

## Chapter 1

# THE WAR ON CHRISTIANITY

**T**HE UNITED STATES is no longer just a Christian nation.” Those are the words of Barack Hussein Obama. Many Americans were rightfully stunned when he announced the demise of Christianity: “Whatever we once were, we’re no longer just a Christian nation; we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers,” the president said in that now-infamous interview with David Brody of the Christian Broadcasting Network.<sup>1</sup>

It was a puzzling statement, considering the president publicly professes to be a follower of Christ. And yet in his speeches and his politics the president has gone out of his way to marginalize Christianity.

In 1995 the future president agreed to an interview with Hank De Zutter, a writer for the *Chicago Reader*. In the article Obama accused the Christian right of hijacking the moral high ground. “It’s always easier to organize around intolerance, narrow-mindedness and false nostalgia,” he said to De Zutter. “And they also have hijacked the higher moral ground with this language of family values and moral responsibility.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2007 then-US Sen. Barack Obama unleashed on conservative Christians again, this time at a national meeting of the United Church of Christ, one of the most left-wing denominations in the country. Obama accused evangelical leaders of exploiting and politicizing religious beliefs in an effort to divide the nation.

“But somehow, somewhere along the way, faith stopped being used to bring us together and faith started being used to drive us apart,”

he said in remarks covered by CBS News. “Faith got hijacked, partly because of the so-called leaders of the Christian Right, all too eager to exploit what divides us.”<sup>3</sup>

But Obama was just getting warmed up. “At every opportunity, they’ve told evangelical Christians that Democrats disrespect their values and dislike their church,” he continued, “while suggesting to the rest of the country that religious Americans care only about issues like abortion and gay marriage, school prayer and intelligent design.”<sup>4</sup>

Now, whatever would give us the impression that the Democrats disrespect church? It’s not like they tried to vote God out of their party platform.<sup>5</sup> It’s certainly not that they booed God at the 2012 Democratic National Convention.<sup>6</sup> Oh, wait. They did.

And how can we forget his private comments to a group of elitists in San Francisco, where he declared people who cling to their guns and their religion are bitter Americans?<sup>7</sup> That’s a taste of Barack Obama unplugged. And he has governed accordingly.

Since he was sworn into office, President Obama has waged a massive assault on the Christian faith with the intent to marginalize Christianity and silence those who follow the teachings of Christ. I believe the end goal is to eradicate the Christian faith from the public marketplace of ideas.

Under this president’s leadership, a US military training brief labeled Catholics and evangelical Christians as religious extremists,<sup>8</sup> churches and Christian organizations were forced to violate the tenets of their faith, and schoolchildren were ordered to sing government-approved Christmas carols.<sup>9</sup>

The Internal Revenue Service launched a widespread series of attacks on Christian ministries and pro-life groups—all deemed enemies of the Obama administration. The IRS even set its sights on one of the most famous evangelical Christians in the world: America’s pastor, Billy Graham.

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan’s Purse were hit with IRS audits not too long after they ran full-page ads supporting North Carolina’s marriage amendment. The ad concluded

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with these words: “Vote for biblical values this November 6, and pray with me [Billy Graham] that American will remain one nation under God.”

Franklin Graham, the evangelist’s son, said the audit was “morally wrong and unethical—indeed some would call it ‘un-American.’”<sup>10</sup> The IRS eventually cleared the ministries of any wrongdoing, but the message they sent was crystal clear: enemies of the Obama administration’s policies will suffer the consequences.

The *Biblical Recorder*, the official news journal for the North Carolina Baptist State Convention, was also hit with an audit. The newspaper had run a copy of Graham’s advertisement. They too were cleared—but only after spending more than \$15,000 in legal fees.<sup>11</sup>

“There seems to be a very anti-Christian bias that has flowed into a lot of government agencies—oppression literally against Christian organizations and groups,” editor Allan Blume told me. “It makes you wonder what’s going on.”

IRS agents ordered two pro-life groups to reveal the content of their prayers and prayer meetings, “as if they were engaged in highly offensive or criminal behavior,” the Thomas More Society charged. Another pro-life group was told they could not picket or protest abortion clinics. An attorney representing the pro-life groups called the IRS actions “intimidating” and “heavy-handed.” One IRS agent went so far as to tell a pro-life group it had to remain neutral on the issue of abortion and lectured the group’s president about forcing its religious beliefs on others. “You have to know your boundaries,” IRS agent Sherry Wan can be heard saying in a recording. “You have to know your limits. You have to respect other people’s beliefs.”<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps Ms. Wan could show us where that edict is located in the US Constitution? And while she’s at it, maybe she could also tell us when the IRS became assigned with the task of policing Christian speech.

Frank Page, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, warned of a bleak future for Christians in America. “I’m not a conspiracy theorist, but I do believe the day is coming when churches will see outright persecution as well as a

continued pattern of harassment and marginalization in this culture,” he told me. “Churches better gear up and realize that day is coming.”

