

DISENGAGEMENT IS NOT AN OPTION

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With all the current chaos in the world concerning U.S. military actions, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, one concept that is rarely mentioned is that of the role of religion. In the U.S., the prevailing attitude is that all Muslims are terrorists and they deserve what they get.

With all the cheering of the U.S. public to annihilate the "dirty Muslims," there comes a denial that religious hatred is at play. After speaking about cleansing the world of Islam, the same people will say, "We have nothing against Muslims."

There are many reasons why the debacle in Iraq is occurring: greed; deceit; power; racism; xenophobia; and, rarely mentioned, concepts of religious superiority.

As a non-believer, I think I can take an objective look at the subject. I have spoken to many seemingly good-natured Christians who tell me that their doctrine tells them that Christianity is a superior religion and it is their duty to convert non-Christians to their ways. Yet, they espouse freedom of religion. The problem is that they only think their religion should be the one which a person can be free to exercise.

Later this month, in Washington, D.C., many evangelical Christian leaders will meet to discuss their role in the U.S. political fabric. They will be working from a recently-released document called *For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility*.

Here is the first paragraph of the preamble:

Evangelical Christians in America face a historic opportunity. We make up fully one-quarter of all voters in the most powerful nation in history. Never before has God given American evangelicals such an awesome opportunity to shape public policy in ways that could contribute to the well-being of the entire world. Disengagement is not an option. We must seek God's face for biblical faithfulness and abundant wisdom to rise to this unique challenge.

The evangelical Christians have publicly laid out their strategy. They hide nothing. The dangerous aspect of the introduction is that they want to sway the U.S. government to their side of issues, although the U.S. is supposed to be a nation in which religion and government are aloof.

In the past few months, I have written about a U.S. colonel saying that Satan is in Fallujah on the eve of the U.S. destruction of the city. And, how Christian chaplains have consoled soldiers who killed Iraqi civilians by telling them that their thoughts were just.

I often wonder if these same soldiers were killing Christians by the thousands if the responses from U.S. civilian and military leaders would be the same. For the past few decades, most U.S. military interventions have been against non-Christian nations. Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia have been cannon fodder for U.S. soldiers. The people of Korea and Vietnam were non-Christian for the most part. And, even Serbia did not have a Christian majority. When the U.S. bombed that country and killed many civilians, about 65% of the people were atheist. It seems that Christian lives are much more important than those of other belief systems, or those who practice no religion.

The following is an excerpt from my upcoming book *The Sledgehammer and the Ant*. The book should be out in June of this year. This is only a portion of the section called "Onward Christian Soldiers."

I am in no way denigrating all Christians or the religion. The problem is that a few individuals can con the public into thinking they are a part of a global holy war by using Christianity as a tool, all the time denying this fact.

Onward Christian Soldiers

During the Gulf War, the U.S. public saw a video clip that was repeated many times. In it, a helicopter pilot was about ready to shoot an Iraqi with a missile. It was nighttime, but the pilot had night vision equipment and as he was about to push the button to annihilate the Iraqi soldier who could not see the adversary, he exclaimed, "Say hello to Allah." Then, the video shows an explosion. The "Say hello to Allah" statement became standard fare in America's psyche.

No one complained about broadcasting the event, yet it is improbable that any TV outlet would have broadcast a foreign soldier stating "Say hello to Jesus" if the roles were reversed. That would have been considered in bad taste.

On September 12, 2001, George Bush declared the United States was about to embark on a "crusade" against terrorism. Many people mentioned to him that the new enemies were mostly of the Islamic faith and that American Muslims and millions of followers of Islam from around the world who decry terrorism were highly offended at the choice of the word "crusade" to designate a future war. He had to be told that a "crusade" is indicative of a holocaust against Muslims to those who adhere to Islam.

Shortly after, Bush retracted the word and said he had nothing against Islam or the followers of the religion. The retraction was hollow. In March 2004, a Bush-Cheney campaign letter praised the president for "leading a global crusade against terrorism." When questioned by the press about the accuracy of the allegations, Bush-Cheney campaign Chairman Marc Racicot acknowledged the letter and its statement.

Since the September 2001 statement and subsequent retraction, Bush has exceeded this gaffe by words and deeds. In 2003, while Bush was still feigning fairness in the Israeli/Palestinian issue, he met with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abas. In the meeting, Bush told the Palestinian that actions must be taken quickly to implement the one-sided roadmap that the American administration had drawn up. The president told Abas, "God told me to strike at al-Qaida and I struck them. And He instructed me to strike out at Saddam, which I did. And now I am determined to solve the problem in the Middle East."

That statement transcends arrogance and borders on idiocy. Bush told the leader of a predominately Muslim people that his God (the Christian one) is behind the U.S. offensive against Arabs and Muslims and he expected Abas to cringe and comply. He might as well have donned a white hood and attended a meeting with the NAACP board of directors and asked for their help in decimating the U.S. of its African-American citizens.

Shortly after Bush's meeting with Abas, the book *The Faith of George W. Bush* arrived on bookstands. It was written by Christian author Stephen Mansfield, who describes incidents in a positive manner that would make even many Christians dubious of Bush's statements. The book was reviewed in 2003 by Paul Harris for *The Observer* newspaper of Great Britain.

Harris wrote:

Among Mansfield's revelations is his insistence that Bush and Tony Blair have prayed together. Blair has previously denied this. Mansfield, however, says that while there were no witnesses, aides were left in little doubt as to what had happened. He told *The Observer*, "There is no question they have shared scripture and prayed together."

