

[http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis\\_e\\_elliott/2008/01/is\\_the\\_constitution\\_under\\_god.html](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2008/01/is_the_constitution_under_god.html)

## Is the Constitution "under God"?

Visible from any angle within my father's courtroom, and situated between the judge's bench and the witness stand, was a small BIBLE. It was the cynosure of solemnity, both symbol and sacrament. *Symbol* in that the sessions of this New York court were conducted under the Judge of all the earth ("Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" [Genesis 18:25]). *Sacrament* (Latin for "oath") for the hand of the witness, about to be judged on veracity by both the Court of heaven and the court of earth.

Now to the question: "Presidential candidate MikeHuckabee says 'we...need to amend the Constitution so it's in God's standards rather than try to change God's standards so it lines up with some contemporary view.' What do you think?"

I think that statement delivered a knockout blow to Huckabee's hope of the White House.

1.....If the Constitution were perfect, it never would have needed any amending. The fact that it was amended argues for the continuation of the amendment process. So far, Huckabee is right.

2.....Wisely, the Constitution guards against its being amended (1) easily or (2) by any other authority than the will of "We, the people...." If the citizenry agrees to a change by "God's standards," so be it: Huckabee would be right.

3.....But no way is this *pluralistic* people in agreement on "God's standards." To put a finer point on it, no way is this Baptist preacher (Elliott) going to agree with that Baptist preacher (Huckabee) on "God's standards." For one thing, I'm as strongly pro-choice as he is anti-choice (or pro-denial-of-choice, disingenuously called "pro-life").

4.....But Huckabee's statement is true to the historic American mind in being—as was my father's courtroom—bibliocentric: the Bible orients Americans to life "under God" as our manner of living (*modus vivendi*). But falsely—and unlike my father's courtroom—Huckabee's statement seems to set Bible and Constitution as competing authorities. Unintentionally, this plays into the hands of the secularistic revisionists who see God-and-Bible on one side and the Constitution on the other.

5.....To correct for this confusion, one need only observe how different are the functions of the two.

The Bible ORIENTS human life to God, in whom the orders of nature and grace subsist, who gives us the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (again, *modus vivendi*).

The Constitution, as "law and order," ORGANIZES political life as structures and processes of action and interaction (*modus operandi*).

6.....Huckabee's phrase "God's standards" wrongly suggests that the Bible can both orient human life (a function of "church") and organize political life (a function of "state"). Islam makes that claim for the Qur'an, but the American mind (including America's "civil religion") does not make that claim for the Bible. Rather, we divide the sacred into two realms: church & state are sacred-inviolable each in relation to the other. Huckabee's disastrous statement unintentionally *violates both sacreds*. Especially sad, coming from one who has proved his leadership competence in both "church" and "state," and just possibly might have made a good president.

7.....The sense of the HOLY gives centering meaning to life, and the sense of the SACRED guards the holy by identifying inviolables. While most Americans still respect "The Holy Bible" as serving both functions, almost all of us Americans believe that the institutions of religion and politics should be separate. In terms of literature, both Bible and Constitution are sacred—imperfect but inviolable siblings of the American heritage and hope.

8.....In the increasing complexity and chaos of American life, the American mind needs an update in the interest of a new COHERENCE, a new "mind" that will continue the insights of Bible+Enlightenment while learning to think globally and use humanly the new powers of the digital world. "Under God," we must produce that mind, and look for it in candidates for public office.



## Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

Bgone on that we agree. I propose that the problem is becoming that too large a percentage of the workforce in this country is employed by the government at one level or the other.

POSTED BY: GARYD | JANUARY 27, 2008 2:14 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

"...situated between the judge's bench and the witness stand, was a small BIBLE...for the hand of the witness, about to be judged on veracity by both the Court of heaven and the court of earth."

Jesus commanded: "I say unto thee, swear not at all. Neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is his footstool."

In the Old Testament, a man rashly swore an oath that cost him the life of his daughter.

How very peculiar to swear an oath on the very word of God that forbids the swearing of oaths.

POSTED BY: JOHN STEPHENS | JANUARY 26, 2008 6:54 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

JoeT I'd agree. Frankly, If it comes down to McCain and Hillary I'd be surprised if thirty percent of the electorate bothers to vote.

