

Opinion

What is the threat to our religious freedom?

Freedom of religion in the United States is threatened today. This is not immediately evident to all since the threat often masquerades in the guise of religious tolerance. It plays on fears that politically involved religious groups will impose their morality on the rest of us, which is clearly contrary to the spirit of tolerance on which a pluralistic society is based.



Brian Frederick

wrong. The law provides a formal standard of right and wrong to which all citizens must conform lest they incur the displeasure of the state. The law imposes a moral code upon all citizens whether they like it or not.

The real question then is not whether someone's morality will be imposed upon everyone else, but whose morality will provide the foundation for a nation's laws. The little phrase "you can't legislate morality" merely serves as a smokescreen for this fundamental question.

Presently a battle is being fought over whose morality will prevail in America. Will it be the Christian values of our forefathers that have been steadily eroded? Will it be the values of those who admit no higher authority than man and believe that government will save him from his problems? Or will it be someone else's?

That such a battle now rages is clear. One side seeks the creation of a new and supposedly better society by overturning traditional values while continually warning us of the dangers presented by the involvement of fundamentalist Christians in government. This side at-

tacks people like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell for seeking to impose their morality on the rest of us and thus threatening freedom in a pluralistic society.

Meanwhile, Christians seeking to obey the dictates of conscience complain about the imposition of secular values on them. They worry that much of what the public schools teach undermines the principles they strive to instill in their children. They object to laws that license pornography and condone the killing of unborn children. Other groups are likewise caught up in the struggle.

The erosion of what was once a clearly Christian consensus in America is partially responsible for this struggle. The lack of general agreement on what is right and wrong engenders conflict as opposing groups battle to see their standards enshrined in law. But such struggles would be of less importance were it not for our highly centralized government.

As our federal government was originally framed, it had but limited authority in domestic affairs. State and local governments exercised nearly all the power that directly affected the lives of

citizens. When power lies at the local level, pluralism and religious freedom can flourish. People can tailor the laws under which they live to match the prevailing values of a community. Those not content with the local establishment can work to change it at that level or move on to a more congenial community.

But when power is concentrated at the national level, such local tailoring is impossible. One Supreme Court decision made in Washington D.C. can overturn the duly legislated laws in thousands of communities around the country, while local officials are reduced to merely implementing the decisions imposed from above.

Given the inescapable moral nature of the law, this concentration of power at the federal level makes it possible for one small group to impose its morality on the whole nation. Both those fearing the religious Right and those fearing the humanist Left have legitimate cause for concern. All groups are involved in a struggle for control in which the winner takes all and the losers are subjected to laws based on morals repugnant to them.

The group prevailing in the struggle

probably would not outlaw competing beliefs. It would permit dissenters to believe whatever they wanted as long as their beliefs did not threaten the existing order. They could believe but not proselytize. Parents could teach their children whatever they wanted at home but would have to send them to school to be indoctrinated with the prevailing orthodoxy. "The free exercise" of religion would be confined to church services judged acceptable by the state where religious ideas could have no impact on public affairs. We would retain only the emasculated shadow of the religious freedom necessary to a truly free society.

The only solution I know to this threat is the decentralization of political power and the return to a truly federal system. This would reduce the threat of having the morality of the minority imposed on everyone else by a distant, powerful capital. This, unfortunately, is unlikely. There may, however, be ways of securing religious freedom in all, but without recognizing the nature of the threat, we shall certainly fail to find them.

Brian Frederick is a senior historian, Russian major and a columnist for The Battalion.

Mail Call

English is the logical choice

EDITOR:

We want a fight! Today's topic: English as America's national language. My roommate and I are multi-lingual and see its usefulness: employer-employee relations, dealing with our border neighbors, knowledge for knowledge's sake, etc. Nevertheless, English must be the national language for an array of reasons.

Historically, many group efforts hinge on common language. Scientists throughout Europe in the 15th - 18th centuries submitted papers only written in Latin. They realized the practicality of a multi-lingual group using a common tongue. God made those constructing the tower of Babel speak in foreign tongues. Consequently, progress halted.

With English as national language, people using their own native languages fear alienation for not being able to communicate. Tie this to money. If someone's native medium is the franc, would he be practical in complaining of alienation when he can't purchase a Big Gulp in Navasota because they won't accept francs? C'mon, get practical!

Voter alienation fear is moot. Voter's are citizens. Citizenship entails being functional using English. Anyway . . . go ahead, print political documents (i.e. ballots) in 50 languages. Don't alienate ANYONE! Expenses up 50 times! Sounds great! Gets better!! A guy in Croslyton speaks only Navajo. He can't read road signs. Make a new sign printed in Navajo . . . and Spanish, Greek, Arabic, whatever (understand?) Impractical and expensive.