Over the past few years, I’ve documented hundreds of instances of religious persecution, including:

- A North Carolina pastor who was fired from his duties as an honorary chaplain for the state House of Representatives after he invoked the name of Jesus in a prayer;<sup>13</sup>
- A senior citizens’ center in Port Wentworth, Georgia, that told elderly guests they could no longer pray over their meals;<sup>14</sup>
- A federal judge who ordered a Texas school district to prohibit public prayer at the Medina Valley Independent School District graduation ceremony. The judge also forbade students from using religious words such as *prayer* and *amen*;<sup>15</sup>
- A Massachusetts eight-year-old boy who was sent home from school and ordered to undergo a psychiatric evaluation after he drew a picture of Jesus on a cross;<sup>16</sup>
- A professor at the University of Kentucky who applied for a job directing the university’s observatory but was turned down after the hiring committee found out he was a Christian;<sup>17</sup>
- Bibles and other religious materials that were briefly banned from Walter Reed Medical Center;<sup>18</sup>
- A New York public school teacher who was ordered to remove inspirational Bible verses from her classroom. The teacher was also told to remove a quote from former President Ronald Reagan. Ironically, the quote read, “If

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we ever forget that we are one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under.”<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Page said the culture is moving rapidly toward an intolerance for people who have a biblical worldview. He called the pace mind-boggling and nerve-rattling. And he made a bone-chilling prediction.

“There will be active and open persecution because of the biblical worldview of churches.... When you have national leaders who say Baptists and other evangelicals are guilty of hate speech because of our recitation of simple scripture, then you are going to see the alienation and active persecution of churches in the United States.”<sup>20</sup>

As you read the following pages, I’m afraid you’ll see that Dr. Page’s greatest fears are already being realized.

### **Banning Prayers**

A widow who lives in a Minnesota apartment complex funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was told she could not pray, read her Bible, or have private discussions of a religious nature in the commons area of the complex.<sup>21</sup>

The incident occurred at the Osborne Apartments in Spring Lake Park, Minnesota, near Minneapolis. Ruth Sweats was having a casual conversation with another resident about the Bible when a social worker interrupted their conversation and told her she could not talk about religion or the Bible in the commons area.

The social worker then told the widow the apartment complex receives funding from the federal government and therefore she did not have First Amendment rights because HUD does not allow religious discussions in public areas of the complex.

Sweats contacted Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a legal advocacy group, who immediately dispatched a letter to the senior living complex urging them to reconsider their actions. “Government funding should not be misused to ban a widow’s prayers,” said ADF legal counsel Matt Sharp. “The private decision of senior citizens to discuss their faith, read the Bible, and pray is private speech, and

no law requires this privately owned independent living facility to restrict the religious expression of these members of America's greatest generation."<sup>22</sup>

The letter explained that "HUD does not prohibit discussion about religion in the facilities to which it provides funding" and that federal court precedent has established that "simply because the government provides a benefit with public funds does not mean that all 'mention of religion or prayers' must be whitewashed from the use of the benefit."<sup>23</sup>

Alliance Defending Freedom also suggested the facility's actions may have violated federal and state anti-discrimination laws. "The right thing to do out of respect for the senior citizens—many of whom fought or saw their spouses fight in wars to defend our nation and the freedoms upon which it is built—is to remove the ban on religious expression in the commons area," the letter states. "We hope that this letter will clear up these issues and that you will do away with this terrible policy."<sup>24</sup>

### **College Shuts Down Dorm Room Bible Study**

Officials at Rollins College in Florida ordered a group of students to shut down a Bible study they were holding in the privacy of a dorm room because, they said, it violated the rules. The incident occurred in the midst of a campus battle over whether religious groups that require their leaders to adhere to specific religious beliefs are violating the school's non-discrimination policies.

Four students affiliated with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship were holding an informal Bible study in the common area of a dorm suite. Midway through the study a resident hall assistant entered the room and asked the student leading the study to step outside.

"He was told they were no longer allowed inside the dorm, even with the express consent of the students to do Bible studies," said Greg Jao, InterVarsity's national field director. "They said it was because InterVarsity was no longer a registered student group on campus."

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The well-known Christian ministry was de-recognized as an official campus organization after it refused to comply with the college's non-discrimination policy. This is a common practice among public universities that are hostile to Christian students.

While InterVarsity welcomes all students and faculty to join its group, it requires leaders to be followers of Christ. The college maintained that requirement is a violation of its non-discrimination policy.

One student who was inside the dorm room when the Bible study was shut down told me it was a confusing moment. "It was really sad," the student said. "One of the students in our group called it frightening." The student asked not to be identified due to fears of backlash from the college.

"I'm so disappointed in the decision that was made to do that," the student said. "We do love this campus. That's why we are involved in student ministry here. There's a great feeling of disappointment because we do feel like this decision is not in the spirit of open dialogue and diversity that we know Rollins upholds as a core belief."

Jao said the students took their concerns to Student Affairs. He said they compared it to kicking a fraternity off campus but still allowing it to sponsor parties. "We pointed out that Christian students holding a Bible study is a little bit different than a fraternity sponsoring a kegger in a dorm," Jao said. "If students want to have a Bible study, they should be free to do so."

