

MEDIA SPINS WAR ON CHRISTIANS CONFERENCE

By Don Feder

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Last week (March 27-28), Vision America convened a **War On Christians** conference in Washington, DC. It was the first to address escalating attacks on Christians from Hollywood, the news media, academia, the courts and activist groups like the ACLU and Anti-Defamation League.

Speakers included scholars, authors, clergy (among them an Orthodox rabbi), lawyers and members of Congress. Delegates came from as far away as South Africa. I was the conference coordinator, as well as a speaker on two panels (“Jews Confront The War On Christians” and “Hollywood: Christians Through A Distorted Lens”).

You will be shocked – shocked! – to learn that the mainstream media did its best to trivialize and marginalize the conference – to present a thoughtful examination of the rising tide of anti-Christian bias and persecution as the work of hysterical, paranoid, whack-doodles who are manufacturing a crisis to generate donations and mobilize Republican votes.

- An alleged news story in The Washington Post, (March 29th) by Alan Cooperman, was headlined “‘War’ on Christians Is Alleged.” Try to imagine the Post covering the 2005 conference *Examining the Real Agenda of the Religious Far Right* and headlining its story “Coming ‘Theocracy’ Alleged.”
- Cooperman misidentified Dr. Rick Scarborough, president of Vision America (the conference host) as

a “radio commentator.” You know, one of those guys who screams at you over the airwaves. In fact, besides being the head of a growing national movement, Scarborough is a Baptist minister, an author and an acclaimed speaker.

- Cooperman included extensive quotes attacking the conference – SOP for reportage on conservative events. A professor of social ethics charged that the meeting was “a spoiled brat response by Christians who have always enjoyed the privileges of a majority position.” A mainline Protestant cleric claimed that by calling attention to the war on Christians in the US, the conference “disrespects the experience of people who have been jailed and died because of their faith.”
- This theme dominated news “coverage” – Christians are so powerful that it’s absurd to claim they’re persecuted. Thus, a commentary in USA Today (March 28th) by Tom Krattenmaker (who called the conference’s theme “overblown” and reckless): “We are in the second term of the most faith-friendly, explicitly Christian presidency in many a decade....Hollywood is producing more Christian-friendly movies (*like “The DaVinci Code”?*) while Christian news media, Christian music, Christian novels and other forms of Christian pop culture continue making their strong mark on society.” I’m only surprised Krattenmaker didn’t cite the presence of “In God We Trust” on our currency to refute claims of Christian persecution.

Apparently, a majority of Americans are equally hysterical, reckless and disrespectful of real persecution. According to a FOX News poll taken in December, 2005, 59% of the

American people agreed with conference organizers that “Christianity is under attack” in the U.S. today.

In reality, you have to be dogmatic, blind and biased – which pretty much describes the mainstream media – to miss the obvious here.

- “V for Vendetta” is the most explicitly anti-Christian movie to date. It’s set in a Britain, 20 years in the future, ruled by a murderous regime of Christian fanatics. (Would Warner Brothers distribute a film about Britain becoming an Islamic republic?) “V for Vendetta” was the number one box-office draw in its first week of release, and number two in its second, with a cumulative gross revenue of over \$46 million.
- The latest literary hatchet-job by Kevin Phillips (“American Theocracy”) claims our civilization will be undone by (among other things) a “milieu of radicalized (and much too influential) religion.” With the faithful fighting to keep “One Nation Under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance (and the teaching of Creationism recently banned by a federal judge lest students be inspired to meditate on the “G” word), Phillips’ charge that religion is much too influential in America should provoke peals of uproarious laughter. “American Theocracy” just made it on The New York Times Bestsellers list – further evidence of the formidable power of radicalized religion.
- In California, an employer can be fined \$150,000 (that’s not a typo) for firing a man who comes to work in a dress. Believe it or not, the law wasn’t intended to target secular humanists.
- Hewlett-Packard fired a Christian for posting near his cubicle a sign with Bible verses relating to the

prohibition of men lying with men. This was in response to a celebrate sexual-diversity sign posted by the company. Hewlett-Packard does not celebrate diversity of opinion.

