



# THE TAMPA BAY AOU NEWSLETTER

## CHURCH-STATE ACTIVISM & ADVANCES

AU Tampa-  
Hillsborough  
Newsletter  
9<sup>th</sup> Edition  
SPRING-SUMMER  
2008

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One Barbados Avenue  
#3D  
Tampa FL 33606  
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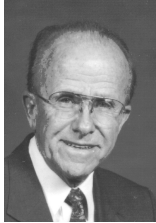
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### My Thoughts at Our 5-Year Mark

By Dr. Albert N. Wells, chapter president

Our experience (*i.e.*, influence) in Tampa/Hillsborough has been modest at most, but we have established a presence at least. Attendance at chapter meetings has been slim. We've suffered grievous losses of local leadership on the Board. We have not been as fully involved in the spirit of "Get local!" recommended



by AU national. Our projects have been reasonably successful but they need improvement and refinement.

Even so, we are here ... we are established ... and we deserve a reassessment and recommitment. The following thoughts are offered for reflection and discussion.

### FIRST, PERSONAL (THEOLOGICAL) THOUGHTS:

Many scholars believe that the first amendment was crafted not to get rid of religion, but rightly to understand, recognize, appreciate and respond to religion—the best of it and the worst of it—in short to encourage the best in religion for the good of the nation.

Thus, Elements of a positive approach (as I see them) are:

- » Love is a civic responsibility too ("Love your neighbor as yourself—warts and all")
- » Tolerance is a social, a mutual privilege ("You also have to tolerate me!")
- » Citizenship is a practical, even dynamic function. Doing as important as thinking.
- » Ought we not to give time and place to discuss these thoughts? Shouldn't we encourage a fellowship of understanding?

[continued on page 4 ... see, 5-Year Mark]

### Florida's Religion/State Separation Threatened in 2008 Elections

by Ken Cooley, chapter vice-president

The Jeb Bush administration is still at it. The former governor's foot soldiers on his Taxation and Budget Reform Commission squandered their chance for serious tax reform by focusing instead on continuing their attacks on the public school system. Florida's Constitution will take a direct hit in the process.



Unless stopped by the voters or the courts in this year's election cycle the exemplary religion/state separation features of Florida's State Constitution will be gutted and our tax dollars will be funneled directly to private and religious institutions. Amendments 7 and 9 are the most direct attacks on the separation language and public schools of our Constitution. The most pernicious is Amendment 7 which changes Article I, section 3 as shown below. The underlined addition is obviously a wolf in sheep's clothing ... and the struck-through deletions insure the public funding of religious activities.

### ARTICLE I DECLARATION OF RIGHTS

*SECTION 3. Religious freedom.—There shall be no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting or penalizing the free exercise thereof. Religious freedom shall not justify practices inconsistent with public morals, peace or safety. An individual or entity may not be barred from participating in any public program because of religion. ~~No revenue of the state or any political subdivision or agency thereof shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution.~~*

[continued on page 3 ... see, Amendments]

## The Fragile Exception ... Church and State

By Fern Frederick, chapter Secretary

Emblazoned on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* [August 19, 2007] was this bold quote from its cornerstone article: "We in the West find it incomprehensible that theological ideas still inflame the minds of men, stirring up messianic passions that can leave societies in ruin. We assumed that this was no longer possible, that human beings had learned to separate religious questions from political ones, that political theology died in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. We were wrong. It's we who are the fragile exception."<sup>1</sup>



Author Mark Lilla states: "After centuries of strife, the West has learned to separate religion and politics—to establish the legitimacy of its leaders without referring to divine command. There is little reason to expect that the rest of the world—the Islamic world in particular—will follow".

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:** Political theology, from Greek and Roman antiquity, continues to this day. Lilla believes theology is a set of reasons people give themselves for the way things are and the way they ought to be. It is easy to assume that the "cosmic order" was constructed for a purpose, reflecting its maker's will. Believers have reasons for assuming it offers guidance for political life. But how that guidance is to be understood depends on how God is imagined, *i.e.*, a passive, silent force or a person with intentions man cannot know on his own. The latter concept leaves no choice but to obey such a God, so the beginnings of political theology are born. It offers a way to think about the conduct of human affairs, and connects those thoughts to loftier ideas about the existence of God, the structure of the cosmos, the nature of the soul, the origins of all things, and, at last, the end of time.