But Jao said the college was sending a message to Christian students that they are not welcome. "The challenge is that InterVarsity students are feeling somewhat targeted in ways that no other religious group would be," he said. "You don't get much more quiet than four students meeting together to study the Bible."

And in the aftermath of the college's decision not to exempt religious groups from its non-discrimination policy, other Christian organizations were getting nervous. "Christian students certainly feel marginalized and unwelcome," Jao said. "Whether it's intended or not, that's the message the students have received."

Jao also said at least one other Christian group had been de-recognized, and the college's Catholic student group was also worried

about the ruling. “They want to know how it will affect Catholic students,” Jao said. “I think they see it’s in the cards.”

“This kind of policy leaves open the door for lots of further consequences as far as expulsion and demands on ministries,” the anonymous student said. “The non-discrimination policy is turning into an exclusionary policy in their hands, and we’re hoping the college will see the irony in what’s happening.”

So why not just change InterVarsity’s policy and comply with the college’s demands? The student who reached out to me said that just can’t happen. “To change our policy would be to say anyone with any set of values can lead,” the student said.

I spoke with several other students at the school, and they said they love Rollins College but are very concerned about the future of Christian student ministry. “With decisions like this, it makes the claim that whatever group is being removed off campus isn’t worthy of having that voice,” one student said. “They are not valued by the college.”

“By and large, they are saying this group of students isn’t wanted in the greater conversation on campus,” another student added.

And so the underground church is alive and well in Florida.

### **Wounded Warrior Rejects Church’s Donations**

Elsewhere in Florida, a Christian church and school were devastated after the Wounded Warrior Project refused to accept their fundraising effort because, they were told, it was “religious in nature.”

“We were heartbroken,” said Wallace Cooley, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church and Academy in Fort Pierce, Florida.

Cooley said they had already paid a \$100 registration fee to raise money for the Wounded Warrior Project and were about to launch the campaign when they received an e-mail from the organization. The church had planned on taking up a special offering on the last Sunday in February 2013, and students were collecting money from family and friends.

“We must decline the opportunity to be the beneficiary of your

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event due to our fundraising event criteria, which doesn't allow community events to be religious in nature," read the e-mail from the Wounded Warrior Project community events team. "Please note your registration fee will be refunded within the next 7-10 business days."

The project said that as a nonpartisan organization, it cannot accept event fundraising from companies "in which the product or message is religious in nature."

Pastor Cooley said the church and school were so shocked that the school secretary called the Wounded Warrior Project to make sure there hadn't been a mistake. He said a representative assured her that "religious" was indeed on their banned list. "We had to tell our children and parents we can't give to the Wounded Warrior Project," Pastor Cooley told me. "We are second-class citizens now because we are people of faith."

The fundraising project was a joint effort by the 400-member church and the 460 students who attend the academy. The pastor said he first learned about the project by watching Fox News Channel. "We appreciate the freedoms we enjoy in this country and the fact that our soldiers have fought for freedom of religion," he said. "We teach patriotism in our school."

The pastor said they expected to raise as much as \$50,000 for the veterans. "We are not a wealthy congregation," he said. "But they are generous. We could tell as we began to talk to our people that it stirred their hearts." He said the idea of giving sacrificially to help someone else struck a chord with students in the academy.

Ted and Cherilyn Mein have two young daughters who attend the school. Cherilyn said their girls were simply devastated by the news the fundraising effort had been cancelled. "Our school is all about patriotism," she told me. "We teach that our country was founded for religious freedom—and then to find out that we couldn't even support the Wounded Warriors because we are Christians? It was hard to explain it to them."

Kindergarten teacher Tanya Sue Albritton posted a note on the Wounded Warrior Project Facebook page recounting what she had

to tell her class. “They were very sad,” Albritton wrote. “One little girl wanted to know, ‘Why can’t we share with the soldiers?’”

“I was at a loss as to what I should tell her because I don’t understand it myself,” she wrote. “Well, WWP, why can’t we share with the soldiers?”

Cooley broke the news to his congregation in what he called “one of the saddest letters I have ever had to write.”

“We are very disappointed that we, as a religious organization, are being discriminated against,” he wrote to parents. “But they are a private organization and have and should have the freedom to make their own rules.”

On the flip side, the pastor told parents, “We also have the right to make our choice as to where our support goes.”

Becky Sharp teaches sixth grade at Liberty Baptist Academy. She posted a message on the Wounded Warrior Facebook page noting her extreme disappointment. She said her students had already raised \$400 and that many of the boys and girls donated their lunch money in the fundraising effort. “I am deeply disappointed that an organization such as yours would reject money from American citizens who want to thank their soldiers for what they have done,” she wrote.

Pastor Cooley said they returned donations that had been collected and were looking for another veterans group to help.

### **Police Chaplain Told to Stop Praying in the Name of Jesus**

For more than seven years pastor Terry Sartain ministered to police officers and their families in Charlotte, North Carolina. Whenever the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department invited him to deliver an invocation, he prayed “in the name of Jesus.”

