

America's legacy: Free church, state

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First, let me thank the *Chowan Herald* for the privilege of writing this column for July. The *Herald* is one of the finest, weekly community newspapers in all of North Carolina, and it is an honor for me to have this communication with its readers this month.

Last week I wrote about freedom and independence in the United States in connection with the Fourth of July holiday. This piece is a sequel to what I wrote last week.

Many historians contend that the American concept of religious liberty, and its corollary, the separation of church and state, is the greatest contribution we have made to Western Civilization. Nowhere in the history of humanity has religion flourished and prospered as in our beloved land.

That good fortune did not come by accident, and it did not come without a price.

It is true that many of the settlers who came to these shores in the 17th and 18th centuries were driven by a desire for freedom to worship as they felt led by God. Granted, they also came for other opportunities - cultural development, economic advancement, hard work and risk rewarded with prosperity and the freedom to enjoy it.

It is equally sad that many were not willing to grant to others what they had appropriated unto themselves. In no realm was this more true than in religious matters.

Of the original 13 colonies, only two - Pennsylvania and Rhode Island - had any measure of religious freedom. The

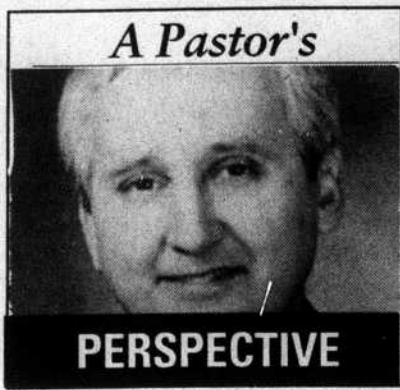
other 11 had a dominant church - usually an officially sanctioned one where the strong arm of civil government enforced the rules of the church, and where the church greatly influenced the decisions of government - which did not look kindly upon dissenters.

For you Baptist readers, our hero was Roger Williams who defied the established church and the colonial government in the Massachusetts Bay area, and was banished into the wilderness. Had it not been for the kindness of the Indians (Native Americans we call them now), Williams would have probably perished in the wilderness during the winter of 1635-36. With the help of his friends, whom he had befriended and defended earlier, Williams did survive and established the colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

In matters of conscience, Williams wanted freedom. In matters of social order, he wanted justice. Those precious ideals have survived because of Williams and others like him who dared to be dissenters, to confront the power structures, and to pay the price for freedom.

While others may have held the concept and even used the phrase, it was E.Y. Mullins in his classic *Axioms of Religion* (1908) who popularized the concept of "A free church in a free state." His insight and wisdom have been beneficial to us all, but they would not have been possible if it were not for the Bill of Rights, those first 10 articles attached to our U.S. Constitution.

Amendment 1 reads in part: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of