For thousands of years the West took inspiration from a "triune God" ruling over a created cosmos and guiding men by means of revelation, inner conviction, and the natural order. Though a magnificent and powerful civilization flowered, it was difficult to understand what political lessons were to be drawn from it. Throughout the Middle Ages Christians argued over these questions and the "City of Man" was set against the "City of God", *i.e.*,

secular sword against ecclesiastical miter, emperor against pope. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to Martin Luther and John Calvin, there was no longer a unified Christendom to reform. Wars of Religion followed, lasting for one-and-a-half centuries.

Enter English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who tried to find a way out of this bind. In his 1651 treatise, "Leviathan", he changed from addressing God and his commands to how and why human beings believed them. If we can understand that, Hobbes reasoned, we can begin to understand why religious convictions so often lead to political conflicts.

Lilla goes on to describe Hobbes' influence on western thinking, namely, that it might be possible to build legitimate political institutions without grounding them on divine revelation. In order to escape the destructive passions of messianic faith, the West replaced a political theology centered on God with a political philosophy centered on man. This was the Great Separation, occurring in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Over the next few centuries western thinkers such as John Locke began to imagine a new kind of political order in which power would be limited, divided and shared ... public law would govern citizens and institutions, allowing many different religions to flourish free from state interference. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century this wonderful idea looked secure.

But not all western nations accepted these new concepts. The Weimar Republic of Germany returned to a messianic spirit to justify Hitler's grab for power over that country's institutions. Thus was Thomas Hobbes' law borne out: messianic theology eventually breeds messianic politics. In Germany, translating religious notions of apocalypse and redemption into justification of political messianism resulted in the rampant destruction of that country. It was only after WWII that principles of modern liberal democracy became fully rooted in continental Europe.

In the chasm between Muslim and western thinking, Lilla describes how the American experience, unique among developed countries, allowed commitment to its faiths (some even exotic) while remaining equally committed to the Great Separation. While Americans have

1 This is an abridgement of the lengthy *Times* article ("The Great Separation", adapted from the book *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics and the Modern West* by Mark Lilla, a professor of humanities at Columbia University)..

[continued on page 3 ... see, Fragile Exception]



## FRAGILE EXCEPTION ... continued from page 2

potentially explosive differences over abortion, school prayer, euthanasia, etc., they generally settle them within the bounds of the Constitution. Because this works so well for us, we assume modernization and secularization will eventually extinguish Muslim theocracy. But this assumption highlights how we misunderstand the world we live in. There is a vast intellectual chasm here, and agreement on basic principles is impossible. We must learn to live with this dichotomy.

Many Muslims believe Sharia is meant to cover the whole of life, that God revealed a law governing all human affairs. Those who believe this find the principle of the Great Separation to be alien, indeed a point of friction. U.S. immigration policies have led to a large Muslim population in this country wherein public institutions such as women's rights are a source of conflict. Only accommodation and mutual respect can help.

Western thought over the last few centuries has assumed that science, theology, urbanization and education would dispel the political power of traditional faiths, as occurred in Europe. But we cannot trust the same process will take hold in the Muslim world. Some Muslim thinkers are promoting a "liberal Islam" more adapted to the demands of modern life and tolerant of other faiths. But some of these thinkers have been exiled or imprisoned for their efforts. Though we cannot expect mass conversion to the principle of the Great Separation, we welcome any transformations in Muslim political theology that ease religious co-existence.

Lilla closes with these words: "We have chosen to keep our politics unilluminated by divine revelation. All we have is one lucidity, which we must train on a world where faith still inflames the minds of men".



As Mankind becomes more liberal, they will be more apt to allow that all those who conduct themselves as worthy members of the community are equally entitled to the protections of civil government. I hope ever to see America among the foremost nations of justice and liberality.

