

Fundamentalist religion: Its time has gone

Fundamentalist forms of religion are on the rise in the world today — from Israel to India, from the United States to the Middle East. Whether we are talking about Shi'ites, Orthodox Jews or Southern Baptists, we see on every side a rising tide of emotion, activism, and even violence as adherents of these faiths promote their causes. The issue of religion appears in the most intractable of political, social and ethnic conflicts.

Religion has always been a part of human culture; every group of people that we know of has had that composite of world view, moral code and ceremony that we call "religion." It serves us in many ways: as an arbiter of our existence, a standard for our behavior, a collection of song, story, and ritual for our esthetic imagination and comfort in the face of death. It is a symbolic system that holds a society together and adds meaning to life, work



Jeff Farmer
 Columnist

and play. It can bring people together to a common purpose. These are aspects of religious experience in every culture and time.

Today religion confronts science, technology, environmental devastation and the global village.

The more "liberal" forms continue to value esthetics, ceremony, comfort and community, while accommodating (or perhaps confronting) the realities of science and the changing circumstances

of civilized life.

The more fundamentalist forms tend instead to cling to outmoded beliefs, rigid morality and cultural exclusivity. Offering a feeling of certainty in an uncertain world, they appeal to people suffering from cultural change and breakneck scientific and technological advance.

First, these groups are dangerous because they encourage people to believe literally things which simply are not true. The world was not created 6,000 years ago as indicated in the writings of all three Abrahamic religions. "Be fruitful and multiply" is no longer an appropriate command. Biology tells us that the human species is one; beliefs that one ethnic group, language, or culture represent "the chosen ones" contradict reality. It is extremely unlikely that some higher force intends that men should not have

long hair, women should not drive cars, or that a temple should occupy some specific site on which a mosque now stands (Hindus and Moslems are killing each other over this issue now).

Second, by blessing the individual prejudices and practices of certain groups, these religions enshrine ethnic intolerance, encourage violence and precipitate incredible human suffering. The most evil of torturers and dictators are those who claim the most righteous causes. Too often these fundamentalist groups find themselves defending (or even espousing) racism, oppression and the status quo in opposition to anything (or anyone) new or different.

Third, by teaching (and sometimes enforcing) a narrow and unbending view of morality, these religions foster an attitude of prideful and uncompromising rigidity in their adherence which makes them

unsuitable for life in the global village. How do the fundamentalist Christian, Moslem, or Jew live in the same modern city as the Hindu, atheist, or Taoist? well, if they believe that their deity has blessed their group and no others, heed the prayers of their group and others, will aid and comfort their group and no others.

Make no mistake, I have no problem with those who believe in God or practice a religion, *on that basis*. What see as problematic is the tendency of some religions to "baptize" and encourage the bigotry and violence which we are all so capable.

The fundamentalists are a throwback to an earlier age that has truly gone; they cannot bring themselves to live in the modern world, then we will all suffer for it.

Jeff Farmer is a graduate student in mathematics.

Republican party must keep best candidates on the ballot

Like most other Republicans in Texas, I spent most of yesterday cussing and discussing the statewide election results, in particular Ann Richards' win over Clayton Williams.

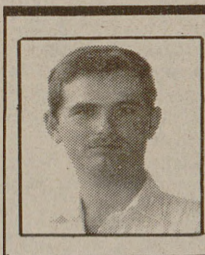
It is, of course, patently obvious that it was Claytie's election to win, and that he literally talked himself out of a job. What is more perplexing, however, is the Republican party's inability to offer a viable field of candidates for the down-ballot offices like lieutenant governor and attorney general.

It was encouraging to see Kay Bailey Hutchison and Rick Perry win their respective races on Tuesday. Perry's win was particularly impressive against a Democratic party stalwart whose reelection was thought to be all but assured.

Conversely, it was disappointing to see the ease with which Dan Morales and Bob Bullock won election to their offices. The Republican Party has spent most of the last decade talking about the birth of a two-party statewide electorate in Texas. That day has not arrived and will not until the Republican Party deals with two phenomena which stand in the way of that aspiration: the power-hungry Republican and the yellow-dog Democrat.

The power-hungry Republican phenomena is particularly crippling because of the lack of a well-developed party infrastructure in most locales around the state. In order for a Republican to win a statewide office, he or she must either be an extremely appealing candidate, far and away the best qualified, or running against a real loser on the Democratic side.

With that scenario in mind, it is ludicrous that the Republicans keep putting all of their eggs in one basket, so to speak, and running their most qualified candidates against each other in the gubernatorial



Larry Cox
 Columnist

primary. Why do the cream of the crop choose to bash heads with each other and send a survivor to do battle with the Democratic candidate? Power. More succinctly, power and ego.

Imagine the potential for a matched contest had Jack Rains run for lieutenant governor and Tom Luce for attorney general, instead of both of these immensely qualified candidates being eliminated from the ballot before the general election was even held.

Both of these men have something important to offer to the people of our state — leadership and experience. The fact that they chose to run against each other is more of a commentary on their hunger for the spotlight than on their quest for Republican dominance and influence in Austin.

Some of the other races were an even bigger farce. Warren G. Harding for Comptroller? I'm afraid it will take the state Republican Party longer to field a full slate of qualified candidates than it will take the Fox Network to expand to seven nights of quality programming. The state leadership must assert itself in order to insure that the most qualified candidates are on the ballot when the November election rolls around. Survival of the fittest tends to perpetuate candidates who aren't fit to be on the ballot.