But not anymore. Volunteer chaplains in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department are no longer allowed to invoke the name of Jesus in prayers at public events held on government property. Major John Diggs, who oversees the chaplain program, told television station WSOC the policy is a “matter of respecting that

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people may have different faiths and that it is not aimed at any one religion or denomination.”<sup>25</sup>

Sartain, the pastor of Horizon Christian Fellowship, told me he first learned of the change when he was scheduled to give an invocation at a promotion ceremony. Before the event, he received a telephone call from his superior major. “I was told chaplains can no longer invoke the name of Jesus on government property,” Sartain said. “[He said] if I could refrain from that during the invocation, he would appreciate that.”

Sartain said he was surprised by the telephone call. The pastor said he’s prayed “consistently” in the name of Jesus at past police department events without any issues. “I’m very sad about it,” he said. “I’m a pastor, and Jesus is the only thing I have to offer to bless people—His life and His person.

“It brings about a very real concern about where we are heading as a nation,” he continued. “I serve a God who loves people unconditionally, who died for their sins on the cross, who wants to reconcile Himself to them and love them where they are at—and now I’m told I can’t bless people as a result of that.”

The police department said Sartain could still pray—just not to Jesus. So to whom was the Christian minister supposed to pray? “That was my question,” Sartain said. “If I’m going to pray, what should I pray?”

Sartain said the police department wanted him to deliver a “secular prayer.” But he said, “Even when I wasn’t a Christian, in my past, I didn’t even know what a secular prayer was. Why even pray if it’s to the one who’s in the room? That could be anybody.” So Sartain asked the police department to withdraw his name from consideration for future public prayers.

Sartain said it’s apparent that “Christians, for the most part, are targeted in these days that we exist in.” He said Christians just want the same rights and privileges as everybody else. “Let the playing field remain level,” he said.

## Churches Banned From Public Spaces

In 2011 an evangelical Christian church was told by New York City officials it could no longer rent a community room in a federally funded housing project named after Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor.

An attorney representing the Bronx Bible Church said the congregation was notified that Christmas Day would be the last day the church could worship at the housing project. “It does present a very ugly picture of the state of religious liberties in New York City,” said Jordan Lorence, senior counsel with the Alliance Defending Freedom. “It’s the height of irony that the housing authority would violate the First Amendment at a place named after a Supreme Court justice.”

Lorence said the New York City Housing Authority based its decision on a recent court case that said New York City has a constitutional right to bar churches from renting schools during non-school hours for worship services. The Supreme Court declined to review the case—meaning dozens of Christian churches were then forced to find other places to hold their services. “What’s next—Central Park?” Lorence asked. “Religious groups can’t meet there? Where is this all going to stop?”

A spokesperson for the Housing Authority declined to comment but did offer the following statement: “The terms of this lease have expired, and the New York City Housing Authority is reviewing the renewal of all of its leases.”

The only trouble is, Lorence told me there was no expiration date on the lease and that when the pastor of Bronx Bible Church was contacted by the Housing Authority, there was no mention of the end-of-the-year expiration of the lease. “This is an arbitrary and unconstitutional decision,” Lorence told me shortly after the church was banned. “Even if they adopt an anti-worship-service policy, they haven’t done so yet. So there’s no reason why they should be kicking out a church—especially during the holidays.”

Lorence said the decision to evict the church sends a dangerous message to the city’s Christian community. “They’re suggesting that

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religion is something dangerous that people shouldn't be exposed to, and that is an extreme and wrong understanding of the Establishment Clause," he said, referring to the clause in the First Amendment that prevents the government from declaring a specific church or religion to be the official religion or church of the government. "Religious expression is being driven away, prohibited in public buildings that are open to all other community groups to meet."

### **Jailed for Hosting a Bible Study**

A Phoenix man who violated city zoning laws by hosting a Bible study in the privacy of his home was sentenced to sixty days in jail. Michael Salman was found guilty in the city of Phoenix court of sixty-seven code violations. He was sentenced to sixty days in jail along with three years of probation and a \$12,180 fine.<sup>26</sup>

Members of Salman's Bible study group posted a video of their teacher as he self-reported to the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office. It was an emotional scene. "We believe that people should not be prohibiting other people from having Bible studies in their homes," Salman said outside the jail. "We believe what they are doing is wrong. It's private property. It's our home."

Salman embraced some of his Bible study members before offering final remarks. "At the very end, after all is said and done, God will ultimately have glory in this," he said. "We do this for the glory of the Lord."

Someone off camera could be heard remarking, "I love you, pastor."

Salman's incarceration is the result of a long-running feud between the ordained pastor and the city of Phoenix over weekly Bible studies that Salman and his wife hosted in their home. City officials determined that the weekly gatherings constituted a church—and therefore violated a number of code regulations.

The controversy erupted in 2009, when nearly a dozen police officers raided the Salmans' home and a two-thousand-square-foot building in their backyard. The family had moved their Bible study into the building after the group outgrew the home's living room.

