

OPINION

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Enough with the attacks on Islam!



Bill Fletcher, Jr.
 Guest Columnist

I cannot believe the likes of the Reverends Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell! The inflammatory, ahistorical attacks on Islam as an alleged violent or terrorist religion are as absurd as they are insulting. Consider for a moment: 19 men were directly involved in the 9/11/2001 terror attacks. They were members of an organization - Al Qaeda - that by some estimates ranges from 1,000 to 2,000 members - this out of a global Muslim population of more than 1 billion people! If the words of Robertson and Falwell were not so insulting and explosive, I would have assumed them to be from a skit on "Saturday Night Live."

It is not surprising that there are right-wing Christian evangelists in the United States who possess no sense of history. What is surprising is the amount of media time and attention they have obtained. Here we are witness to blatant distortions of history offered by men of the cloth with the clear intention of demonizing an entire religion.

The hypocrisy of the Robertson, Falwell, et al., attack on Islam is obvious. Each religion on Earth has, at one point or another, been used in the service of violence and evil. This is as true of Christianity as it is Islam.

Robertson, Falwell, et al., should be familiar with the Crusades - launched by European Christians - which resulted in the untold loss of lives and property; or, the sacking of Constantinople by the same Crusaders in which the streets were literally flowing with blood; or, the Spanish Inquisition, used by Christians against so-called heretics, Muslims and Jews; or, the destruction of the Aztec, Incan and other Native American civilizations in the name of rooting out paganism and introducing Christianity; or, the blessing by virtually every European Christian denomination of

slavery and the slave ships that transported millions of Africans to either the New World or to our deaths; or the colonization of Africa, Asia and Latin America. All were in the name of Christianity.

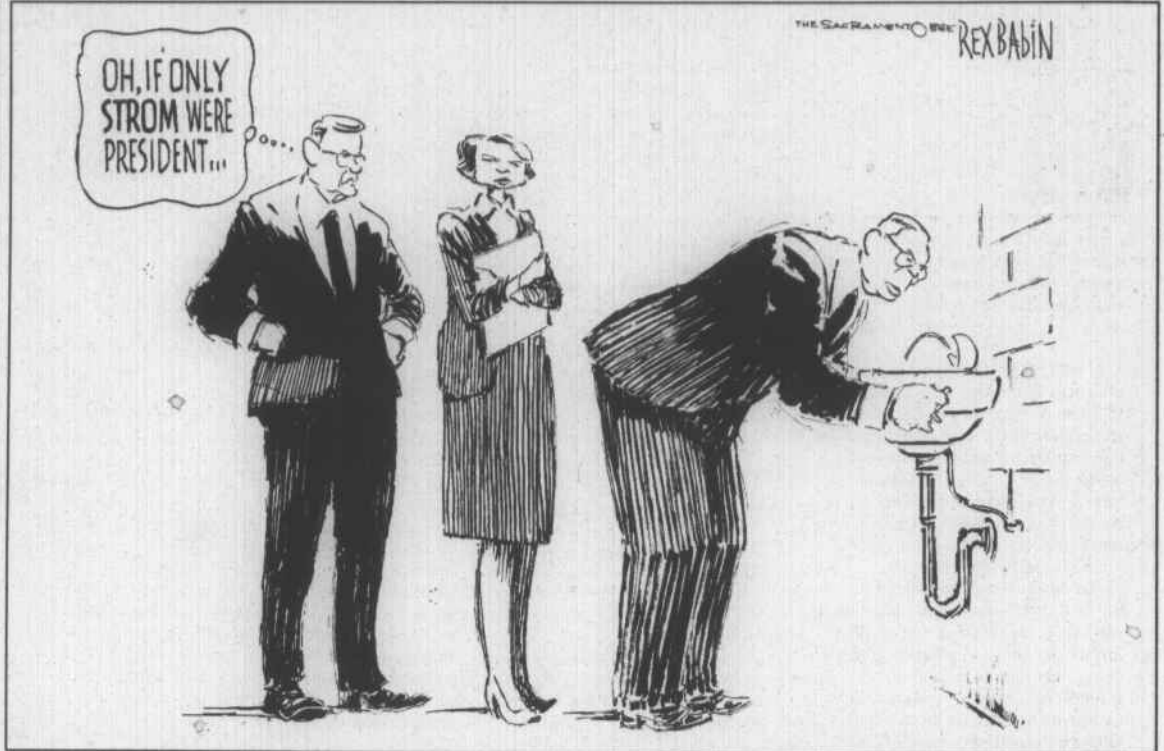
Does one need to add to this list? Would it be acceptable to blame all current Christians for these atrocities? Can one write off the words of Jesus because of these same atrocities?

Some commentators have attempted to confuse the issue by acknowledging that Islam is not inherently violent but that violent factions currently dominate it. Again, this is nothing more than sophistry. As with all religions, there are tendencies within Islam. So-called "political Islam," "Islamic fundamentalism" or "right-wing Islam" all exist as tendencies among the billion-plus global Muslim population.

