

IBRAHIM AND IRA MEET CHRISTIAN AMERICA

By Don Feder

John McCain -- not my idea of a Constitutional scholar -- nevertheless stumbled upon something significant in the course of a recent interview: that America was built on a foundation of Christian morality.

The presidential hopeful put his foot in it, in an interview with the website *Beliefnet* (“it” being the increasingly shrill assertion that this nation was established on a secularist worldview and that the best exemplars of the American way are the ACLU, Hollywood and the Gay, Lesbian and Trans-gendered Caucus).

McCain told the interviewer, “But I just have to say in all candor that since this nation was founded primarily on Christian principles, personally, I prefer someone who I know has a solid grounding in my faith,” to lead the nation.

Like the prospect of hanging in the morning, running fourth in the polls does much to concentrate the mind.

McCain said he agreed with the 55% of Americans who believe the U.S. Constitution establishes a Christian nation, according to a poll released by the First Amendment Center last month.

The Senator observed, “The Constitution established the United States of America as a Christian nation ... in the broadest sense,” and that, while Lady Liberty standing in New York harbor welcomes all regardless of creed, newcomers should “know that they are in a nation founded on Christian principles.”

McCain is genetically incapable to saying anything sensible without adding a dollop of dumbness, hence the Arizonan's homage to political correctness, "I admire the Islam. There's a lot of good principles in it." Like, for instance – jihad, the inferior status of "infidels" in a Muslim society, the subjugation of women? But I-admire-Islam is a ritualistic incantation (akin to "Islam is a religion of peace"). Any attempt at elaboration would expose its inanity.

That qualifier (along with McCain's assurance that he could vote for a qualified Muslim for president) didn't shield him from a firestorm of criticism.

Ibrahim Hooper, spokes-thug for the Council on American Islamic Relations (an un-indicted co-conspirator in a recent federal terrorism trial) charged, "That kind of attitude goes against the American tradition of religious pluralism and inclusion."

Hooper (who belongs in the special "Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World") also insisted, "Islam and other faiths have their basis in human dignity." Well, at least he got the "other faiths" part right.

Abu Hooper should have driven home his point by mentioning all of the Muslim countries which have come to be synonymous with the concept of human dignity – Iraq (which won't allow Jews to emigrate), Saudi Arabia (where it's illegal to openly practice a religion other than Islam), Pakistan (where insulting the Prophet is punishable by death), the Sudan (where Christians are butchered in droves), Kosovo (where those Christians left after the Muslim takeover live in a state of siege) and so forth.

A friend of mine, an Egyptian lawyer and a nominal Muslim, told me he was asked to give a lecture to an American audience on

religious tolerance in the Muslim world. “I told them there was none,” he chuckled.

While Hooper believes the observation that America is a Christian nation is the height of intolerance, he longs for the day when minarets dot the American landscape, the muezzins’ call to prayer drowns out choirs at Sunday services and we all live under the code of the Koran.

In a 1993 interview with the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Hooper confessed, “I wouldn’t want to create the impression that I wouldn’t like the government of the United States to be Islamic sometime in the future.” Human dignity, here we come! And ladies, don’t forget to pick up your mandatory burqas in several stylish shades of black.

McCain’s comments also provoked ire of Ira N. Forman, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council. (How proud he must be of his party’s embrace of notorious anti-Semites like Al Sharpton, and its desire for a dialogue with Ahmadinejad.)

“Someone running for president ought to understand the Constitution a little better,” Forman sneered. “Nowhere does it say the United States is a ‘Christian’ nation. How can we trust someone to uphold the Constitution who doesn’t even know what’s in it?”

Nowhere does the Constitution say that there’s a high and impregnable wall of separation between church and state. That hasn’t kept liberals like Forman from repeatedly reading those words into the Constitution over the last 60 years.

Guess only the left gets to engage in Constitutional exegesis.

Our Constitution ends with these words (which come just before the signatories), “Done in convention by the unanimous consent of the states present the 17th day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand, seven hundred and eighty-seven....”

Who does Forman think the drafters of the Constitution were referring to as “our Lord” – Allah, Buddha, Krishna, The Great Pumpkin? The signers were declaring that Jesus was their Lord, and – by implication – that the government they had just established reflected the tenets of their faith.