The charges that sent Salman to jail were a result of that raid, ranging from not posting exit lights above the doors to not having handicap ramps or handicap parking.

Salman told me the attacks on his family were nothing more than a crackdown on religious liberty. “They’re attacking what I, as a Christian, do in the privacy of my home,” he said. “At what point does the government have the right to state that you cannot have family and friends over at your home three times a week?”

But city officials said it was a matter of zoning and proper permitting, not religious freedom. They said he was given a permit to convert a garage into a game room, not a church. “Any other occupancy or use—business, commercial, assembly, church, etc.—is expressly prohibited pursuant to the city of Phoenix building code and ordinances,” said Vicki Hill, the chief assistant city prosecutor.

The irony of that rule was not lost on Salman. “If I had people coming to my home on a regular basis for poker night or Monday Night Football, it would be permitted,” he said. “But when someone says to us we are not allowed to gather because of religious purposes, that is when you have discrimination.”

The city of Phoenix argued otherwise. They put out a fact sheet to back up their assertion that he was operating a church on his property. They released a damning memorandum detailing a mountain of evidence. They said that Salman filed for tax-exempt status annually and had as many as eighty people attending services. They also said he collected a tithe.<sup>27</sup>

But perhaps the most disturbing evidence was found inside the family’s home. City officials allege they found chairs—and they were “aligned in a pew formation.” Well, that settles it. I’m surprised they didn’t tie the man to a pole and burn him at the stake.

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, said the attack against Salman should serve as a wake-up call to Christians across the nation. “Any time religious freedom or the freedom of speech is infringed upon, Americans should be concerned,” Perkins said. “We are seeing jurisdictions using zoning ordinances to crack down [on] the exercise of religious freedom.”

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Perkins said there is a movement in recent years for churches to move back to an early church model, where Christians met in private homes rather than church facilities. As a result, he said some communities are, in fact, cracking down on what people do in the privacy of their homes.

“We’re seeing more Bible studies, home-based churches, small groups meeting together,” he said, “and people are not able to do with their own property that which is an exercise of their religious freedom.” Perkins also took issue with the city of Phoenix deciding what constitutes a church. “The definition is nebulous,” he said. “A family of more than eight people who gather for prayer could meet the definition of a church.”

“It goes back to religious freedom,” Perkins continued. “As long as it’s not posing a threat or a nuisance to the surrounding property owners, people should be free to do with their property as they see fit.”

### **No Jesus in the Graveyard**

The family of a Colorado preacher’s wife is still fuming after the director of the city-owned cemetery refused to engrave her final resting place with the name *Jesus* because it might offend people. The city eventually reversed course under public pressure.

“We were in disbelief,” said Stacy Adams, the daughter-in-law of Linda Baker. “Who tries to censor Jesus from a cemetery?” Linda Baker lost her battle with cancer in October 2013. She was the wife of Mark Baker, the pastor of Harvest Baptist Church in Ovid. Adams said her mother-in-law was passionate about her Christian faith and her family. Her final wish was to have her cemetery marker engraved with the ichthus, a symbol of early Christianity. She also wanted the word *Jesus* written inside the fish.

“At first they told us it wouldn’t fit,” Adams told me. “But after we kept pushing them, the cemetery director told us that it might offend somebody. They weren’t going to allow it.”

The family was devastated and asked the cemetery director to

reconsider. He refused. “He said, ‘What if somebody wanted to put a swastika?’” Adams recounted. “My reply was, ‘So what if they do?’ It’s not my business how they want to be remembered.”

The family then took their concerns to the Sterling city manager—but once again, they were rebuffed. “He refused to work with us,” Adams said. “He said he would have to take it to the city attorney. They were being difficult.”

Adams said city officials kept telling them people would be offended by the name of Christ. “We weren’t asking for a six-foot neon sign,” she said. “We did not want to put a cross on everyone’s tombstone. It’s a six-inch fish with the name *Jesus* on it.”

So the family decided to post their plight on Facebook—and that’s when the city had a change of heart. “We gave them fair warning,” Adams said. “We gave them time to do the right thing.”

Sterling city manager Joe Kiolbasa told 9news.com they would no longer censor religious references on headstones and cemetery markers. He said the cemetery manager made a mistake. “This gentleman thought it may have been objectionable to someone because of the Christian connotation,” Kiolbasa told the television station. “It will be allowed in the future.”<sup>28</sup>

Adams tells me the family was incredibly distraught and disturbed by the incident. “As an American and as a Christian, we have this thing called freedom of speech, freedom of expression,” she said. “We weren’t trying to stop anybody from putting anything up. We just wanted the same freedom others have.”

Besides, the cemetery is filled with tombstones that have Bible verses and angels and other religious symbols.

Adams can’t help but wonder why “people are so fearful of one name that they would go to such lengths to try and eliminate it.”

“If it can happen in a small country town like this, it makes you wonder what’s happening in other parts of the nation,” she said.

