

# Is Christianity An Oppressed Minority?

Recently hundreds of Christians gathered on the steps of the state judicial building in Montgomery, Ala., to offer support to Judge Roy Moore and his 5,300-pound monument to the Ten Commandments. They were also there to protest a federal court order that had the monument removed.

Leaders among the crowd compared their actions to the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Some evoked the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, suggesting Judge Moore's defiance of a federal court order was in concert with the slain civil rights leader. In that spirit, the crowd sang, "We shall overcome."

This is not the first time the Christian right has compared its agenda to the civil rights issues of the '60s. Ralph Reed, former president of the Christian Coalition writes in his book *Politically Incorrect*, that Christians in America are routinely mocked in the media. Because of this, Reed describes Christians in America as "the new Amos and Andy." His reference is to a racially offensive television sitcom from the 1950s that portrayed urban blacks in the worst of comic stereotypes.

Reed also describes Christians as "riding in the back of the bus" in American culture. Reed argues that Christians are blocked from participation in the public sphere and are therefore like minority bus riders in the 1950s who were forced to give up their seats to white customers and move to the back of the bus.

In the 1960s when followers of Dr. King were singing "we shall overcome," they were dealing with a political and economic system that had completely disenfranchised them. They were segregated from the best schools, from colleges, and consequently from decent jobs.

But is this true of the Christian community in the United States? Are Christian people prohibited from voting? Are they excluded from jobs because they are

Christian? Do they drink from separate water fountains or have separate public toilet facilities?

The fact is conservative Christians hold enormous power in our culture. The Religious Right claims they gave Ronald Reagan the White house in 1980. The Christian Coalition takes credit for the resurgence in the Republican Party. And it hardly needs to be pointed out that President Bush is a conservative evangelical. It doesn't make much sense for the Christian right to portray themselves as an oppressed minority when they seem to be running things.

It would actually be more accurate for these Christians to sing "we shall overturn." For the past 40 years Christians on the political right have been trying to overturn court decisions that ban teacher-led prayer and Scripture reading, and of course monuments to the Ten Commandments. But these prohibitions hardly constitute political oppression.

There is a puzzling insecurity at work in all this. Even while wielding enormous political power, many of the faithful shudder in fear that God has been banished from the landscape simply because the Ten Commandments are not on display in the court house. They argue that if Scripture is not affirmed by the state, God is silenced in our land. This certainly diminishes the significance of the church—apparently the Scripture reading and prayer that goes on there doesn't count.

Ironically, the remedy for this insecurity can only be found in the church. Faith must be grounded in a community, and a tradition, and marked by meaningful rituals and celebrations. Only then can faith conquer fear and instill confidence. Interestingly, according to the Scriptures, that's how we are supposed to acknowledge God anyway.

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