

First Thoughts



Welcome to CrossingCurrents, the Crosswinds Foundation E-Letter. This month we are taking a look at what the culture's has to say about God and salvation, through the views expressed by our President. Recently, he created quite a stir in an interview with Cynthia McFadden. Perhaps the real story is not what he said but how it relates to cultural trends.

We'll also have a quick update on last month's article on Christmas and atheism. And, of course, we'll open the mail bag.

As we prepare for the holidays there are many facing great needs, especially economic ones. Let's not forget to pray for them. Let me also encourage you to pray for our brave men and women who are serving our country in the military and for their families who will be separated for the holidays due to their service.

Our own staff member, Don Malin will be departing in January for his second tour of duty in the Middle East. This time he will be deployed in Afghanistan. While there Don will be reporting back to us periodically through this E-Letter, and other means, regarding life in the service and in a Muslim country.

I, our Board, and staff hope you have a very Merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year. Thanks for letting the Crosswinds Foundation be a part of your educational and ministry experience.

Bob Waldrep
President, Crosswinds Foundation



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BUSH, FAITH, AND CULTURE By Bob Waldrep



Last week President Bush was interviewed by Cynthia McFadden for ABC's Nightline. The inter-

view was intended to specifically focus on the President's beliefs in regard to his Christian faith. His answers to some of those questions proved to be quite controversial; particularly among conservatives and evangelicals. Here are some comments from bloggers and online media sources that are reflective of some of the responses being generated by the

Nightline interview:

"All it [the interview] proves to me is that Bush is an intellectual lightweight who doesn't have the capacity to defend his own faith."

"I kinda think that Bush has lost his first love from being around political Washington too long; that is, if he was ever truly born again as claimed."

"I honestly do not think President Bush intended to



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do this or meant what he said. At least, I hope he didn't. I do believe that this entire interview put tremendous pressure on Mr. Bush causing him to either compromise or reveal what he truly believes."

"Can you believe that George Bush is a religious moderate? That's the image he projected a few nights ago in an interview with Nightline's Cynthia McFadden."

Even this morning, a week after the show aired, I heard some comments on talk-radio still expressing disbelief at the President's remarks. In case you missed the story, here is an excerpt of the parts of the interview that have upset so many.

Concerning the Bible, McFadden asked if it is literally true. Bush responded: "You know, probably not. No, I'm not a literalist. But I think you can learn a lot from it."

Another exchange causing controversy came from a question regarding prayer. Here is that exchange:

McFadden: "Do you believe that when you pray to God that that's the same God that a Muslim prays to?"

Bush: "I do."

McFadden: "That's gotten you in some trouble with your base."

Bush: "I don't know, maybe it does. I do believe there is an Almighty that is broad - big - enough, loving enough, that can encompass a lot of people. I don't think God is a narrow...umm...a narrow concept, I think it's a broad concept. I just happen to believe the way to God is through Christ, and others have different avenues toward God and I believe we pray to the same Almighty, I do."

At minimum, the comments made by President Bush reflect a belief that other religions are valid paths to God, and that Christianity is, therefore, just one of many divergent ways to come to God. In a sense, when it comes to knowing God, this approach almost leads one to believe everybody makes it somehow or another - that is, unless you are a "religious" terrorists. The President, very candidly tells McFadden that those who practice hate aren't really praying to God, so he excludes them in his assessment that we all pray to the same God.

My purpose in writing is not to be critical of President Bush. I actually tend to lean more toward the view that he may have compromised his beliefs for political correctness, or that he truly hasn't thought through the ramifications of his statements. Maybe he'll get a do-over, like so many before him who, when caught in the glare of the media, hedged on taking a clear stand on the gospel being that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ.

Maybe he would have been better taken the approach of the President-elect, who when faced with tough "faith" questions, brushed them aside with the comment he was not running to be the chief theologian.

"I just happen to believe the way to God is through Christ, and others have different avenues toward God and I believe we pray to the same Almighty, I do."

President George Bush

Actually, the President's comments don't really surprise me. What I do find rather astonishing is that others are surprised by them. I don't mean by this that Bush has given us reason to expect such comments from him. Rather, based on the cultural trends regarding faith, I am not surprised that the President wouldn't be included in those statistical beliefs.

For example, when he said he didn't believe the Bible was literal, Bush was expressing a view held by a large segment of the Protestant Church. In their 2008 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, the Pew Forum found that while 77% of Protestants (89% of Evangelicals) and 62% of Catholics believe the Bible is the Word of God, 27% of Protestants and 36% of Catholics do not believe the Bible is literal (among Evangelicals, 25% said it was not literal).

Regarding there being more than one way to God, this same Pew Report found that 70% of Americans with a religious affiliation believe that many religions can lead to eternal life. Even

among evangelicals, the number was an astounding 57% that answered many religions can lead to eternal life. Among Catholics the number was a staggering 79%.

