

Born to Win

A True Theocracy

by Ronald L. Dart

It's really not clear exactly what people are worried about when they fight so *strenuously* to keep religion out of the public square. Take Reverend Barry Lynn for example. He is a spokesman for Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. In a debate about school vouchers on CNN, he made this argument, and I quote:

I believe there are many reasons why vouchers are bad public policy and dangerous to public education. But my bedrock reason for opposing them is constitutional: These plans violate the separation of church and state.

Rev. Barry W. Lynn - CNN Presents: Private Schools/Public Money

End of quotation. Now, it seems to me that this is obviously not true. In the first place, there is *nothing* in the Constitution about the separation of church and state. All the Constitution says is this, and I'll quote again:

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

First Amendment to the United States Constitution

Now, I feel like asking Barry Lynn to rephrase his argument. According to the Constitution, he should put it this way: "School voucher plans violate the Constitution because they amount to the establishment of a religion." He doesn't put it that way because it would be absurd and it can't be supported. School voucher plans *do no such thing*. The separation of church and state has become a catchphrase for people striving to keep religion in its place. Barry Lynn went on to say:

Most private schools in America have a religious affiliation. Many are Roman Catholic, but others are Jewish, fundamentalist Protestant or affiliated with other denominations. These schools certainly have the right to exist and should not face undue or burdensome regulation by the state. But at the same time, they should absolutely be barred from receiving as much as one dime in taxpayer aid.

Rev. Barry W. Lynn - CNN Presents: Private Schools/Public Money

Why? Why not? What is unconstitutional about diverting taxpayer money from public schools to private schools? Think about it for a moment. Whose money are we talking about? There's a group in the chattering class who seem to forget whose money that is that they are spending. Schools are financed by state and local taxes—mostly local. Why should this be the business of the federal government? You know, here we are—Smith County, Texas. We're going to take up our taxes (and I pay my share of them) and they go to finance the local schools. What business does the federal government have nosing around in there?

I pay property taxes, locally, to pay for the education of the kids in Smith County. Never mind that I have never, and never will have, any kids in school here. I'm willing to accept the fact that it is to my benefit that the kids are educated up to a certain standard in Smith County. But why should *I* care whether that money goes to a public school or a private school, religious or otherwise? (As long, of course, as the private schools are required to at least reach the standards of the public school—which, frankly, shouldn't be that hard.) If it costs say, \$5000 per year, per kid, how am I harmed if that \$5000 is removed from the budget of the public schools and transferred to the budget of a private school—especially if that private school *exceeds the performance* of the public school, which most of them do? And there's one more question: Why not allow the taxpayers to decide whether they object to vouchers if it is their money and we're concerned about how their money is spent? I'm a taxpayer. Why not *ask me*? I would cheerfully sign a form that allowed my tax dollars to go to a voucher program. Who would get hurt? Well, I'll tell you who gets hurt: the teachers' unions and the politicians who lose power when money moves out of *their* system and out of *their* control.

The argument is made that the public school system has been an important good in the American way and the history of this country, and that is beyond argument. It, however, doesn't naturally follow that the public schools will *always* be an important good in the American way. The argument is also made that vouchers threaten this public school system. But what if the public school system is becoming a dinosaur? What if its time of departure is nigh? It isn't, of course. There will *always* be a need for public schools, but they're going to have to pull up their socks and get in the game.

But this program is about something much bigger than school vouchers. What got me started on this theme was an editorial by Mort Zuckerman, who is the respected editor-in-chief of *U.S. News*. His piece was titled *Faith, in Its Place*. (You'll find it in the March 6th, 2006 edition of *U.S. News*.) "*Faith, in Its Place*". It's a very unfortunate title, in a way, because no one really likes to be reminded to stay in his place. And that's *precisely* what this entire issue is all about. Here's Mr. Zuckerman's opening paragraph:

Has America anything to learn from the violent reactions to those Danish cartoons?

Mort Zuckerman - Faith, in Its Place

He's talking about those cartoons that appeared in Danish newspapers about Mohammad, in which Mohammad was pictured and which generated riots *clean around the world* from Islamic people. His question: Do we have anything to learn from that?