*George Washington, 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. President*

## AMENDMENTS ... continued from page 1

### AMENDMENT 9

AU's *Church & State* July/August feature article "Florida Flim Flam" by Sandhya Bathija summarizes the damage to be done by Amendment 9 as follows

Amendment 9 would remove from the constitution language that a "paramount duty of the state" is a "uniform, efficient, safe, secure and high quality system of free public schools." The revised Article IX, Section 1 will state, "this duty shall be fulfilled, at a minimum and not exclusively" through public schools, invalidating the Florida Supreme Court's *Bush v. Holmes* decision."

Bathija reports further that a coalition lawsuit, filed on June 13 in Leon Circuit Court in Tallahassee, asserts that the Florida Tax and Budget Reform Commission exceeded its authority since neither amendment deals with "taxation or the state budgetary process." And that "many school associations are backing the lawsuit along with AU, including the Florida Education Association, the Florida School Boards Association, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, and the Florida Association of School Administrators. The Florida ACLU, the Anti-Defamation League and People for the American Way also joined in filing the lawsuit."

The entire article can be found at [au.org](http://au.org).

If the lawsuit is not successful then an effective education campaign will be waged by all of the coalition described above. If you care about this issue and would like to act locally then please contact us at [autampa.org](http://autampa.org) and help us inform the public on these radical amendments to our state constitution.

### AMENDMENT 2

Also directly related to Religion/State separation is Amendment 2, the Florida Marriage Protection Amendment. The Amendment is sponsored by Florida4Marriage, an umbrella group that includes representatives of Florida Catholic Conference and Florida Baptist Convention. Amendment 2 debases the fundamental religious concept of "marriage" by rendering it a government controlled civil institution and defining it as only between a man and a woman.

Details of all the 2008 amendments can be found at: <http://election.dos.state.fl.us/initiatives/initiativelist.asp>



**5-YEAR MARK ... continued from page 1**

SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

1) *Organizational*—How do we make meetings more productive?

Do we even need meetings? With modern technology and media, are there better means of communication? The recent new phone networks, for example?

2) *Agenda*—We have done some good things ... we ought to appreciate and learn from them. In my judgment the best thing we have done in the last five years is educational, *i.e.*, the “skits” and “demonstrations” our late Board member Margaret Peeler helped us pull off. Is this not a fruitful way to ‘get local” as national recommends?

Now: How can we build on that successful venture? One option: communicate through churches as well as teachers’ organizations to set up meetings and get the Great Separation message across. In addition, civic organizations might help. We have an educational job to do for our whole society, and AU is in a strategic position to made a difference.

Let’s look just once again at the 1<sup>st</sup> amendment:

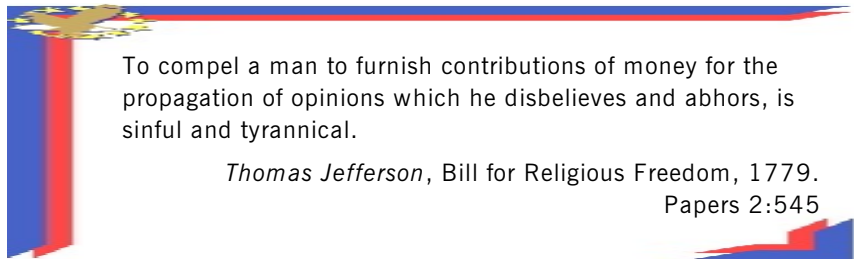
*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”*

Just 16 words! But are they not still among the most revolutionary political words ever written or spoken? Even the Pope recently acknowledged it.

When I came to Tampa seven years ago, I was surprised, even shocked, to learn there was no local chapter of AU in existence here—even though there were many contributors to the national organization. Our good friend, the late Sidney Goetz, helped us get this organization under way, and it deserves enthusiastic support of all of us.

Your local Board will meet in a few days to chart out the way ahead. Give it your full support. Recruit new members. **“We’ve gott-a big job to do!”**

..... Al Wells



To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical.

*Thomas Jefferson, Bill for Religious Freedom, 1779.*  
Papers 2:545



ONE BARBADOS AVE  
#3D  
TAMPA FL 33606  
[www.autampa.org](http://www.autampa.org)