A second major stumbling block to statewide Republican parity is the specter of the yellow-dog Democrat. How can a party compete when they field a candidate who mirrors the

views of a majority of his or her constituents and loses anyway because of political tradition? It boggles my mind to have someone tell me, "Yes, I voted for her even though I can't stand her, but you've gotta understand. Grandpa was a Democrat just like his Dad and that's just the way I was raised."

Texas Republicans have made some headway into this enclave of partisan voters in the last three presidential elections, but have faced a much tougher time in statewide and county races. We may be heading toward a two party system in Texas, but until then a vast majority of the state's residents will elect their county's elected officials in the Democratic primary. Ann Richards' electoral dominance in conservative East and South Texas is evidence that the yellow dog voter is alive and well in our state and finally able to vote their conscience.

I'm not saying that Rob Mosbacher, Buster Brown, or any of the other statewide candidates weren't qualified. To the contrary, most were immensely qualified, much more so than their opponents. In order to work out of the hole from which Republicans running for statewide office must start, however, the absolute best available candidates must be on the ballot. If that means a "rigged" primary in which hand picked candidates run unopposed, so be it. Giving the yellow dogs an excuse to pull the Republican lever just once will embolden them to do so again.

Until that day, we all have to live with the choices which the people have made for the next four years. Remember that only those people who actually cast ballots are enfranchised to bitch about who got elected. And only those who were on the ballot got elected. Too bad.

Larry Cox is a graduate student in range science.

Program provides food, classes, health care for mothers, infants

Let's just call them Jack and Dianne. Let's call my best friend Jack rather than his real name, and let's call his wife Dianne.

Jack is a poor African-American man from a poor single-parent family. Dianne is a poor Mexican-American woman.

Jack told me several months ago that Dianne was going to have a baby. They had considered having an abortion, he said, but they decided to have the baby. I told him that I was happy for him, but I secretly worried about the health of the baby.

I worried more as I learned more about the situation of America's babies. The infant mortality rate in the United States is worse than in some Third World nations (NY Times Mag 9/9/90). The infant mortality rate in our nation's capital (23 deaths for every 1,000 live births) is worse than in Cuba, Jamaica and Costa Rica.

Every day, more than 100 American babies die before their first birthdays. That's over 36,500 infant deaths every year. The mortality rates of African-American and Mexican-American babies are much worse than the rate of the overall population. The mortality rate of babies born to poor families is also much worse than the mortality rate of babies born to families of higher income.

The statistics did not bade well for Jack and Dianne. Low income families often cannot afford proper prenatal care. As a result, 250,000 babies are born seriously underweight every year in America. These babies are two to three times more likely to be blind, deaf, or mentally handicapped. Underweight babies are much more likely to die in the first year or suffer future physical and mental problems. Malnutrition and lack of affordable health care also contribute to infant deaths.

As Jack worked 60, 70, 80 hours a week at his two jobs, and Dianne continued to work at her job, I wondered how much extra money they were making to ensure a healthy pregnancy.

At near-minimum wage, the meeting of ends is a luxury.



Irwin Tang
 Columnist

Being able to afford a healthy pregnancy is far from automatic.

I thought about the conservatives' axiom that poor people get what they deserve. Do their babies deserve to be unhealthy, as well? I thought about Bush's veto of the parental leave bill. The parental leave bill would have allowed Dianne to leave her job during pregnancy and not be fired.

I thought about proper prenatal care for Dianne and her baby. Where would the money come from to pay for visits to the doctor, nutrition classes, and nutritious food?

But then fruit juice started popping up in their home, and Jack began telling me about some pregnancy classes he was attending with Dianne. They even went to see the doctor.

How could they afford all this? The answer was WIC. Jack told me it is a Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children, a government social program. WIC provides women with vouchers to buy infant formula, cheese, fruit juice, cereals, milk, and other foods. It also offers nutrition classes and medical care.

WIC is a social welfare program that saves the lives of babies. It should receive the support of "pro-lifers" and "pro-choicers" alike; a mother who chooses to have her baby can have a living, healthy one. Those who believe in a strong defense should surely support WIC; it defends our babies from disease and ill-health.

Those who want to beat down crime should support this program; it prevents babies from falling into bad health and parents from falling into deep frustration. Ill health and parent frustration lead to bad

childhoods which leads to criminal behavior. And those who believe in a good education should know that malnutrition, a young age causes learning disabilities.

And yet pro-life and strong pro-defense politicians such as Joe Barton and Phil Gramm tend to be the first to want to cancel social programs such as WIC that promote life and health for the defense of the people and their children.

Perhaps these hypocritical politicians should realize that the WIC program actually saves money for government. The food vouchers given to pregnant mothers cost only \$30 a month and help to prevent \$2,500 a year in treatment for extremely underweight babies. In fact, every dollar spent on the prenatal care program saves between \$1.77 to \$3.13 in Medicaid costs. The monetary savings made from WIC's prevention of crime, further health problems, and learning disabilities are incalculable. WIC is also an investment in human capital; healthy childhoods lead to healthy economic production for society.

But it is embarrassing that I must, for some people, lay out the economic benefits; healthy babies are reward enough. And yet government funding of WIC is only enough to provide 59 percent of eligible mothers with WIC benefits. Only 19 states contribute their own funds to the federal program. Texas state senator Hugh Parmer pushed for partial state funding for the Texas WIC program. Perhaps Governor Ann Richards will also realize or has already realized the merits of the WIC program and will increase support for the money-saving and life-saving program.

And perhaps, after reading this, voters will realize that social programs often save both lives and money in the long run.

Final note: Three days ago, Jack and Dianne had a healthy eight-pound baby with a beautiful head of hair.

Irwin Tang is a junior political science major.

Adventures In Cartooning

by Don Atkinson Jr.



The Battalion

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