

The 102 Take a Stand for Freedom By Linwood Bragan

When was the last time you discussed politics with a Pilgrim? "Never", you say? Nor have I; however, to this day, their experiences, their faith, and their values still impact our politics and our government - even though many Americans could not tell you who they were, much less the contributions they made to the development of our country.

Yet, their story is one that many Americans should be able to identify with today. After all, theirs is a story that grew out of hardship and oppression and led to freedom - it is a story you know well, it is America's story. It is a story that runs through the very fabric of our culture. For, the legacy of the Pilgrims is the United States of America.

Their ideals are enshrined in our founding document the Declaration of Independence. Their offspring would later produce the Constitution of the United States, the guiding governing document of our nation. In it we find our rights as citizens in the first 10 amendments of the Constitution, known as the Bill of Rights.

First among those rights guaranteed by the First Amendment is religious freedom for all, as sought by the Pilgrims. This first amendment was a clear protection for religious liberty in the United States of America, stating:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

This was not the concern of a secular society, or people. This was not the wishes of some local or national Humanist, Free Thought, or Atheist society, or the Socialist Party. It was the desire of those who believed that faith is as important, if

not more so, than government or one's politics.

There are those today who would still try to trample on these sacred rights. We see that somewhat played out in the current political environment. But, who were the Pilgrims and how does their story have a place in today's discussions regarding faith and religious liberty.

In 1620 the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts. Having survived a tortuous ocean crossing, 102 of them stepped off the boat as free men and women. Their journey had begun as exiles of their home country where they had endured years of religious persecution for their desire to worship God according to their own dictates, rather than those of the government sanctioned Church.

Staying true to their convictions had cost them dearly, but on that day in 1620, they entered that sweet land of liberty.

In England they had been taxed to support the Anglican Church, a church that they differed with theologically. Very simply, the Pilgrims sought to be left alone to worship God in the manner

they thought most fitting. This was at odds with the "official" Church and would prove costly for them. Economically, they were discriminated against in the job market; but, more importantly for them, they were also denied their very rights to speak, to assemble peaceably, and to worship - rights that would be guaranteed in their new country. Finding their conditions intolerable under the Anglican Church, they thought exile preferable to life in England and fled their homeland.

They settled in Holland and found themselves in a nation that welcomed them and allowed them to hold to their beliefs. However, it was not a nation that shared their values and they now found themselves living in the midst of a culture that was detrimental to the rearing of their children in their faith and practice.



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For them, this was as intolerable as the religious persecution they had experienced in England since, these exiles of conscience believed the practice of their faith was to be indistinguishable from the actual belief they held. In other words, the "walk" of their faith was to be in accordance with the "talk" of their faith. This is not to say they thought themselves to be perfect. No, they knew themselves to be sinners saved by the loving sacrifice of a great and gracious God. As such, they sought to so engraft their beliefs into their daily actions as to make their faith obvious in every act, word, or deed.

In England, this had caused them to

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**Pennsylvania, Democratic
Congresswoman Kathy Dahlkemper**

suffer the burdens of the royal ministers and court that sought to inflict the King's will at the expense of Christian belief and practice. Those in power burdened and bound them with taxes, regulations, orders and obligations that violated the most basic of their God-given rights.

Similarly, as Christians try to live out their own faith and practice today, are they burdened by some in government who think it their place to "rule" the American people - even going beyond the constraints of constitutional limitations? Public minded "servants" of the people who think of themselves as a "national nanny", unleashed from a mere Constitution, strive to implement their noble vision - whether beneficial, benign, or belligerent - for a people, they think, unable to determine their own best interest.

We have entered a new world of "transformational" politics, where those who govern seem to think it unnecessary for the "Pilgrim citizens" to understand the laws Congress enacts. Their world doesn't require messy, reasoned, thoughtful, knowledgeable debate. As Speaker Pelosi famously said, regarding the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (commonly called Obamacare), "We have to pass the bill so you can find out what is in it." She certainly spoke the truth, as two years after its passage, we are still "finding out" what is in it.

