Volume 6 September 2010 Issue 003

The Coop Report...

Enough evidence to convict Obama of being a Christian?

In recent days, Obama's religious preferences have been a subject of discussion, likely resulting from his approval of building a mosque near the World Trade Center site. Soon after his comments in this gathering of a mostly Muslim audience, the White House insisted that "President Obama is a Christian who prays daily," as it looked to amp down growing doubts among Americans about the President's religion. 'The President is obviously a Christian,' spokesman Bill Burton said Thursday as Obama headed out for vacation. 'He prays every day.'"

Sadly, "praying every day" does not justify anyone to be called a Christian. Bill Burton, along with a large majority of Americans has only a cursory knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. Many who identify themselves as Christians are not committed disciples (students) of God's Word. As a result of their superficial knowledge of the Scriptures, they lack the understanding of the doctrines provided by the Holy Spirit that provide the means of understanding the very character of God (inasmuch as man can understand the majesty, the greatness, and holiness of God).

This edition of *The Coop Report,* while focused on the false claims that Obama is a Christian, is intended to echo Paul's message to Timothy to all 21st century committed Christians so they may be ready to defend the faith…

> *"**4**[1] I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: [2] Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.*
> *[3] For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. [4] They will reject the truth and chase after myths."*
>
> *(2 Timothy 4:1-4)*

The State of Christianity in America

The *Barna Group*, established in 1984, is widely considered to be the leading research organization focused on the intersection of faith and culture. In a current article on their web site, they surmise the state of Christian beliefs as follows:

Choosing Specific Beliefs

The United States has well over 200 different Christian denominations, a testimony to the historic importance people have attached to doctrinal accuracy. But things have changed dramatically in recent decades. The Barna survey underscored the fact that people no longer look to denominations or churches to offer a slate of theological views that the individual adopts in its entirety.

By a three to one margin (71% to 26%) adults noted that they are personally more likely to develop their own set of religious beliefs than to accept a comprehensive set of beliefs taught by a particular church. Although born again Christians were among the segments least likely to adopt the a la carte approach to beliefs, a considerable majority even of born again adults (61%) has taken that route. Leading the charge in the move to customize one's package of beliefs are people under the age of 25, among whom more than four out of five (82%) said they develop their own combination of beliefs rather than adopt a set proposed by a church.

Evidence of people's willingness to part with church teaching was shown in other data from the survey regarding what people believe. Among individuals who describe themselves as Christian, for instance, close to half believe that Satan does not exist, one-third contend that Jesus sinned while He was on earth, two-fifths say they do not have a responsibility to share the Christian faith with others, and one-quarter dismiss the idea that the Bible is accurate in all of the principles it teaches.

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Implications of the Research

Asked to describe what the research means for American society today, researcher George Barna offered several insights.

1. The Christian faith is less of a life perspective that challenges the supremacy of individualism as it is a faith being defined through individualism. Americans are increasingly comfortable picking and choosing what they deem to be helpful and accurate theological views and have become comfortable discarding the rest of the teachings in the Bible.

2. Growing numbers of people now serve as their own theologian-in-residence. One consequence is that Americans are embracing an unpredictable and contradictory body of beliefs. Barna pointed out, as examples, that millions of people who consider themselves to be Christian now believe that the Bible is totally accurate in all of the lessons it teaches at the same time that they believe Jesus Christ sinned. Millions also contend that they will experience eternal salvation because they confessed their sins and accepted Christ as their savior, but also believe that a person can do enough good works to earn eternal salvation.

3. In the past, when most people determined their theological and moral points of view, the alternatives from which they chose were exclusively of Christian options - e.g., the Methodist point of view, the Baptist perspective, Catholic teaching, and so forth. Today, Americans are more likely to pit a variety of non-Christian options against various Christian-based views. This has resulted in an abundance of unique worldviews based on personal combinations of theology drawn from a smattering of world religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam as well as secularism.

4. Faith, of whatever variety, is increasingly viral rather than pedagogical. With people spending less time reading the Bible, and becoming less engaged in activities that deepen their biblical literacy, faith views are more often adopted on the basis of dialogue, self-reflection, and observation than teaching. Feelings and emotions now play a significant role in the development of people's faith views - in many cases, much more significant than information-based exercises such as listening to preaching and participating in Bible study.

What are the Fruits of Obama's Presidency?