She raises a valid question. It’s outrageous that a grieving American family had to fight and cajole a city government to allow them to engage in their constitutional rights. I say the city of Sterling,

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Colorado, owes the family of Linda Baker a sincere apology—and it should probably be delivered from the pulpit of Pastor Baker’s church.

As for the cemetery manager—comparing the name of Jesus to a swastika? Really, sir? My only wish is that on Judgment Day, Mrs. Baker is standing at the pearly gates watching you explain yourself to Saint Peter.

### **You Can’t Have Your Cheese and Jesus Too**

A Florida ministry that feeds the poor said a state agriculture department official told them they would not be allowed to receive USDA food unless they removed from their facility portraits of Christ and the Ten Commandments and a banner that reads “Jesus is Lord,” and stopped giving Bibles to the needy.

For the past thirty-one years the Christian Service Center has been providing food to the hungry in Lake City, Florida, without any problems. But all that changed when it said a state government worker showed up to negotiate a new contract.

“The [person] told us there was a slight change in the contract,” said executive director Kay Daly. “They said we could no longer have religious information where the USDA food is being distributed. They told us we had to take that stuff down.”

Daly said it’s no secret that the Christian Service Center is a Christian ministry. “We’ve got pictures of Christ on more than one wall,” she told me. “It’s very clear we are not social services. We are a Christian ministry.”

But Daly and her staff sat in stunned disbelief as the government agents also informed them the Christian Service Center could no longer pray or provide Bibles to those in need. The government contract also forbade any references to the ministry’s chapel.

“We asked if we had to change the name of the organization, but they said we could leave that,” Daly said. “But we had to take our religious stuff down.”

She said they were told they could continue distributing USDA food so long as it was somewhere else on the property—away from

anything that could be considered religious. In other words, the Christian Service Center had a choice: choose God or the government cheese.

So in a spirit of Christian love and fellowship, Daly politely told the government what they could do with their cheese. “We decided to eliminate the USDA food, and we’re going to trust God to provide,” she told me. “If God can multiply fish and loaves for ten thousand people, He can certainly bring in food for our food pantry so we can continue to feed the hungry.”

In a nutshell, Daly said the Christian Service Center would not compromise. “We are a Christian ministry,” she said. “Our purpose is to help people in need and to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are going to pray with them. We are going to offer them a Bible. We are going to counsel them in Christian help. We are going to use our chapel.”

Churches across Lake City have stepped up to the challenge, filling the void left when the government took away their cheese. “I’m called to do what the Lord tells me to do,” Daly said. “I’m not called to worry about it. I pray about it. The Lord answers our prayers, and we move forward one day at a time, one person at a time.”

### **Baptisms Banned in Public Rivers**

For as far back as anyone can remember, Missouri Baptists have gathered on riverbanks for Sunday afternoon baptisms. The preacher leads the new believers into the water, draped in white robes as a choir sings “Shall We Gather at the River.” It’s the way it’s been done for generations—baptizing in creeks, lakes, and rivers “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” But now the long-cherished tradition of taking the plunge has been drawn into a controversy with the federal government.

Many Christians believe the Bible commands new followers of Christ to be baptized immediately after their conversion. It’s a public expression and celebration of their newfound faith in Christ. But the National Park Service began enforcing a policy that required

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churches to obtain special use permits in order to baptize in public waters.

As part of the same permit process, the National Park Service also mandated churches give forty-eight hours advance notice of pending baptisms. But as any Baptist or Pentecostal in good standing knows, that's a problem. "If the Holy Spirit is working on Sunday morning, you're going to baptize Sunday afternoon," Dennis Purcell told the *Salem News*. "You may not know ahead of time."<sup>29</sup>

The National Park Service told local churches the permits were needed to "maintain park natural/cultural resources and quality visitor experiences" and that "specific terms and conditions have been established."<sup>30</sup>

The feds also closed vehicle access to a sandbar along a popular creek in the Ozark Mountains, meaning churches could no longer drive their elderly members to the outdoor baptisms. And to make sure the Baptists behaved, they placed large boulders in the area to block car traffic.<sup>31</sup>

"Like the Baptists and Pentecostals are going to harm natural resources and adversely affect quality visitor experiences by occasionally baptizing new converts?" asked local resident Lewis Leonard. "I can think of a whole lot more activities along the river ways that are not conducive to maintain the natural resources."

Representative Jason Smith fired off a letter to the feds, demanding answers. "I am very troubled by any federal rule that requires churches to apply for a permit for the purpose of baptism, especially when these traditional activities have been done in the rivers and streams of this nation since its founding," the congressman wrote.

Smith pointed out the National Park Service does not require a forty-eight-hour notification from fisherman or swimmers—so why churches? "One would hope that the answer is not 'because the National Park Service wants to limit the number of baptisms performed on the river,'" he said.

