

# OPINION

THE BATTALION

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## When religion and politics collide

### The Republican Party does not reflect many of the principles of Christianity

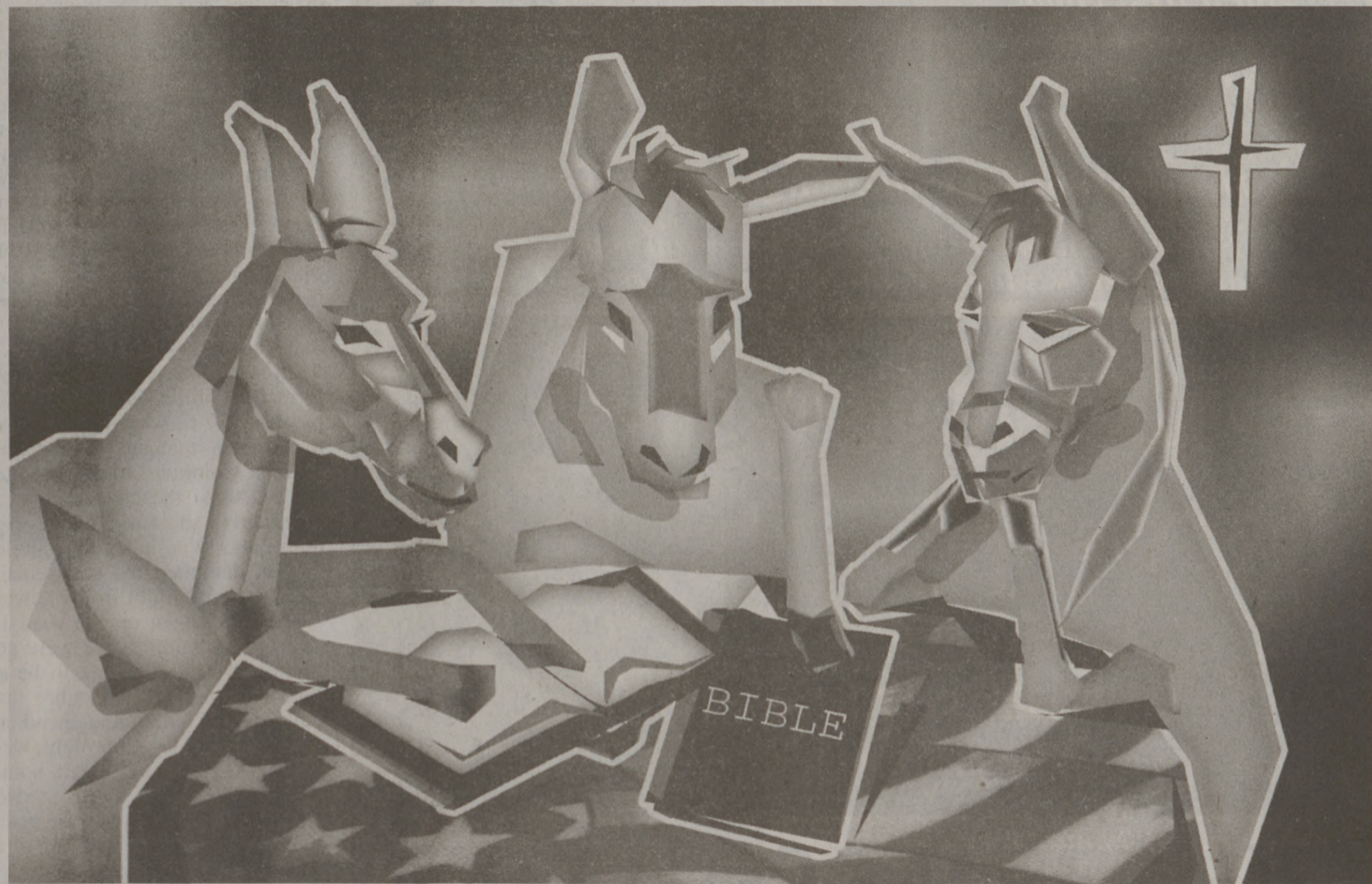
**W**hen James Madison wrote the First Amendment, he vaguely set out to protect the institutions of government and religion from one another: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Though constitutional scholars debate to this day the question of what establishes religion and to what degree, if any, government may prohibit its exercise, a letter written by Madison to Edward Livingston in 1822 sheds some light on the matter. When government applies what he called "perfect separation between the ecclesiastical and civil matters; religion and government will both exist in greater purity the less they are mixed together." While this rings of Jefferson's "wall of separation" analogy, religion remains a given in modern politics.