What is missed, however, is that in response to the racism, colonialism and imperialism of Europe and North America, the oppressed peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America have sought direction and answers from various political, cultural and religious movements. Whether Marxism (secular or religiously influenced), Islam, or any other view, there have been attempts to reaffirm the humanity of billions of people who have been derailed from the course of their own development in the interests of the wealthy of Europe and North America.

The fact that certain people should distort Islam in order to justify political terror speaks to the desperation and frustration of millions that drives some to commit atrocities. It says nothing about the religious doctrine of Islam or the sensibilities of the millions of people who practice it.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a longtime labor movement activist who is president of TransAfrica Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organizing and educational center committed to raising awareness regarding the issues facing the nations and peoples of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. He can be reached at bfletcher@transafricaforum.org.



Lott's Southern strategy



Val Atkinson
 Jones Street

Editor's note: This column was written before Lott stepped down as majority leader.

Many in the leadership of the Republican Party would have us believe that there is no - and has never been any - Southern strategy. But the facts don't bear that out. The facts suggest that the Republican Party engaged in a deliberate and calculated strategy to wrestle the South from the Democratic Party.

Richard Nixon, the early George Wallace, Lester Maddox, Jesse Helms, Lee Atwater, Ronald Reagan, Haley Barber, Strom Thurman, Trent Lott and several other Southern representatives and senators were the principal architects of this successful strategy.

The primary focus of the strategy was the conversion of Southern white males from their historical "Yellow Dog" allegiance to the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. The Southern strategy subliminally suggested to white Southerners that the Republican Party was the "real" party of their ancestors because the Democrats had sold out to minorities. Without the conversion of the South, the Republican Party would not have been successful in 1968, 1972, 1980, 1984, 1988 or in 2000 and 2002.



Demonstrators hold signs outside of Trent Lott's office in Mississippi.

African-Americans in the South have thought for some time that conservatives had an agenda to appease white voters in the South who supported segregationist positions and policies. Trent Lott solidified that notion by bringing the chickens home to roost.

Senate Republican leader Lott has a long history of anti-minority voting and anti-minority activities. In his college days, he actively opposed the integration of his college fraternity. He opposed every civil rights bill that came to the Senate floor. He opposed the Martin Luther King

Jr. holiday, and he voted against every affirmative action bill that ever came up in the U.S. Senate. Lott is truly a son of the Southern strategy. He has clearly brought the Southern strategy into focus. He let the cat out of the bag, he spilled the beans, and he was his own worst enemy.

Whether Lott leaves the Senate, runs for governor or stays put, there will never again be a race-based strategy in America that goes unchallenged. Therefore, Lott has done us all a favor. He's opened the eyes of the media and the average white voter. And believe me, this is something the

conservative movement in America doesn't need.

So why are conservatives so upset with Lott? It's because he spilled the beans. Conservatives don't want the rest of us to know that their Southern strategy was a subliminally race-based strategy cloaked in phrases like "states rights," "law and order," "school choice," "national defense," "entitlement programs," "forced busing," and "affirmative action." Everybody now knows what and whom they were really talking about.

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Overtake president's Faith-Based Initiative



Ada Fisher
 Guest Columnist

The use of the presidential executive order in instituting policies that add to the federal budget without approval by the Congress is a breach of our system of checks and balances such as was done in the Faith-Based Initiative signed by President Bush. This Faith Based Initiative allows federal money to be given to church-related charities that do not have to pass scrutiny in how they have used their moneys, as well as allows those charities to discriminate in not hiring others of different faiths while using these federal funds, which in all other institutions receiving such would not be allowed.

The constitution clearly implies that there must be a separation of church and state and that no national religion should be established. Giving federal money to religious organizations while allowing them to discriminate in my view clearly crosses that constitutional line. The president's Faith-Based Initiative is as unfaithful to this constitutional principle of our founding ideals as was his admonishment to Sen. Trent Lott about his comments not opposing segregationist prac-



tices rendered at Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday celebration.

In an atmosphere where one of the largest church bodies has refused to turn alleged child molesters over to legal authorities or an outspoken civil rights person has drawn millions from the federal government without adequate accounting while giving moneys to his mistress for his out-of-wedlock child or where ministers routinely are found guilty of affairs with church members or in the name of being

holier than thou one minister denigrates the Islamic faith or the practice of alternative lifestyles that offend some, I don't believe the federal government should give moneys that condone religious institutions without accountability. If these groups would sell some of their non-church sanctuary properties, jewels and other adornments, they'd have enough money to do whatever work for people they need.

My father, who was a Baptist minister, used to tell us as children that the church must stand

on its own feet without interferences from government and such can't be done if you take money from the government, which should then hold you accountable for compliance with all federal laws. Amen, amen, amen!

Dr. Ada M. Fisher is a licensed teacher for secondary education in mathematics and science, physician and was a Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate. Contact her at P.O. Box 777, Salisbury, NC 28145, telephone (704) 637-6134.