I am not saying that truth is determined by polling and that since our President is in line with the majority, it is not a problem for him to hold to, or express, such views. What I am saying is, in light of such predominate cultural views, perhaps we should hold back somewhat on the shock and incredulity that is being expressed regarding this interview.

Maybe is it more reflective of the poor job we -the church - are doing in discipling those whom the Lord entrusts to us. Perhaps it is indicative of how much easier it is to sit back and complain about what the culture looks like than to be invasive in addressing it.

If one takes time to listen carefully to the entire interview with President Bush, you will find an interesting blend of right on statements about the gospel, mingled in with the comments that have created such a furor. At one point he even admits he is getting way out of his lane in answering some of these questions, stating, "I'm just a simple President". His admission indicates these are questions that may have been best left unanswered.

However, when asked about life after the Presidency and how his faith will enter into it, I think he makes an excellent observation, stating: "I'm going be trying to stay on the walk until the last day on the face of the earth. I've come to this conclusion, maybe I'm wrong, I don't know. The full understanding of Christianity is going to take a full life time of study." On this I think we can agree with him; only, it will take this life and beyond.

Hopefully, here is something else we can agree on, as people of faith. The Nightline interview clearly shows that even the President is not excluded from the cultural trends we face. Rather than beating up on the President and his faith beliefs, let's use this as an entry point to talk about what the Bible really says and what the gospel really offers, and to whom it is available.

Now that's something to talk about.





Atheists and Christmas Update

In our last issue we reported that an atheist organization in Washington D.C. was duplicating the actions of a similar group in London by placing signs promoting atheism on D.C. buses. On the other side of the nation, in the state of Washington, another group of atheists, the Freedom From Religion Foundation have created their own furor.

Each year, the Washington Capitol building in Olympia, displays a Nativity scene during the Christmas season. Earlier this month, the Freedom From Religion Foundation successfully petitioned the Governor's office to allow them to place a sign, near the Nativity, that reads in part, "Religion is but a myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslave minds."

This soon gained the attention of the nation as the national media reported on it and various groups began to weigh in. Protests against the sign were organized and it was stolen and eventually returned. Not to be undone by the atheists, the pastor of the Antioch Baptist Church placed his own sign, proclaiming that, "There is one God" and "Atheism is but a myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds."

Washington's Governor, Christine Gregorie (a Democrat) and the state Attorney General (a Republican) have supported the right of the atheists to place the sign in the Capitol building, explaining, "...once government admits one religious display or viewpoint onto public property, it may not discriminate against the content of other displays, including the viewpoints of nonbelievers."

With that statement, they opened up a can of worms. Soon others began to petition for the right to place their own displays at the Capitol. In fact, so many applications have come in that a moratorium has now been declared by the Department of General Administration, which oversees the Capitol grounds.

The moratorium applies to an application by the controversial Westboro Baptist Church (this group has protested at the funerals of soldiers who lost their lives in Iraq) to place a sign that reads, "Santa Claus will take you to hell". Other pending applications include requests for a Buddhist display, a Jewish banner, a mannequin of Satan holding a statement against atheists, and an aluminum pole in celebration of the invented holiday of Festivus.

In the Mailbag

What Our Readers Are Saying



I appreciate the [articles you and Ron have written]. I believe as a Christian we are embarking on a time of increased persecution and need to be informed of what we are up

against. Thanks (Email)

I got the information about your website from the Alabama Baptist newspaper. I am clipping the articles from the newspaper. I will be reading them with interest. I didn't realize that the run of the mill Mormon member isn't aware of so many of the false teachings of their church. (Email)

Great article and apt analogy! After mentioning the danger of Oprah's "new" theology from the pulpit a few months ago, I had a lady approach me and thank me for the warning. It seems that this lady, who is a leader in the church, had signed up for the Oprah/Tolle "webinar" touting his belief system as expressed in The New Earth! Needless to say, we had to have a little talk right then and there about Oprah and about the greater issue of biblically examining things that are being thrown out as "truth" before participating in them. It certainly makes me understand how so many Southern Baptists become Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses! Thanks for the article! (Email)

(Editor's Note: Due to the popularity of our Spiritual Buffet series, running in the Alabama Baptist, four more articles will be added to the series and then all fifteen articles will be published in booklet format.)

ENGAGING THE CULTURE



For additional information on a topic in this newsletter, or another area of interest, contact us for a free information packet.

Culture Tracks

Statistical data reflecting some of the findings



Americans that believe many religions can lead to eternal life:

- Protestants 66%
- Evangelicals 57%
- Catholics 79%
- Orthodox 72%
- Jews 82%
- Muslims 56%

American's Views Regarding the Scripture

Believe the Bible is Word of God

- Protestants 77%
- Evangelicals 89%
- Catholics 62%
- Orthodox 59%
- Jewish 37%

Believe the Bible is Literal

- Protestants 46%
- Evangelicals 59%
- Catholics 23%
- Orthodox 26%
- Jewish 10%

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