We are proud of our tradition of freedom but expect it to be exercised responsibly: There has been a remarkable degree of acknowledgment here that the cartoons were insensitive, [...]

Mort Zuckerman - Faith, in Its Place

Well, *so what?* Have you ever paged through your newspaper and found political cartoons that were *sensitive*? I mean, one of the objectives of these things is to lampoon, to ridicule, to step on toes, to jab people, to make them think. Cartoons insensitive? There has been a remarkable degree of acknowledgment of that, he said:

[...] matched by shock at the viciousness of the rioting and the rabid level of intolerance.

Mort Zuckerman - Faith, in Its Place

Oh my goodness, this goes way beyond intolerance.

Even Muslim journalists in Jordan and Yemen who published the cartoons so as to condemn both them and the incitement and overreaction now face trial. Ominously, that's because the authorities in these Islamic societies are fearful of losing ground to the extremists. This confluence of religion and politics can be malign.

Mort Zuckerman - Faith, in Its Place

Well, yeah. The confluence of religion and politics *can be* malign, but to compare the riots across the Muslim world to the attempts of, say, Christians in America who want to bring some morality back to public life, is absurd. It isn't the confluence of religion and politics that's malign; it's Islamo-fascism that's malign. The statement summing up what Mr. Zuckerman was saying in *U.S. News* is this:

At a time when religion is becoming a more potent force in America, the Muslim cartoon riots remind us that God and politics are often a volatile mix.

Mort Zuckerman - Faith, in Its Place

Well, yes, I suppose that's true. But he's saying the lesson that we should learn from the cartoon riots is that religion should be kept in its place. Now, forgive me, but I find this idea *intensely* annoying. To know my place and stay in my place? Come on. He went on to say this:

America remains one of the most religious of modern nations, but we are also the most diversely religious. Our Constitution says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." The French writer Voltaire once encapsulated the virtue of this in a manner that has relevance today to both the Muslim and the non Muslim western worlds: "With one church you have tyranny; with two, civil war; but with a hundred, peace."

Mort Zuckerman - Faith, in Its Place

Now, there's a lot of truth in that statement. And he does, at least, not toss out the *shibboleth* about the separation of church and state.

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What he just said there is *extremely* important and I'm going to read it to you again.

Moral inspiration drawn from religion has been central to America's great political and social movements from the abolition of slavery, to women's suffrage, to civil rights.

Mort Zuckerman - Faith, in Its Place

Is that true? Well, then, why try to silence religion on political issues if religion has been a major factor in some of our important social movements? Actually, that's what this argument is all about: trying to silence religion on political issues. He went on to say:

At the same time, religion in America has been largely a private matter.

Mort Zuckerman - Faith, in Its Place

Implying that he'd like to keep it that way.

All men are equal before God, wrote John Adams, so all men should be free to worship God as they please. [*Agreed.*] Today our cherished tradition is vulnerable to an inclination to mix religion with politics over issues like abortion, gay rights, and stem cell research.

Mort Zuckerman - Faith, in Its Place

Uh...but wait, didn't we mix religion and politics on the issues of slavery, women's suffrage, and civil rights? Well, then, why are we going to cavil over the fact that we bring religion to the table to discuss abortion, gay rights, and stem cell research? The argument really boils down to this: religion is fine as long as it's kept private. We mustn't mix religion and politics. Equating efforts of people of faith to influence government on issues of morality...comparing that to the Muslim cartoon riots is absurd beyond words. Mr. Zuckerman concludes thus:

In America, religion has long reflected values that unite the country. "In God We Trust" is not just a slogan. But dangers abound. To paraphrase the late Sen. Barry Goldwater, we saw in the Muslim world that intolerance in the name of religion is no virtue. Here in America, we must also remember that tolerance in the name of religion is no vice.

Mort Zuckerman - Faith, in Its Place

Okay, but that's not what his argument is about; it's about keeping faith in its place—about not mixing the personal with the political. It's about keeping religion separate from education and public policy. And yet religion is the *foundation* of what little morality is left in public life.