- At colleges across the country, Christian groups have lost their accreditation for refusing to accept homosexuals as officers. Thus, at schools founded by Christians and endowed by Christians – Christians are forced to choose between their conscience and the ability to hold meetings on campus.
- In the New York City public school system, Moslem crescents and menorahs are displayed during certain holidays, but not Christmas trees or crèches. Incredibly, school officials have decided that the former are non-religious (try telling that to bin Laden) but the latter strictly sectarian.
- Recently, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed a unanimous resolution attacking the Catholic Church for teaching that children should be placed for adoption with mothers and fathers. The resolution called this “hateful and discriminatory.”
- Last weekend, the Christian youth group Teen Mania held a two-day revival for 25,000 kids in the city that inspired the moniker San Francisco Democrats. Supervisors labeled this “an act of provocation,” while State Assemblyman Mark Leno called it a “fascist mega-pep rally.”
- Evangelicals have been described as “a clear and present danger to religious liberty in America” (former Labor Secretary Robert Reich), determined to “Christianize all aspects of American Life” (the ADL’s Abraham Foxman), “moral retards” and “an ugly, violent lot” (City University of New York Professor Timothy Shortell), “the party of paranoia”

(Bill Maher) possessed of “the same kind of fundamentalist impulse that we see in Saudi Arabia” (Al Gore), and responsible for moving America “each day closer to a theocracy where a narrow and hateful brand of Christian fundamentalism will rule” (a full-page ad in The New York Times, signed by Jane Fonda, Ed Asner and other Hollywood savants).

- And, in Philadelphia not quite two years ago, a group of Christians with Repent America were arrested for holding signs and quietly praying at a city-sponsored gay pride event. Though the Christians obeyed all police orders and were accosted by militants, *they* were arrested and spent 20 hours in jail. The City of Brotherly Love wanted to prosecute them for a laundry list of felonies, including criminal conspiracy. If convicted, they could have faced up to 47 years in prison. (Fortunately, a reality-based judge ruled the Christians were exercising their First Amendment rights and threw out the case.) No other group in America has seen its free-speech rights attacked in similar fashion.

Granted, the foregoing doesn't rise to the level of persecution in Afghanistan (where a man was threatened with death for converting to Christianity), Saudi Arabia (where the New Testament is contraband) or China (where the organizers of home churches are imprisoned). And, granted again, unlike Europe, Christianity is thriving in America.

But to say the presidency of George W. Bush proves the potency of conservative Christians is a real stretch..

Bush's rep as an “explicitly Christian” president is based mostly on the 2000 campaign, wherein he referred to Jesus as his favorite philosopher. Last year, White House “Christmas”

cards didn't even mention by name the holiday celebrated by more than 90% of Americans. Bush invokes the Almighty no more than any of his predecessors.

Despite a GOP majority reputed to be the love-slaves of Jerry Falwell, it's been almost two years since Congress voted a on a federal marriage amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Other than a ban on partial-birth abortion, the political agenda of Christian conservatives has been studiously ignored in our nation's capital.

The news and entertainment media, public education, higher education, the judiciary and a fair number of corporations and foundations are in the hands of ideologues who despise Bible-believing Christians, and who rarely miss an opportunity to smear them, to foment hatred against them and to circumscribe their activities.

Give the National Socialists credit for candor.

In 1920s Germany, if a Jew had said to a Nazi, "You hate me." The goose-stepper would have replied: "You're right, Jew. And if we ever get a chance, we'll kill you." He would not have accused his victim of paranoia, hysteria, disrespecting real religious persecution and making wild allegations for fundraising purposes.

The war on Christians is real. So too is the media's thoroughly biased coverage of same.

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