is plainly put by the Treaty of Tripoli.

It doesn't say 'American GOVERNMENT is not founded on the Christian religion, it says 'America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.

Which wouldn't be a problem to let people like the Dr. spew off his bigotry, as is his right to do so, but that he is in a position to teach young people a misleading and misrepresentative view of history is absolutely appalling.

Consider what another panelist put on his response to today's question, the words of the man himself, George Washington:

"The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for giving to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support."

Now THAT is a policy worth getting behind.

Blessed be, this Yule.

POSTED BY: PRIVER | DECEMBER 24, 2007 1:04 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

And of course the resolution doesn't violate the establishment clause. that's a straw man. the problem is that a resolution appreciating minority religions reassures the minority that they are welcome. a carefully worded resolution recognizing the dominant religion sends the unnecessary message that some folks are more equal than others. sometimes telling the truth is actually mean spirited. all depends on context and motives. those are suspect in the case of this resolution, which is anything but a recognition of your otherwise accurate thesis, Dr. (apart from the problem with it mentioned in my previous post)

Have a Merry Christmas!

POSTED BY: JOET | DECEMBER 24, 2007 12:51 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

The problem with this thesis is actualizing it. What are good atheists, Jews, Muslims, lapsed Catholics, those who go to church out of tradition but no particularly deep faith, whatever, to do? Is the good doctor asking us to just leave Christians alone to act as if the country is theirs, and be polite and act as if we don't exist when they put 5 ton granite commandments in a courthouse lobby and proclaim it the law in that court? And what does he mean that christianity is required for order to exist? There would be anarchy if christians can't make kids pray in third grade (Dr. E you really need to get over your wife's reaction to that). What more does he want than that I draw the line at what the constitution actually does require, and then just leave Christians alone to worship as they please? Letting Christians pretend that the country is their heritage alone is not just silly, it has no practical manifestations that don't themselves result in chaos. Dr. E, perhaps you could give us one practical example of what you think Christians and the rest of us would be acting like if we listened to you (and don't say pray in public school - that ship sailed, and the Supreme Court got it right anyway). I say respect and remember our heritage, but trying to reimpose it is daft.

POSTED BY: JOET | DECEMBER 24, 2007 12:39 PM
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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