Sometimes these catch words can be revealing if you just can understand what they mean. One of them I hear a lot is the word "theocracy". Bill O'Reilly, in particular, seems to worry a lot that the increasing

vocal Christian Right wants to create a theocracy in this country. Now, we need to talk about this idea because theocracy—a true theocracy—may well be the solution to the problems that plague us. But before we can understand this, we have to understand what a theocracy is *not*.

Throughout all the history of Israel in the Old Testament—from Saul, David, and Solomon—Israel was a monarchy; it was not a theocracy. They had a king, *theoretically* governing under God’s guidance. But I’m afraid it was more theory than fact through most of the kings of Israel and Judah. Theocracy is often confused with ecclesiocracy, which means rule by a religious leader or a body. And this is what the Founding Fathers of this country wanted to avoid. They did not want some religious leader or religious body governing the country. So they say “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion[.]” They came out of Europe, the came of England, where there was an established church—one where the king was the head of the church—and *that* they wanted to avoid.

But that’s not what a theocracy is; that’s an ecclesiocracy. Theocracy means “rule by God”—not by God’s appointed representatives (or self-appointed representatives), not by a council of bishops, not by a pope, not by anybody in-between—just rule by God. Now, how can that be a bad thing? The best way for me to explain the difference is to go to the only known example (as far as I can think of) of a true theocracy. And perhaps the best place to start is with the pivotal moment when theocracy was abandoned in favor of monarchy. The description of the time between the conquest of the land by Joshua and the monarchy that began with Saul is described in the Book of Judges this way. You’ll find it in Judges, chapter 21:

Judges 21

AKJV

²⁴ And the children of Israel departed there at that time, every man to his tribe and to his family, and they went out from there every man to his inheritance.

They’d all been given an inheritance by lot, and now they distributed out to it. And it says this:

Judges 21

AKJV

²⁵ In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Now, you have to think about that for a moment. It could be a pejorative. On the other hand, maybe it’s not. Maybe what it’s telling you is there was no central government; all politics were local. As somebody famously once said, “All politics is local”, about *our* system. Unfortunately, it isn’t quite like that now. There were no taxes in Israel at that time. There was the tithe. All men were commanded to give God a tenth of their increase.

But the tithe was personal; it was a matter of worship. There was no Internal Revenue Service to collect and enforce the tithe. That’s something important for us to know. Local governments tended to be patriarchal, with tribal elders maintaining order. But here’s what you need to know about theocracy: the organizing principle of this theocracy was the law of God. There was very little in the way of enforcement of that law. The law of God defined the way to live your life. You break it...there were *consequences* contained within the law itself, but very little in the way of someone coming around to enforce it.

Take the laws of murder and manslaughter, for example. Obviously, something had to be done about that. If you killed my brother, I would have had the right, as the next of kin, to take your life as an avenger of blood [**Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19, Joshua 20**]. The avenger of blood is the term that’s used for the person with the responsibility of tracking down the killer and avenging the one who is dead. But here is one of the areas where government did enter the picture. God commanded Israel to set

aside several cities of refuge where a slayer might flee. Now, if a man kills someone, he fled to the city of refuge. The elders of that city had to sit in judgment of the case. If it was an accidental killing, the man was not put to death, but he had to stay in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest. It was a form of house arrest as the penalty for manslaughter.

If, on the other hand, the judges decided that the killing was intentional, the man was delivered to the executioner. So, here is a case where there is a necessity for some level of government. Some level of, not-quite-centralized (because I think there were seven of these cities of refuge around the country) but nevertheless something a little more centralized than just every man doing his own thing. A theocracy places great responsibility on the *individual* to live according to the laws of God and gives him freedom to live his life as he sees fit and the freedom to suffer the consequences if he does not. The time of the Book of Judges in the Bible describes this time in Israel's history. Unfortunately, they didn't do very well and, as a result, they were oppressed by neighboring kingdoms. Finally, they had had enough freedom, and they came to the priest—the prophet named Samuel—and demanded a king. Now, we are going to move; we're going to abandon the true theocracy and change to a monarchy.