Obama perfectly fits into the pattern categorized by the preceding *Barna Group* study. The evidence for this lies in the fruits of Obama's actions. For instance, in the March 2009 edition of ***The Coop Report…*** (available online as a pdf file at www.ChristianEquity.com), I examined the fruits of Obama's actions-to-date. This listing includes his claim to be a Christian while at the same time doing or believing things that would not be acceptable to a committed Christian.

- Being a member of Trinity United Church of Christ which endorses the legitimacy of gay, lesbian, and transgender lifestyles
- Having a gay Bishop (Gene Robinson), a Muslim cleric, a Hindu, and the hate-filled Reverend Lowery (Trinity UCC) to provide the prayers for his inauguration ceremony
- Stating that he believes in evolution
- Straining our country's relationship with Israel
- Supporting abortion rights

In more recent times, Obama has pressured Israel to divide the Holy City of Jerusalem as a means of achieving a "peace" accord with the Palestinians. Again, this action would be contrary to God's teaching. There are numerous references in the Holy Scriptures that tell us that Jerusalem (i.e., Zion, the Holy City, etc.) is God's chosen city. Two of these references follow:

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> [14] *Then the angel said to me, "Shout this message for all to hear: 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: My love for Jerusalem and Mount Zion is passionate and strong.*
>
> *Zechariah 1:14-16 (NLT)*
>
> [17] *"Then you will know that I, the LORD your God, live in Zion, my holy mountain. Jerusalem will be holy forever…"*
>
> *Joel 3:17 (NLT)*

Additionally, we must not forget God's promise with Abram (Abraham) that he would make a great nation through him. God specifically stated that He will bless those to who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel.

> [2] I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse;
>
> Genesis 12: 2-3 (NRSV)

God simply does not condone the division of His Holy City nor will He bless those who do not stand by Israel.

What about the Claim that Obama is a Christian?

In the past few days, Obama's administration must have been feeling some heat from at least some of us who have a much improved knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. An article by Margaret Talev (McClatchy Newspapers) that ran in the Charlotte Observer, Friday, August 20, 12010, quotes Pastor Kirbyjon Galdwell of Windsor Village United Methodist Church in Houston as saying, "He (Obama) is a Christian by choice, a devout Christian." According to Galdwell, Obama regularly calls him for inspiration. I guess in defense of Galdwell as a reputable Christian minister, the article says that he officiated at the wedding of President George W. Bush's daughter Jenna.

The article also names Pastor Joel Hunter of Northland Church as another defender of Obama's claim to be a Christian. He says, "Those of us who've spent time with him and have had a part of forming his spiritual life can testify with certainty of his commitment to Christ."

Unfortunately, many have or will be mislead by these claims in Talev's article. The aforementioned article from the *Barna Group* seems to convict these two pastors of also adopting a worldly view of the Christian faith. As the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, a young minister of the church in Ephesus:

> *"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."*
>
> *2 Timothy 4:2-4 (NIV)*

Perhaps somewhat dated, but nonetheless a personal testimony of Obama's beliefs, is an interview he had soon after he won the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate. This interview with Cathleen Falsani (a religious reporter for the Chicago Sun-Times) occurred on March 27, 2004. In her interview, Ms. Falsani asked some very direct questions about Obama's religious beliefs. The following are a few excerpts of this interview along with one of many counterpoints from the Scriptures:

Falsani: "What do you believe?"
Obama: "I am a Christian...So, I have a deep faith. So I draw from the Christian faith...I'm rooted in the Christian tradition. I believe that there are many paths to the same place, and that is a belief that there is a higher power, a belief that we are connected as a people."

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> [6] Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."
>
> (John 14:6 NLT)

Falsani: "Have you always been a Christian?"
Obama: "I was raised by my mother and my mother was a Christian. So, my mother, who I think had as much influence on my values as anybody, was not someone who wore her religion on her sleeve. We'd go to church for Easter. She wasn't a church lady. As I said, we moved to Indonesia. She remarried an Indonesian who wasn't particularly, he wasn't a practicing Muslim. But my mother was deeply spiritual person, and would spend a lot of time talking about values and give me books about the world's religions, and talk to me about them. And I think always, her view always was that underlying these religions were a common set of beliefs about how you treat other people and how you aspire to act, not just for yourself but also for the greater good."

"I'm a big believer in tolerance. I think that religion at its best comes with a big dose of doubt. I'm suspicious of too much certainty in the pursuit of understanding just because I think people are limited in their understanding."