Take a stroll through U.S. history and try not tripping over evidence of America’s Christian heritage.

- In a 1776 message to his troops, George Washington expressed the hope “that every officer and man will endeavor to live and act as becoming a Christian soldier, defending the dearest rights and liberties of his country.” In 1778, the commander-in-chief directed that “Divine service” be performed on Sunday morning.
- In 1799, a Connecticut court proclaimed, “By our form of government, the Christian religion is the established religion; and all denominations of Christians are placed on the same equal footing.”
- In 1845, Supreme Court Associate Justice Joseph Story, author of a famous treatise on the Constitution, observed that at the time of its adoption, it was “the general if not the universal sentiment in America, that Christianity ought to receive encouragement from the State....”

- An 1854 report of the Senate Judiciary Committee acknowledged what was considered a truism, “The great, vital, and conservative element in our system (the thing that holds the American system together) is the belief of our people in the pure doctrines and divine truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”
- In an 1892 case, the Supreme Court held: “Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind. It is impossible that it should be otherwise, and in this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian.” As late as 1931, another Supreme Court would declare, “We are a Christian people.”
- Woodrow Wilson told a campaign rally in 1911, “America was born a Christian nation.” Harry Truman -- who assured Pope Pius XII “This is a Christian nation” – agreed. So did Truman’s predecessor. Throughout World War II, FDR appealed to Christianity to justify the Allied cause.
- According to Forman then, for most of our history, neither presidents, nor congressmen nor Supreme Court justices knew what was in the Constitution.
- Every president of the United States has taken his oath of office on the Christian Bible. To emphasize the connection between our government and that book, our first president kissed the Bible after swearing to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.
- The first Congress appropriated sums of money for Christian missionaries to American Indian tribes. After

passing the First Amendment, it voted a salary for a Congressional chaplain. It wasn't until the Civil War that a non-Christian gave an invocation at an opening a session of Congress.

- And, it wasn't until the 1947 case of *Everson v. Board of Education* that the U.S. Supreme Court got the barmy notion that the First Amendment erected a “a wall of separation between Church and state” – words not used by the Amendment, which speaks of an “establishment of religion.”
- Prior to that, Americans understood the First Amendment the way the Founders intended. Webster's 1828 Dictionary (published less than 40 years after the adoption of the Bill of Rights) defines an “Establishment of Religion” as “an ecclesiastical authority, as in the Anglican Church in England.”
- Up to the era of creative jurisprudence, the First Amendment was never taken to exclude non-denominational school prayer, Bible reading in the classroom, “one nation under God,” “in God we trust,” public displays on the 10 Commandments, and creches in parks at Christmas, among other mild manifestations of our heritage.

That McCain, once the darling of the establishment media, should be savaged here is predictable. (“McCain Casts Muslims as Less Fit to Lead” read the headline in a *New York Times* story on the controversy.) The idea of America as a Christian nation is at the heart of the culture war.

The concept of Christian America has profound implications for the political tug-of-war over abortion, euthanasia, embryonic

stem-cell research, human cloning, gay marriage, hate crimes legislation, pornography, sex education and other issues whose outcome will determine our survival as a free people.

In politics, as in the physical world, nature abhors a vacuum. Everything must be something.

If America isn't a Christian (or a Judeo-Christian) nation, what is it to be – a Muslim nation, a Marxist nation, a nation inspired by the French Revolution, the Humanist Manifesto II or “The Earth In Balance” (prequel to “An Inconvenient Truth”)? A survey of the 20th century – with particular attention to Europe, Asia, the Middle East and San Francisco – will show how successfully those belief systems have worked in terms of promoting human dignity.

The same Father of our Country who commended Christian values to his soldiers and ordered Sunday services, who kissed the Christian Bible after taking the oath of office, and who commented, “To the distinguished character of a patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of a Christian,” wrote a letter in 1790 to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island that exemplifies human dignity and individual rights, American-style.

In it, this Christian gentleman assured the members of the Truro Synagogue that: “It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving on all occasions their effectual support.”

Similar sentiments were never expressed by a Muslim ruler, in the 18th or any other century.

That's what this Hebrew congregant thinks of when he hears interminable whining over the words "Christian America."