The Park Service responded within twenty-four hours. They said the reason they needed two days' notice was to "give the park staff adequate time to prepare the permit."<sup>32</sup>

But based on local outrage—and Smith’s promise to bring the matter before Congress—the Park Service had a change of heart. “As of today, the park’s policy has been clarified to state that no permit will be required for baptisms within the Riverways,” Superintendent William Black wrote in a letter to the congressman. “I can assure you the National Park Service has no intention of limiting the number of baptisms performed within the park.”<sup>33</sup>

Smith called the decision a “victory for common sense. The notion that permits would be required for baptisms on our riverways is ridiculous,” he said.<sup>34</sup>

But it’s not the first time government officials have tried to discourage public baptisms. In 2011 a church in Olympia, Washington, was denied a permit to hold a baptism at Heritage Park, on the grounds of the state capitol.<sup>35</sup>

The Department of General Administration, the state agency that oversees the park, turned down their request stating that the proposed baptism service was a violation of the state constitution. “We approved their permit for the barbecue, but our state constitution does not allow public grounds or funds to be used for religious ceremonies, so we got advice from our attorney general’s office and we denied their permit for the baptism,” GA spokesman Steve Valandra told me.

The American Center for Law and Justice filed an appeal with the state on the church’s behalf, but it was denied. ACLJ attorney Jordan Sekulow said the state of Washington was treating Christians like second-class citizens.

Acting General Administration director Jane Rushford said the government was not preventing the church from exercising its religious liberty. “It’s an outrage. GA [General Administration] is not precluding members of the Reality Church from exercising their First Amendment rights to express their religious beliefs or conducting a baptism ceremony at the church,” Rushford wrote. “However, the use of public property for the performance of religious worship, exercise or instruction is prohibited under the Washington State Constitution.”

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Article One of the Washington State Constitution provides that “No public money shall be appropriated or applied to any religious worship, exercise or instruction, or the support of any religious establishment.”

Sekulow claims the US Constitution prohibits the government from suppressing or excluding speech of private parties. But the state refused to back down. “So now you’ve got a state saying this is too much religious activity so it’s not really speech anymore,” Sekulow said. “This violates the US Constitution.”

Rushford, however, wrote that a “baptism ceremony is a form of religious exercise and worship. And as such it would violate Article 1, Section 11 to authorize the use of state property for this purpose.”

The church held their baptism service at a local YMCA instead. Sekulow said the state’s decision makes it “uncomfortable for Christians to use the facility in the future.”

“If they open up this property for people to use,” he said, “they can’t ban religious groups from being able to access it and perform something like a baptism.” He said if the church were to sue the state it could set a national precedent. “Who is the state to decide what is worship and what isn’t?” he asked.

But while the government cracks down on public expressions of the Christian faith, they are embracing public expressions of the Islamic faith—many times at taxpayer expense. Universities across the nation are spending thousands of dollars to install foot baths so Muslim students can wash their feet before their five-times-a-day prayers. The *New York Times* reported that the University of Michigan-Dearborn spent \$25,000 to install the foot-washing stations in restrooms. The university defended the expenditure, claiming it was for health and safety measures, not religion.<sup>36</sup>

In 2007 officials at Minneapolis Community and Technical College banned a campus coffee cart from playing Christmas carols. But they used taxpayer dollars to construct daily prayer preparation facilities for Muslim students.<sup>37</sup>

Airports have made accommodations for Muslim taxi drivers by

installing foot washing basins. Sky Harbor Airport in Phoenix built a cleanup station to help Islamic drivers meet their religious needs.<sup>38</sup>

And San Francisco International Airport renovated a building to create a house of worship for Muslim workers.<sup>39</sup> Airport officials declined to reveal how much tax money was spent, but a spokesman told the *San Francisco Chronicle* they just wanted to maintain “a good relationship with ground transportation providers.”<sup>40</sup>

So there you have it, good readers. Our government increasingly affords accommodation to the Muslim faith while attempting to regulate the Christian faith.

It reminds me of something John Adams once wrote: “Nothing is more dreaded than the national government meddling with religion.”<sup>41</sup>

### **City Mows Down Cross-Shaped Flower Bed**

A flower bed shaped like a cross was removed from a park in Columbus, Georgia, after non-Christians raised concerns and the city’s mayor determined the cross violated the law.

“We had some complaints from other citizens not of the Christian faith,” Columbus mayor Teresa Tomlinson told me.

The Windsor Park Homeowners Association was responsible for upkeep of the flower bed and at the request of city officials they removed the two arms. Now the cross is shaped like a rectangle—and conforms to federal law.

The flower bed had been a part of the Heath Lake Park for decades. Large stones had been positioned to form the outline of the cross. But Mayor Tomlinson said the symbol ran afoul of a 1983 federal court ruling that she said banned Christian crosses from public land.

She cited a court case involving a fifty-foot lighted cross in Rabun County, Georgia. That particular cross had been a part of the community for forty years, she said—until someone complained. “A Christian cross or a symbol of any particular faith could not permanently rest in a park,” she said. “So we had to abide by the applicable law.”

According to local media accounts, a number of citizens are upset over the removal. “The satisfactory resolution is that the cross is

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there,” resident George Wade told television station WTVM.<sup>42</sup> He was one of many people to attend a recent city council meeting to demand the cross be restored.

