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Looking Into Christian ‘Extremism’

Do some Christians carry their faith to the extreme?

Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice... and moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.

--Hon Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), Republican presidential candidate, 1964

Next to the urgent matter of underinflated footballs, the conservative press corps wants to know why President Obama is making nice with the most barbaric military force the world has witnessed in more than a generation. Screaming “Allah Akbar” as they torture young children and carry out mass executions among terrified civilian populations, mostly in the Middle East, Islam’s extreme militants say they are coming soon to Israel and the cities of America. Who pray tell, believes the President is credible when he refers to these crazed killers as “junior league?”

In a September 2012 speech before the UN General Assembly, Mr. Obama said, “The future must not belong to those who slander the prophet of Islam.” “In keeping with this sentiment,” writes Joe Klein in *frontpagemag.com*, “his administration decided to scrub all federal law enforcement training materials in order to eliminate the use of such words or phrases as jihadists or Islamic terrorists, since the use of such terms could be viewed by Muslims as evidence of Islamophobia.

By contrast, the Obama administration, including the military over which President Obama presides as commander-in-chief, is engaging in a pattern of behavior targeting traditional Christian believers and their groups as extremists and mocking their beliefs.”¹

So we have to ask, are there really Christian “extremists” among us that bear close scrutiny?

Gary Bauer, former Reagan administration official and chairman of the Campaign for Working Families, comes to the defense of a former dear friend accused of Christian extremism. He writes:

“In 1983 the pornographic magazine *Hustler* published a parody ad attacking Jerry Falwell. The ad featured a fake interview in which the evangelical minister described having an incestuous encounter with his mother in an outhouse. Falwell sued *Hustler*'s publisher, Larry Flynt, for libel, invasion of privacy, and emotional distress. Falwell said that while he could tolerate insults against himself, he couldn't abide attacks on his family.

Falwell won most of the lower court rulings. But he lost at the Supreme Court, which ruled that the satirical ad was legal under the First Amendment. The justices wrote that the ad was "doubtless gross and repugnant," but that since Falwell was a public figure, his mom was fair game. After exhausting all legal recourse, Falwell accepted the decision.

In the aftermath of the massacre at the offices of Charlie Hebdo in Paris on January 7, many commentators have strained to avoid mentioning the religion of the alleged attackers, even though the attackers...made it clear that they felt called to violence by their Muslim faith.

Other pundits engaged in a kind of false equivalency, suggesting that Christians are just as likely

to resort to violence when offended. During a discussion of the massacre on the MSNBC show “Now with Alex Wagner,” a panelist cited Falwell's lawsuit as proof that, in his words, "this isn't just Islamic extremism," but Christian extremism too—to the apparent approval of the other panelists.

In a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law, people have many avenues of recourse—not only lawsuits but also protests, boycotts, ad campaigns, and the ballot box, to name a few—against perceived injustices. But the Falwell lawsuit is evidence of a very different kind of response to religious insult, one that is uniquely Christian. Many people know of Falwell's lawsuit against Flynt. But few know the rest of the story.

Ten years after the Supreme Court's decision, Falwell and Flynt appeared together on Larry King Live. The occasion was the release of *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, a Hollywood film in which Falwell's lawsuit is prominently featured.

During the interview, Falwell embraced Flynt and told King that though he believed Flynt's work was "demeaning to women and children," he "never had any ill feelings toward him." King was incredulous. How could Falwell separate the business from the man—if you will, the sin from the sinner. "I am a Christian," Falwell responded, continuing:

"My interest is that the next time around, Larry, when he accepts Christ, he'll really mean it and go on and get rid of that magazine and go for God. ...I do like him. More than that I love him... I love him, but I hate what he does. And that is not difficult...Christ, when he was on earth, he condemned sin, but loved sinners. And I think what Larry is doing is very damaging to people. I think it is wrong. That is who we are, we are pastors, and we're not supposed to be preaching to the choir. I'm sitting here when you invite me to come, I want to get this close to him to tell him I love him, I'm praying for him, I want to see him come to Christ and I want to be his pastor one day."

Flynt was taken aback by Falwell's profession of Christian love. As he recounted in a 2007 op-ed/eulogy for Falwell in the *Los Angeles Times*:

"[W]hen he started hugging me...on television 10 years later, I was a bit confused. I hadn't seen him since we'd been in court together, and that night I didn't see him until I came out on stage. I was expecting (and looking for) a fight, but instead he was putting his hands all over me."

Flynt titled his piece "My friend" and described how he and Falwell formed a friendship in the years after their joint appearance on King's show. They chatted and visited one another often. They had philosophical conversations and exchanged Christmas cards and dieting tips. They even traveled the country together debating morality and First Amendment issues in colleges and other venues.

Falwell's actions after losing the lawsuit are a wonderful example of how Christians are called to respond to insult or injury. They follow Christ's admonition to turn the other cheek, to forgive our enemies, and to love those who persecute us.

Christianity and its adherents will continue to be mocked and ridiculed, in part because those doing the mocking and ridiculing know that Christians will almost never respond with violence. And Christians will continue to respond nonviolently because love and forgiveness are not merely byproducts of the Christian gospel. They are the Gospel.”²

Mr. President, is it really slander to say we've experienced enough of Muhammad's grand scheme? Why not give *extreme* Christianity a look? You, know, the kind modeled by the **King** of kings and **Lord** of lords!

Rick Forcier

¹. frontpagemag.com/2013/joseph-klein/obamas-war-on-the-extremist-christian-threat/

² dailycaller.com/2015/01/08/msnbc-equates-paris-terrorist-attack-to-jerry-falwell-lawsuit-video/