POSTED BY: GARYD | JANUARY 25, 2008 11:47 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

After watching the love fest, (debate) last night I kinda like Huck. He'd make a real good "Saturday Night Live" superstar like Nixon. Seriously, I liked tricky Dicky because we could call him that -still laughing at night club performers doing him. Like Nixon, Huck has a face to mold into a rubber mask.

Something really big is up. Can't say what but my nose is killing me. It's beginning to look like a complete financial collapse -top 10 banks = over half cash in the country go belly flop. The Hewie "King-fish" Long approach, send everybody a check from the government to cure an economy that we're told is not in trouble says something dramatic is bad wrong somewhere. Hope that's not the case but...

POSTED BY: BGONE | JANUARY 25, 2008 1:31 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Gary: I'm no leftie ;-). I'm a dem, but was sort of hoping Fred Thompson would catch on. maybe Bloomberg? it's a tough year on both sides.

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 25, 2008 12:29 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Huckabee never had much of a chance to begin with he is after all conservative lite. While you lefties hate his stance on religion you'd have loved his stance on spending government money to help the poor. We

conservatives are well rid of this guy now if we can just get rid of Giuliani and the freedom thief McCain maybe we can nominate an actual conservative instead of another pretender.

POSTED BY: GARY | JANUARY 24, 2008 11:48 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

Dr. Elliot: Your thesis is worthy of further elaboration, as it is at the heart of the issue of how people of faith are to address secular responsibilities, and is precisely the distinction that is glossed over by both side of the debate. And you expressed it so subtly that many might just not catch it. ;-) Fortunately, Huckabee's statement is so clearly wrongheaded that the masses are getting it quite clearly indeed.

POSTED BY: JOET | JANUARY 24, 2008 2:01 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

"I think that statement delivered a knockout blow to Huckabee's hope of the White House."

My sentiments exactly. And a good thing it is! I've had enough of our present god-fearing president, I surely don't need another.

POSTED BY: GABY | JANUARY 24, 2008 12:45 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

Geez Rev: Doesn't Sacrament mean completely burned up? Does oath mean the same thing? Learn something new every day or did someone get it kinda cockeyed -in your father's court room?

Anyhow, as you know from <http://www.hoax-buster.org/sellyoursoul> (you can sell your soul but don't expect to get much for it unless you're a successful minister leading the multitudes to hell) the false God of the Bible is really the fallen angel Lucifer. Hell was created for those who worshiped him.

A more urgent issue has come up with the determination last week that there is but one deadly sin, blasphemy (all others are forgivable by the real God?). When one recites the pledge, says the word God and naturally thinks the being in the burning bush, Lucifer, one commits blasphemy -guaranteed ticket to hell.

At present, 86% of Americans who claim to believe in God are being tricked by representatives of the false God Lucifer and express that belief with the pledge thus blaspheming. One gets little argument when noticing "the whole country is going to hell." With only 14% not blaspheming on a regular basis that surely seems to be the case sub prime notwithstanding.

It is up to you to educate the public, let them know that they are being tricked by that tricky Devil Lucifer through his representatives -those raking in the big money for leading the multitudes to hell.

We can ignore Huck can't we. He gave up leading a small flock straight to hell, (or has he?) in hopes of leading the whole country. After he's done that? Maybe it's America today and tomorrow the whole world? Sound familiar?

POSTED BY: BGONE | JANUARY 24, 2008 11:21 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

"I think that statement delivered a knockout blow to Huckabee's hope of the White House."

I can only hope you're right, however this IS the same country that voted Reagan in twice, followed by a former head of the CIA, stood for eight years of witchhunts during the 90s, and then \*cough\* elected \*cough\* W twice, and wet their collective beds on cue while he dismantled the constitution, so I'm thinking maybe the track record isn't so hot with the American electorate. In fact, I would go so far as to say that Huckabee seems a little too damned "all American" to me.

POSTED BY: Madder Love Than Ever | JANUARY 24, 2008 12:21 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

Dr. Elliot,

So close and yet so far.

Yes, the Constitution is a living document and is subject to amendment only by the will of the people, not by presidential fiat. And I seriously doubt that we the people would be so stupid as to ratify amendments that would make this country a de facto theocracy.

The Bible is not the basis of the "American mind," any more than any other religious text is. The American mind does not need to be produced "under God" - in fact, it cannot be.

POSTED BY: Lepidopteryx | JANUARY 23, 2008 9:45 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

---

The comments to this entry are closed.