All contemporary presidents have been Protestant, with the exception of Kennedy, who was Catholic. President Bush said he believes he was called by God to become president, according to USA Today, and has made it well known that he prays daily in office. He, like many Republicans, claims that his party is the only choice for Christians. This argument sells well due to the oft-touted voice of the religious right. But is the Republican Party truly in tune with mainstream Christian values? Perhaps in rhetoric but not in policy.

There is one issue that instantly surfaces when religion and politics collide. Abortion has been the Republican Party's concession to fundamentalist Christians for years, and for years many Christians have been sold. According to Daniel Maguire, professor of ethics in Marquette University's theology department and president of the Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health and Ethics, "The healthier Catholic and Protestant traditions of social justice and concern for the poor and for peace were swallowed up in what is called pelvic politics," or extreme Christian meditation on reproductive issues, with the subsequent disregard for those truly in need — the poor, hungry and sick.

The disparity between the stance of most Republicans and Democrats on abortion has been amplified by name-calling, extremism and an overall lack of discourse between adherents and opponents of choice. As Maguire points out in his book "Sacred Choices," both sides can agree there are too many abortions. But which party has set out to end abortion in a realistic manner? Unwanted pregnancy is the foremost cause of abortion. However, many Republicans scorn organizations such as Planned Parenthood (whose name more than suggests its goal to prevent unwanted pregnancies), and the contraception which provides the means to control reproduction.

According to Maguire, "Poverty brings unwanted pregnancies, since poverty breeds chaos and despair and is not conducive to realistic planning in sexual or other areas of life." The Republican response to this problem: Depart from progressive tax policies toward a regressive policy which gives a disproportionate boost to the top 5 percent of earners. Nothing says "love thy neighbor" like increasing the already vast gap between the wealthy and the poor. In contrast, the Democratic Party has had a solid record of helping lower- and middle-income Americans since Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, proving government can be an instrument of good. Policies that favor corporations over individuals, however, are at odds with the principles of Christianity, and do not deserve the support of Christians.



Some sicknesses do not require divine power to be healed. The U.S. government has the power to guarantee that the basic health concerns of all Americans will be cared for. Yet, somewhere in his divine inspirations, the president has found the motivation to place tough new rules on Medicaid financing that will limit each state's ability to provide health care for millions of poor people, according to The New York Times. The compassion behind such a policy is starkly pale next to the health care plan of presidential hopeful John Kerry, which looks to expand health care to cover every American child and 96 percent of the populace.

Republicans like to talk about family values, especially when debating gay marriage, but it is hard to find substantial policy that strengthens the average family. Judith Baer, a professor in the Department of Political Science at Texas A&M, suggests in her book "Women and the Law," that the government could "subsidize child care ... or make comprehensive health insurance available to all citizens." The question is which helps the family more — preventing gay couples from taking on the responsibilities of married and family life, or fully funding programs such as Head Start, which increases the educational readiness of young children in low-income families, and the Children's Health Insurance Program, which extends health insurance to uninsured children? Both programs have felt the strain of the Bush tax cuts.

According to The Washington Post, the unemployment rate may have fallen slightly recently, but the reasons are not because more people are finding jobs. Hiring is stagnant, stocks have fall-

en and the dollar has tumbled. As indicated by the Department of Labor, job growth has stalled and unemployment has fallen because people gave up on looking for work. Parents will find it increasingly difficult to keep families together when they lack adequate forms of income. Furthermore, the Bush administration has cut more than \$8.5 billion in unemployment benefits. Even if Republicans continue to claim that job loss under their watch is somehow not their fault, there is still no excuse for cutting such benefits during a time when they are needed most. It seems the administration's priorities are not in order, as a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage does not fill the stomachs of children whose parents have lost their jobs nor does it provide them with shelter.

Bush often calls himself a "compassionate conservative," a phrase considered by many to be an oxymoron. After all, one would not have to add the word "compassionate" in front of his ideology unless this ideology was inherently void of compassion. Bush and the Republican Party have misplaced their compassion. The meek have been ignored, and the powerful championed. The Republican agenda does not reflect Christian doctrine.

*John David Blakley is a sophomore political science major. Graphic by Gracie Arenas*

#### MAIL CALL

#### Homosexual marriages 'have nothing to bring to the table'

In response to Feb. 26 mail call:

I'm tired of this whole gay thing. The thing homosexuals are failing to realize is that the United States has no need for homosexuality (I said homosexuality, not homosexuals). If you want to be gay and live in the United States, that's your decision, but there is no reason that your lifestyle should be encouraged by others recognizing your relationship as a marriage. The vast majority of heterosexual marriages lead to procreation, which every society depends on to survive. The government recognizes that and encourages it. While it may not always be a fairy tale story for every family, it for the most part provides children with a well-rounded upbringing — that of a father and mother.