Falsani: "Who's Jesus to you?"
Obama: "Jesus is an historical figure for me, and he's also a bridge between God and man, in the Christian faith, and one that I think is powerful precisely because he serves as that means of us reaching something higher. And he's also a wonderful teacher. I think it's important for all of us, of whatever faith, to have teachers in the flesh and also teachers in history."

> [25] The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." [26] Then Jesus told her, "I Am the Messiah!"
>
> *John 4: 25-26 (NLT)*

Falsani: "Jack Ryan (Obama's Republican opponent in the U.S. Senate race at the time) said talking about your faith is fraught with peril for a public figure."
Obama: "Alongside my own deep personal faith, I am a follower, as well, of our civic religion. I am a big believer in the separation of church and state."

Obama continues: "There's the belief, certainly in some quarters, that people haven't embraced Jesus Christ as their personal savior that they're going to hell.
Falsani: "You don't believe that?"
Obama: "I find it hard to believe that my God would consign four-fifths of the world to hell."

> [13] "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. [14] But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it."
>
> *Matthew 7: 13-14 (NLT)*

> [15] And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.
>
> *Revelation 20: 15 (NIV)*

Obama continues: "If all it took was someone proclaiming I believe Jesus Christ and that he died for my sins, and that was all there was to it, people wouldn't have to keep coming to church, would they?"

> [16] "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. [17] God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. [18] There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. "
>
> *John 3:16-18 (NLT)*

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Falsani: "Do you believe in heaven?"
Obama: "Do I believe in the harps and clouds and wings?"
Falsani: "A place spiritually you go to after you die?"
Obama: "What I believe in is that if I live my life as well as I can, that I will be rewarded. I don't presume to have knowledge of what happens after I die. But I feel very strongly that whether the reward is in the here and now or in the hereafter, the aligning myself to my faith and my values is a good thing."

> "4 and we have a priceless inheritance—
> an inheritance that is kept in heaven for
> you, pure and undefiled, beyond the
> reach of change and decay. 5 And
> through your faith, God is protecting you
> by his power until you receive this salva-
> tion, which is ready to be revealed on
> the last day for all to see."
>
> *1 Peter 1:4-5 (NLT)*

Falsani: "Do you believe in sin?"
Obama: "Yes."
Falsani: "What is sin?"
Obama: "Being out of alignment with my values."

> "22 But the Scriptures declare that we
> are all prisoners of sin, so we receive
> God's promise of freedom only by be-
> lieving in Jesus Christ."
>
> *Galatians 3:22 (NLT)*

Editor's note: Since the issue of abortion did not come up in the preceding interview, I will reference a forum discussion at Messiah College on April 13, 2008 during which Obama had this to say in response to the question, "Do you personally believe that life begins at conception?"

Obama: "This is something that I have not come to a firm resolution on. I think it's very hard to know what that means, when life begins. Is it when a cell separates? Is it when the soul stirs? So I don't presume to know the answer to that question. What I know is that there is something extraordinarily powerful about potential life and that that has a moral weight to it that we take into consideration when we're having these debates."

(Source: 2008 Democratic Compassion Forum at Messiah College Apr 13, 2008)

> "13 You made all the delicate, inner
> parts of my body and knit me to-
> gether in my mother's womb.
> 14 Thank you for making me so
> wonderfully complex!
> Your workmanship is marvelous—
> how well I know it.
> 15 You watched me as I was being
> formed in utter seclusion, as I was
> woven together in the dark of the
> womb.
> 16 You saw me before I was born.
> Every day of my life was recorded in
> your book. Every moment was laid
> out before a single day had passed."
>
> *Psalm 139:13-16 (NLT)*

Well, that's a sad commentary on the leader of our nation, but there is always hope...

Continue to pray for our nation and our nation's leaders, that we may be restored to our Christian roots.

Remember also *2 Chronicles 7:13-16:*

> *12 Then one night the LORD appeared to*
> *Solomon and said,*
> *"I have heard your prayer and have cho-*
> *sen this Temple as the place for making*
> *sacrifices. 13 At times I might shut up the*
> *heavens so that no rain falls, or com-*
> *mand grasshoppers to devour your*
> *crops, or send plagues among you.*
> *14 Then if my people who are called by*
> *my name will humble themselves and*
> *pray and seek my face and turn from*
> *their wicked ways, I will hear from*

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heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to every prayer made in this place. [16] *For I have chosen this Temple and set it apart to be holy—a place where my name will be honored forever. I will always watch over it, for it is dear to my heart.*

We are together in Christ,

Brian

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