Former Democratic Congresswoman Kathy Dahlkemper, a pro-life, Cath-



olic from Erie, Pennsylvania, realized not knowing what was in the bill could be a problem. She agreed to vote for Obamacare only after obtaining assurances from the President and Speaker Pelosi that Catholic owned institutions would be exempt under conscience provisions which are protected by the First Amendment. Having garnered these assurances she argued for passage of the bill, realizing, as the debate raged, she had likely sacrificed her congressional career.

As it currently stands, one sixth of the economy was seized under a law that was unread, not understood and misrepresented by those who authored it. Because it was passed before anyone could read it thoroughly, certain safeguards in the passing of legislation were missed. The privileged relationship between a physician and a patient, protected by law is under threat. And, perhaps

most importantly, the usual protections for First Amendment rights were left out as conscience provisions were never inserted in the bill to protect the long-standing religious liberties held by devout practitioners of many faiths.

Dahlkemper seemed to realize this early on as, one year after losing her seat in Congress, she stated in a press release by Democrats for Life of America, "I would have never voted for the final version of the bill if I expected the Obama Administration to force Catholic hospitals and Catholic Colleges and Universities to pay for contraception. We worked hard to prevent abortion funding in health care and to include clear conscience protections for those with moral objections to abortion and contraceptive devices that cause abortion."

Recently, those assurances made to Dahlkemper proved to be empty promises when Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, herself a Roman Catholic, announced federal guidelines under Obamacare would not exempt non-profits with religious affiliation (including schools and hospitals) from providing preventative health measures (contraception) for women. Catholic institutions immediately responded, as did other religious entities, creating a heated controversy. Even the majority of Catholics who allow for the use of contraception were outraged that the government was inflicting its will upon the Catholic Church.

As those who opposed Sebelius' announcement recognized, the real issue is not one of abortion, or one's preferred contraceptive method, or Obamacare, for that matter. Nor is it one of faith or no faith - of fervor, devotion, denomination, or religion. The essential issue here is do Americans retain the freedom to act as their forefathers intended? Are we today moral agents as were the Pilgrims and their offspring who fought for this right as Continental soldiers?

In this instance the "well intentioned" regulations put in place by Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, ignited a storm of protests. For a brief period, the "Pilgrim" unity was profound - secular organizations, non-Christian religious denominations, as well as other Chris-



tian denominations rallied to the defense of Catholic institutions. It was obvious this was not really an issue of "women's health care", as large segments of Democrats and Republicans alike rallied to the defense of religious liberty.

While the range of conservative organizations and religious denominations (or segments of denominations) was to be expected, another interesting coalition occurred. Conservative and liberal Roman Catholics, including many members of the media, took the regulations as a slap at their church. A unity of purpose - protecting the Catholic Church - rallied an overwhelming majority of active, inactive, lapsed, conservative, moderate, liberal and devout Catholics.

The swift and sudden reaction caused shock to those backing the regulation and the administration quickly stepped away from their original stance and offered a fall-back position. An initially stunned major media rallied to the new compromise. They turned their focus to the irony that the number of Catholics supporting their Church's right to defend its theology regarding abortion and contraception was about

the same as those members who used, or defended the use of contraceptives. Now framed and popularly accepted as a debate over the use of contraception, instead of religious freedom, the previous unity dissolved.

Again, contraception is NOT the issue. Religious independence - the bedrock of all of our freedom is the point. The focus, despite the cares and joys of life, is whether or not we shall maintain our most fundamental liberty. Will you decide for yourself, or will you have someone dictate an action, decide a belief, or disallow your choice for you?

American debate ranges from the hushed mellow tones of National Public Radio to the more animated conversations and rants heard on liberal and conservative talk-radio; from the din of a construction site, or tailgate party, to the office water cooler. We love a good debate. It resembles an intellectual sporting event, complete with verbal clashes, sparring, and hits. Many of us enjoy open conversation, Internet blogging, competitive tweeting, and the rough and tumble of debate in full and free terms. But what we like most is coming to our own conclusion.

We can't stand to lose! But if lose

we must, to the American psyche it must've been a fair fight. Legendary Green Bay Packers coach, Vince Lombardi recognized this with his famous quote, "Winning isn't everything--but wanting to win is." Coach Lombardi obviously was talking about football, but he tapped into the great reserves of the American character when he told his men, "The greatest accomplishment is not, in never falling, but in rising again after you fall."