Blair and Bush were the two most aggressive world leaders against the Ba'athist regime. One can only wonder how the Muslims in the Arab world look at a scenario where the two biggest warmongers pray to a Christian God together. Then, when the leaders emerge, they are even more militant. This is indicative of the insincerity of Bush saying that neither he nor America have anything against Muslims or the Muslim world.

The Faith of George W. Bush reveals much about the influence of Christianity on Bush in areas where religion is normally kept aloof from governmental duties. Shortly before he announced his candidacy for the presidency, Bush told a Texas evangelist, "I can't explain it, but I sense my country is going to need me. Something is going to happen ... I know it won't be easy on me or my family, but God wants me to do it."

Bigotry is an ugly trait and its message many times becomes garbled. Many racial bigots will state that they are not racists and then go into a racist tirade attempting to convince people of their openness. A standard ploy of bigots is to negate the message of those of differing cultures or colors who complain about bigotry by saying that there is no racism or ethnocentrism involved in actions that are blatantly hateful.

Let me give an example. The San Diego State University sports teams are called the Aztecs. For years, the mascot was a savage looking individual who held no resemblance to an Aztec Indian. Finally, a movement was put in motion to address the issue. Many white members of the university's alumni wanted to keep the old mascot and a common statement was, "I don't see what the problem is. It's not a racist symbol." Hundreds of Native Americans from the San Diego area decried the mascot and criticized those who wanted to keep it. The Native Americans said the mascot was a racist depiction of their ancestors.

Only the recipient of hatred can determine the boundaries of racism. The perpetrator has no say in what a racist incident is if those offended claim racism, yet, in this case, the white alumni tried to define racism on their terms.

We have heard and still hear Bush administration officials state, "We are not against Islam. This is not a war against Islam." This statement is as hollow as any made by administration spokespeople.

Many American citizens are equally as duplicitous when it comes to their attitudes toward and knowledge of Islam and its followers. Time-after-time, we hear statements such as, "I have nothing against Muslims, but ..." After the "but" comes a tirade. These common actions represent denial at its utmost. The blinders put on by much of the American public are identical to those used by racists in speaking about African-Americans. They are the same used by those who maintain that humankind has not degraded the atmosphere and the environment. They are the same blinders used by people who say they are not homophobic, yet decry any attempts by homosexuals to attain equal treatment under the law. They are the same barriers used by most bigots throughout the decades and centuries. In most instances, only a few bigots will step forward and admit their hatred. The majority of bigots hide behind the veils of denial. They are more dangerous than the outspoken zealots.

In the United States, many people look at Islamic governments and scoff at them because they use the Koran as the basis of their laws. We have all heard Christians laugh about

Islamic social mores, but most of the time, those who laugh have misinterpreted the message. Coincidentally, many of the same Christians who denigrate the concept of a country run by the laws and values of the Koran would not think twice about the Bible being the fundamental law of the U.S. To them, secular means "non-Islamic."

Christian broadcaster Pat Robertson once aired footage of trip he and his son made to the Ganges River in India. They both laughed at the Indians bathing in the river, people whose religious texts demand that each Hindu perform this ritual at least once during his/her lifetime. Robertson turned to his son and, speaking about Hindu religious beliefs, asked, "How can they believe this stuff?" That's a strong statement from someone who deceives the public by claiming to cure people in various parts of America by praying on his TV program; usually just before he asks for donations for God. I assume that Hindus would have a difficult time believing that a man, whose mother was a virgin, could walk on water.

In 2003, George Bush appointed General William Boykin to coordinate the hunt for Osama bin Laden. Boykin was a regular speaker at evangelical Christian meetings all over the U.S. Many times, while in uniform, he stated that God was on his side. His view of the "war on terror" is that it is a battle against Satan. When speaking about a Somali warlord whom he beat in battle in 1993, Boykin said, "My God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol." In speaking about the Somali warlord, Boykin failed to mention that his God had blessed his troops with the most modern and deadly tanks, missiles, helicopters, artillery and other military hardware. Not many Muslims found solace in the appointment of Boykin to head an organization designed to target those of the Islamic faith.

When the scandal about the U.S. mistreatment of Iraqi POWs at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad first broke, the public was exposed to many names with which they were unfamiliar. General-after-general made statements, all exonerating themselves and blaming others. However, Boykin's name eventually re-appeared. On May 11, 2004, it was reported that Boykin had given a top Pentagon official in the summer of 2003 advice on "softening up" the Iraqi prisoners. On the orders of Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, Boykin flew to Guantanamo, where hundreds of Muslims were being held in prison without even the basic rights of the Geneva convention. Boykin met Major General Geoffrey Miller, who was in charge of the camp that had a reputation for brutality, and ordered him to fly to Iraq and extend the methods to the prison system there. Suggestions have been made that Boykin advocated and was behind the strategy of using sexual and physical abuse of the prisoners. These allegations have once again brought to the forefront the possibility that many people may regard the war on terrorism as, in fact, a war on Islam.

Chris Toensing, editor of *Middle East Report* stated, "This will be taken as proof that what happened at Abu Ghraib is evidence of a broader culture of dehumanizing Arabs and Muslims, based on the American understanding of the innate superiority of Christendom."

Congressional Democrats, as well as Senate Armed Services Chairman John Warner, have advocated that Boykin relinquish his duties, but the Pentagon defended his right of free speech. This assessment by the Pentagon is illogical. If an avowed racist were on a civil rights commission and made racial remarks and had been instrumental in having blacks tortured in prison, he/she would be immediately replaced. Freedom of speech is not a luxury that one can use to hide behind in an official capacity when blatant bigoted practices are being perpetrated.