Homosexuality has nothing to bring to the table that anything good for the country. In fact, homosexuality can be blamed for some not-so-good things, more specifically, the spread of the AIDS epidemic through sodomy.

The United States allows a man to marry the man he loves, what's to stop a man from marrying a woman, a job or a car that he loves? After all, they all have the same chance of reproducing. Gays will never talk badly about heterosexual marriage, because they know they depend on it. They know the only reason their alternative lifestyle is an option is because everyone else is making up in areas where they're falling short. They know that if they all moved to an island, they wouldn't last two generations.

*Curtis Rogers  
Class of 2004*

I could find no quote from the YCT explicitly saying that gay people couldn't come out and support the straight way of life. They were not excluded.

Homosexuals simply did not show up. How very close-minded of them. Why are homosexuals not bigots, since they cry bloody murder anytime someone disagrees with them, and immediately calls them "intolerant?"

In his mail call, Mr. Johnson defines tolerance as "recognizing and respecting the beliefs and practices of others." Tolerance has nothing to do with liking or respecting something. I tolerate listening to a crying baby on an airplane, and I tolerate listening to my roommate's terrible music.

However, I don't go praise the mother of the crying baby for the baby's "resolve." I don't have to "respect" my roommate for his choice to listen to music I hate. I just can't go over and punch the baby or my roommate.

The YCT never did anything to harm the goals, aspirations or the cause of gay pride week here at Texas A&M. All they did was promote a goal that directly contradicts that of gay pride week. Its a free country, isn't it?

Tolerate that.

*Noah Johnson  
Class of 2007*

#### Homosexuals are 'as much bigots as anyone else'

Most people who oppose homosexuality are against it because of religious beliefs, and if they vocalize those beliefs, then they are condemned as intolerant and hateful. Homosexuals are as much bigots as anyone else.

They're intolerant of religious beliefs. Homosexuals are trying to force Christians and people of other faiths to accept their lifestyle against their own beliefs.

Even if gay marriages are made legal, true believers will never accept what is wrong and sinful. Just because the state justifies gay marriage, homosexuals will never be justified in the eyes of true believers or God.

*James Mosher  
Class of 2006*

#### Proposed ban on gay marriage must be opposed by students

All students at Texas A&M should oppose the proposed constitutional amendment that would ban gay marriage. There is no amendment in the Constitution for limiting individuals' rights, and there should never be one. Amendments to the Constitution were created to protect the people from the government and to establish their rights, not to prevent them from expressing the rights to which they are entitled as Americans and human beings. To limit the rights of any group is to open the door to the limitation of the rights of all Americans.

Further, though difficult for some, it is time to realize that gays are not unlike us. They are not a different species. They are human just like you and I and deserve every right that we do. I am engaged to be married and I cannot imagine a more terrible world to live in than one in which I could not marry the woman I loved. Imagine yourself in the same place. Now imagine that you can't fulfill your dream to marry the one you love because it isn't socially accepted, because it is banned by the one document created to protect you.

Lastly, remember that being gay is not something that you do, it is something that you are. People do not stop or start being gay. They cannot choose to be something that they are not and we should not force them. That is why, if the president really supported marriage in this country, as he insists, he would never support this hateful measure.

*Ryan Anderson  
Class of 2003*

#### Gay marriage wouldn't lead to other 'ridiculous unions'

In response to Nicholas Davis' Feb. 26 column:

Mr. Davis, I would advise you to be very careful on your slippery slope. I would hate to see you fall and embarrass yourself. You say that by allowing gay marriages, logically we open the door for marriage to animals and other "ridiculous unions."

First, it's nice that you group gay marriages in with "ridiculous unions," but even more disturbing is that you somehow think that allowing one action neces-

sarily allows other, unrelated actions.

Other actions can be addressed when and if they come up in a judicial environment, but have no bearing on the current issue. Allowing gay marriages logically only allows one thing: gay marriages.

*Marcus Dunn  
Class of 2006*

#### Every single Vietnam veteran is a hero, including John Kerry

In response to a Feb. 26 mail call:

How dare you, young man? You are free to criticize Senator Kerry on his political record all you want, and I would probably agree with you, but I don't know where you get off questioning his service to this country. The Silver Star is just barely below the Congressional Medal of Honor, it isn't something you get for having nicely shined shoes.

Yes, you were correct that many others went to Vietnam and many others saw action, but you need to realize that every single one of them were heroes. It's hard enough to go through the stress of a deployment and time in a combat zone, but those men and women also had to endure the added injury of the disrespect of so many people back home.

I am really curious what it is that you have done for your country that entitles you to trivialize the contributions of any one of our veterans. You show me your Silver Star and your three Purple Hearts and I'll pay for an ad in The Battalion to apologize to you.

*Joseph Ferguson  
Class of 2004*

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