Some of the saddest stories in history are those times when a people who had been free become weary of the burdens of freedom and decide to lay it down so someone else can take care of them. And that is *precisely* of what happened to the Israelites after generations of living under God's leadership with total freedom. Now, they said, "No, freedom is just getting to be too big a burden." You'll find this story, by the way, in 1 Samuel, the 8th chapter.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

¹ And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.

² Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba.

Problem:

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

³ And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre [*money*], and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

Now, you would sort of think that the elders of Israel would come together and they would say, "Look, uh...do something about these boys Samuel, and do it *now*." But, no, they:

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

⁴ [...] gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel to Ramah,

⁵ And said to him, Behold, you are old, and your sons walk not in your ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

What they were asking for was a change from a theocracy to a monarchy.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed to the LORD.

⁷ And the LORD said to Samuel, [...]

And these words are *so* important in this whole story. He said:

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

⁷ [...] Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you: for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

This is the pivotal idea: the rejection of rule directly by God, which conveyed maximum freedom... they wanted to lay it down. Where is it going to lead? Well, God says:

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

⁸ According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, with which they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also to you. [*They're going to do the same thing with you.*]

⁹ Now therefore listen to their voice: however, yet protest solemnly to them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

Now, what God's about to tell these people is not that "I'm going to give you a bad king and he's going to do these things to you", because God went out and found for them the best man for the job. But it was *still* not going to work out for them.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

¹⁰ And Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people that asked of him a king.

¹¹ And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots.

You know what this is saying? This is saying you're going to have a military draft now, not a volunteer army. And I can't believe it...you know, I watch all the talking heads on television and I hear, occasionally, people talking about, "Well, we need to bring back the draft because we're taking advantage of minorities and poor people and putting them in the army. We need to spread this out. We need to some of the élite into the army, as well." They want to do draft instead of a volunteer army. Why would they want to do that? The only reason not to go with a volunteer army is when people aren't volunteering, and they are. Of course, you can kill all that off. If you fight it and if you disrespect the military at every turn and nobody wants to be in it, sooner or later you're going to have a draft.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

¹² And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots.

The whole war-making machine is going to become *huge*.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

¹³ And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers.

¹⁴ And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive groves, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.

You know, it's *uncanny* how prophetic this is. We have the strange situation where our constitution *forbids* the government from doing this sort of thing. It forbids the government to take our property, and the Supreme Court is now allowing the government to do just that. And the people are scratching their heads, they're throwing up their hands, and saying, "What do you have to put in the Constitution to keep the government from taking our property?" They're not taking the property for public use; they're taking it for private development [see *Kelo v. City of New London*]. Well, this is what Samuel told the people was going to happen. He went on to say:

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

¹⁵ And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants.

Well, I would that our taxes were only ten percent. But for Israel it would no longer be the voluntary tithe; there would now be an internal revenue service that would come out and get the money.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

¹⁶ And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your best young men, and your asses, and put them to his work.

¹⁷ He will take the tenth of your sheep: and you shall be his servants.

¹⁸ And you shall cry out in that day because of your king which you shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day.

Frankly, I think we're getting pretty close to that now in this country. Where we cry out to God because of what our government is doing to us. Well, Samuel told them all this stuff.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

¹⁹ Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, No; but we will have a king over us;

²⁰ That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

And you know, right here is where it came down and where the rubber met the road. It was because they were getting tired of having to be mobilized to go out and fight to protect themselves. Now they want the king to do it for them.

1 Samuel 8

AKJV

²¹ And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD.

²² And the LORD said to Samuel, Listen to their voice, and make them a king. [...]

And Samuel? Samuel sent all the people home.

Now, keep this in mind when you hear the scare word “theocracy”. It is the most desirable form of government for those who love freedom. Christian people are tired of being told to go home and shut up. We have every right to expect a respectful hearing. But if we’re burned for it, let everyone know it’s not the first time.

I’m Ronald Dart.

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A True Theocracy

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