Americans relish victory, we can stomach defeat, but we detest cheating and find ultimatums absolutely intolerable. In this round those in power backed off. What about the next time? Will people of faith rally again, or has the opening shot brought about an anesthetizing effect? Will we be more pliant, accepting or complacent next time?

This time, the affront to our most basic God-given right of freedom of worship was aimed at the largest identifiable association in America - 77.7 million members of the Roman Catholic Church. What if the next target is a small sect, suspected by neighbors, envied by rival congregations, and easily ridiculed by the mainstream media?

Does that spirit of the Pilgrims still

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Culture Tracks

Statistical data reflecting the cultural footprints of Americans

Voter Perceptions of 2012 Presidential Candidates

From the February 16-19 Gallup Polling of American Voters

Democrats Perceptions of Candidates' Political Views

- Regarding Obama: 17% believe too liberal, 11% too conservative, 69% about right
- Regarding Romney: 19% believe too liberal, 55% too conservative, 17% about right
- Regarding Santorum: 21% believe too liberal, 50% too conservative, 17% about right

Republican Perceptions of Candidates' Political Views

- Regarding Obama: 89% believe too liberal, 3% too conservative, 6% about right
- Regarding Romney: 25% believe too liberal, 9% too conservative, 61% about right
- Regarding Santorum: 5% believe too liberal, 24% too conservative, 61% about right

Independents' Perceptions of Candidates' Political Views

- Regarding Obama: 50% believe too liberal, 14% too conservative, 32% about right
- Regarding Romney: 22% believe too liberal, 33% too conservative, 34% about right
- Regarding Santorum: 12% believe too liberal, 38% too conservative, 34% about right

Agree/Disagree with Candidate on Issues that Matter the Most

- Obama: 47% agree; 50% disagree; 3% no opinion
- Romney: 42% agree; 47% disagree; 10% no opinion
- Santorum: 42% agree; 42% disagree; 15% no opinion

For additional information about these and other cultural trends, email your request to: info@crosswindsfoundation.org



live in us 400 years into the journey to a new culture?

If needed, will 102 Americans value their religious liberty enough to suffer for their faith - to stand up for their God-given rights and the rights of others?



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***In the News:
Religion and Politics***

Polling by Pew Research found Romney and Santorum in a virtual tie in the race for the Republican presidential nomination. What is interesting is the rise of Santorum appears to be tied to white evangelical voters, 41% of whom now favor him compared to 23% who favor Romney. 20% favor Gingrich and 6% Ron Paul. The big question all along has been whether or not

evangelicals would vote for Romney, who is a Mormon. Apparently the answer is, no - that is, unless he wins the nomination and is running against Obama in the general election. Under that scenario, 76% of white evangelicals favor Romney. This is consistent with the support Gingrich (70%) or Santorum (74%) would have with this group were they the Republican nominee.

Among religious groups, the President finds his greatest support among those who identify as religiously unaffiliated. Among this group he has a 40-point lead over Romney, a 44-point lead over Santorum, and a 50-point lead over Gingrich.

This poll also found that the more often one attends a religious service the more likely they are to vote for Romney or Santorum rather than Obama. Of those who attend a religious service at least once weekly, 58% favor Romney and 55% favor Santorum. Gingrich just barely outpolls the President with this group at 49% to 45%.

Those who rarely, seldom, or never attend a religious service, favor the President by anywhere from 19 to 38-points over Romney, Santorum, or Gingrich.

One final item worth noting; the poll found that while 56% of white evangelicals believed Romney to be a strong conservative in November of 2011, this number dropped to 42% in February. It is interesting that this coincides with the rise of Santorum.

It appears that how one views himself "religiously" does factor into one's politics. The Pew poll, perhaps, also indicates that sometimes one is willing to alter their religious conviction to accomplish their politics.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

We love to hear from our readers. Mail, or email, us your thoughts and opinions on this and other topics of concern in today's culture. Even if it's the same as ours we would appreciate knowing what you think.

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