Each citizen could be drafted. Cadets, give orders in each language natively spoken by your troops. Just try and say "fire" in Spanish, French, Choctaw Indian, etc. How 'bout the Egyptian hieroglyphic users? DON'T ALIENATE ANYONE!

In conclusion, history and practical thought show the need and usefulness for a national language. English is the logical choice for this country.

W.J. Wade '89
Kenneth E. Pfeiffer '89

It's a fox hunt

EDITOR:

The NCAA basketball tournament is winding down, and I hope that everyone has a chance to watch the AGGIES in action. What, those were the AGGIES of North Carolina A&T and Utah State?

Where were our beloved AGGIES of TEXAS A&M? You mean they stayed here during Spring Break? Not even an NIT bid? Had the "Silver Fox" let us down?

I am afraid the Silver Fox has let a lot of people down the last few years. No longer able to go into a delay with ten minutes remaining in the game, unable to realize the value of a three-point-shooter, unable to recruit a big man and unable to field a team that can shoot free throws, the Silver Fox has seen the game pass him by.

Sure, the Silver Fox has 413 career wins, but he also has 282 losses, and it took 25 years to amass those totals. The strength of our schedule is nothing to brag about either. I must admit that we have played the Sooners the last few years, but I am sure everyone knows the outcomes of those games. We have been able to get to the NCAA and NIT tournaments in recent years, however, we have been eliminated in first round play and only SWC tournament miracles got us the NCAA tourney.

I guess the media call him the Silver Fox due to his ability to get contract extensions despite poor performances. Come on Jackie, recruiting is your strength, how about getting us a head basketball coach? Or might success in basketball detract from your success on the grid iron?

Gary Wheeler '86
accompanied by three signatures

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There's-a-First-Time-for-Everything Department:
SHIPS DESERTING A SINKING RAT



Isn't high school tough enough?

Education Secretary William Bennett decided a while back that high schools aren't tough enough academically.

Secretary Bennett suggests high school students take the following courses:

Four years of English; three years each of science, math and social studies, two years of a foreign language; two years of physical education; and one semester each of art history and music history.

The primary reason younger people don't trust older people is because older people sit around and try to figure out how to make life more difficult for younger people than it already is.

High school isn't tough enough? When you're 15 you're lucky to be able to dress yourself each morning and locate the school.

Plus, there are all sorts of things to worry about as a teenager without some

bureaucrat in Washington trying to put you through Harvard when you're barely housebroken.

You've got to worry about getting your driver's license, a date for the prom and tickets for the nexy heavy metal concert.

On top of that, your homeroom teacher has it in for you because your ear-ring jingles during quiet period, your father is a narc and your face is covered with zits.

This is not to say there shouldn't be changes in our high schools. For years I have called upon educators to revamp the curriculum to fit modern times and each student's particular interests and needs.

For instance they made me take algebra in high school.

"But I'm never going to use this," I pleaded.

"You never know," said my teacher. I did know that I was right. I have been out of high school 24 years and not once has algebra come up.

Teaching kids to read and to write and to count a little is important, but high schools also should offer some

practical courses that would help students as they join the adult world. Here are a few of these courses taught:

• **DRESSING FOR SUCCESS.** Most firms do not hire young women with orange hair.

• **HOW TO SPEAK THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.** Like, you know, it's so important.

• **HIGHWAY SANITY.** Every time you try to see how fast the car will go, the morgue is, like, a totally boring place.

• **HOW TO DRINK SENSELESSLY AND NOT THROW UP ON YOUR DATE.** Very important if one is to prove socially.

• **ECONOMICS.** Your parents are going to cut you off one of these days. Learn to cope with being in charge of your own survival.

• **GETTING EVEN.** Just hold out a few more years and you can get back all the adults who made your life miserable by doing the same thing to their own kids.

Life isn't fair, my young friends. It has its moments.

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Lewis Grizzard

BLOOM COUNTY

FIRE BACK
"WHERE THE READER'S RESPOND"

TODAY:
MR. CHARLES RAYMOND FOXWORTH... PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN ASSOC. FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF PEOPLE WITH FACIAL HAIR.

LAST WEEK, THIS FEATURE DISPLAYED A BEARDED PERSON CHARACTERIZED AS A VIOLENT LUNATIC. THIS IS PURE, IRRESPONSIBLE BIGOTRY.

PEOPLE WITH FACIAL HAIR ARE OFTEN DOCTORS, JUDGES, BAGGAGE HANDLERS AND OTHER LAW-ABIDING CITIZENS. WE STRONGLY RESENT THE STEREOTYPE SUGGESTING OTHERWISE.

"FIRE BACK" WELCOMES OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS. WRITE 5/6 THIS NEWSLETTER.

The Battalion

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