“The councilmen are beginning to understand the urgency that needs to be addressed because the people are concerned about this,” he told the television station.<sup>43</sup>

But that’s not going to happen.

Columbus is home to Fort Benning, and the area is home to a number of military retirees, the mayor said. “We have a lot of military retirees of the Jewish faith and other faiths wearing the uniform,” the mayor said. “We’ve had a lot of those individuals come forward talking about the fact that a lot of blood has been shed to make certain that our public institutions are open to people of all faiths, of all races, of all genders.”

Tomlinson did not dispute the notion that many of her constituents might disagree with the decision to remove the cross. “Whenever we have a tradition that begins to fade, that’s always something that becomes very emotional for people,” she said.

She did say, though, that the city would allow Christians to hold Easter sunrise services at the park and that the neighborhood association would be allowed to plant seasonal flowers in the bed, like Easter lilies.

Maybe the city could plant pansies instead.

### **Diner Investigated for Giving Church Discount**

A family-owned restaurant in Pennsylvania is under a state discrimination investigation for offering a 10 percent discount for diners who present a church bulletin on Sundays.

The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission confirmed there was an investigation against Prudhomme’s Lost Cajun Kitchen in the town of Columbia. The complaint was filed by John Wolff, a retired electrical engineer.

“I did this not out of spite, but out of a feeling against the prevailing self-righteousness that stems from religion, particularly in Lancaster

County,” Wolff told the *York Daily Record*. “I don’t consider it an earth-shaking affair, but in this area in particular, we seem to have so many self-righteous religious people, so it just annoys me.”<sup>44</sup>

According to the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, a restaurant is classified as a public accommodation. As such, owners are not allowed to discriminate based on religion, among other things.

Sharon Prudhomme, who owns the restaurant along with her husband, said she’s not discriminating against anybody and plans on fighting the charges. “What freaks me out is the state of Pennsylvania is basically agreeing with this guy,” Prudhomme told me. “We’re just a mom and pop. We’re not some big chain like the Olive Garden.”

Prudhomme said the trouble started in April 2011, when she received the first of several letters from the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF). The FFRF is a Wisconsin-based organization of “more than 17,000 freethinkers, atheists, agnostics and skeptics,” according to its website.<sup>45</sup>

The FFRF demanded the owners stop giving discounts to patrons who brought in a Sunday church bulletin. “I just filed it and blew off the other letters,” Prudhomme said. “I said I have no intention of taking [the offer] off the website.”

Then the restaurant was served with a sixteen-page complaint from the state of Pennsylvania accusing her of discrimination. “I’m an American,” Prudhomme said. “This is America. This is my business, and we’re not breaking any laws.”

Prudhomme said a representative from the state suggested she compromise and sign an agreement that she would offer discounts to any civic organization in the town. “I said, ‘Wait a minute—you’re asking my husband and I to give anybody coming through my door a discount?’” she recounted. “They said yes.”

“I said, ‘Are you crazy?’” she continued. “We have taxes to pay. We have utility bills, payroll, mortgages, and they’re expecting me to give everyone a discount?”

Prudhomme said that’s just not going to happen. “This is our business,” she said. “We’re the ones paying the taxes. We need the

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people coming in. Our life is in this—and then to have someone come along and tell me what I can do and what I can't do?"

She then wondered if the restaurant's other discounts might be considered discriminatory too—like the one on Tuesday night, where kids under age twelve get to eat free. Or what about the senior discount? "Could someone under sixty-five complain?" she asked.

Wolff told the LancasterOnline that he discovered the church discount on the privately owned restaurant's website. "That rubbed me a bit the wrong way," he told the online publication. "It's not a big deal in itself, and I have no animosity towards Prudhomme's, but I do bear a grudge against the religious right that seems to intrude on our civil rights."<sup>46</sup>

The commission ultimately determined the Prudhommes could continue their promotion, but the discount must be given to bulletin holders "from any group oriented around the subject of religious faith," even atheists, whom the federal courts consider to have a religious creed.<sup>47</sup>

These are just some of the more egregious skirmishes in the war on Christianity. The battles are no longer limited to urban centers such as New York City and Los Angeles. The atheists and secularists and liberals have already conquered the big cities. Now, they're going after Bible Belt towns and cities. They have taken their fight to the suburbs and small towns.

I suspect at this point in our journey that you might be slightly overwhelmed. It's understandable. These stories are not covered in the daily newspapers. You won't see them on the evening newscasts. This is a war that the mainstream media has decided is not worth covering. That's because this is an unconventional war. And the Bible tells us the enemy cannot be defeated with modern day weapons: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."<sup>48</sup>

Just before the start of World War II the British government produced a motivational poster intended to raise the morale of the public.

“Keep Calm and Carry On,” the posters declared.<sup>49</sup> We had a similar saying growing up in the Deep South. It brought a smile to our faces during those rough patches of life. And perhaps it might offer you a bit of encouragement before we move on to the next chapter: Keep Calm and Butter a Biscuit.