A Pastor's

PERSPECTIVE

religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

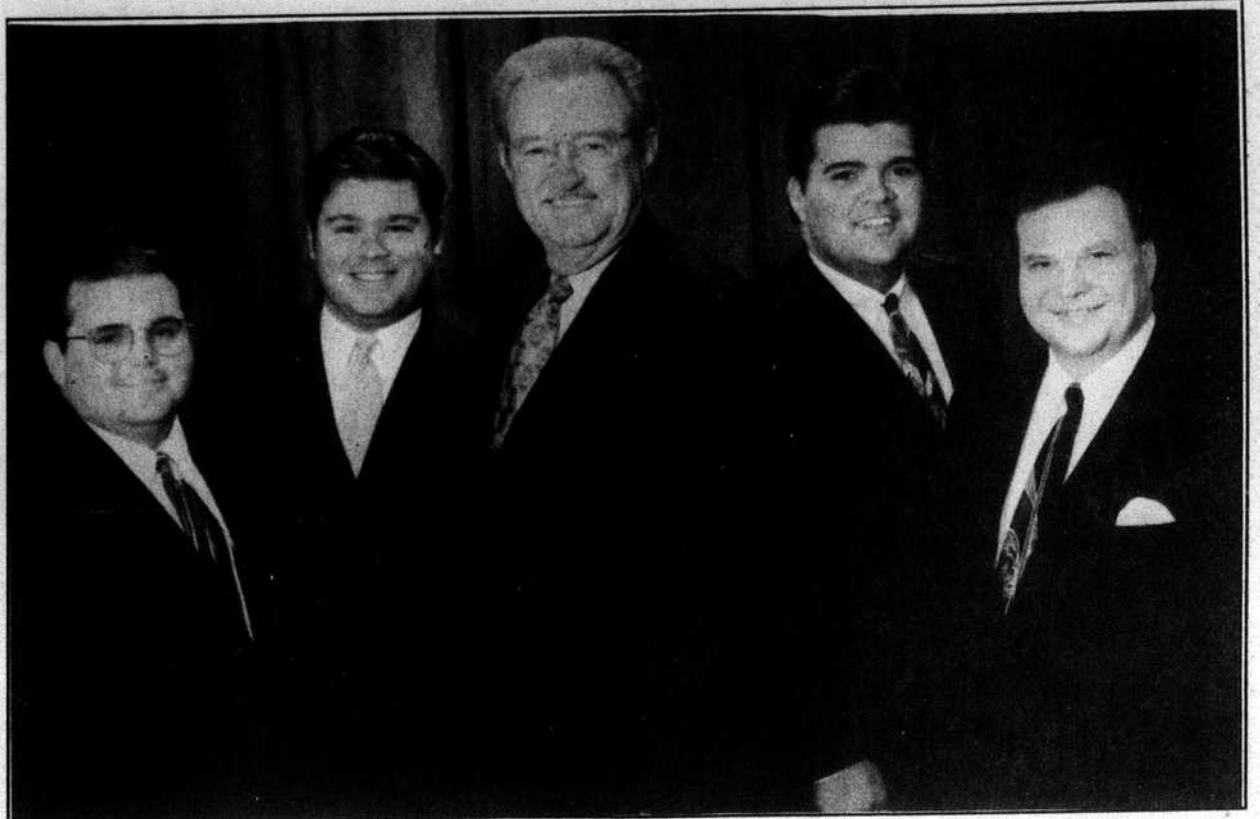
That simple guarantee is profound in its meaning, comforting in its assurance, and awesome in its freedom to the human spirit in being religious, or not!

Sometimes we forget that freedom of religion is also freedom from religion. No government, no community, no religious institution/structure, has the right and/or responsibility to force people to worship any god or use their taxes to support any religious entity.

In a pluralistic society, the key to survival and healthy progress is "a free church in a free state." If we claim our rights to be free, we must grant equal rights to others. Only when one person's conduct is harmful to another person's well-being, is freedom to be restricted. Some would impose their brand of religion - Christian or otherwise - on others if they could, but that must never be in these United States.

Let us give thanks for the freedom we enjoy in America, not the least of which is to worship, or not to worship, as we feel led. Let us give thanks for a Bill of Rights which preserves these freedoms.

Lest we forget, lest we forget.



The Dixie Melody Boys

Homecoming for Gospel music nears

The Martin County Auditorium in Williamston, NC will be the setting as popular Southern Gospel quartet The Dixie Melody Boys host their annual Homecoming celebration as Friday, July 31 and Saturday, Aug. 1.

Throughout the past 37 years, The Dixie Melody Boys have established a firm place in the forefront of Southern Gospel Music. They have enjoyed many chart-topping radio hits, including their most recent, "Antioch Church Choir," and they have received many industry awards, as well as a Grammy nomination. Traveling in excess of 200 days each year throughout the United States and Canada, this popular quartet has also been featured on many popular television programs, including the Ralph Emery Show, Primetime Country, and most recently

appeared on the Grand Ole Opry Live.

To commemorate this year's exciting Homecoming event, The Dixie Melody Boys have invited several of Southern Gospel Music's most recognized recording artists to be a part of the event. On Friday evening, Poet Voices, Down East, The Pfeifers, The Encouragers and Three for One will join The Dixie Melody Boys. On Saturday evening, Greater Vision, Joel and LaBreeska Hemphill and The Encouragers, as well as The Dixie Melody Boys will be featured. Both evening concerts begin at 7 p.m.

In addition to the exciting evening concerts, many other activities have been planned in conjunction with the event, including a Saturday morning Prayer Breakfast and afternoon Fellowship Banquet. The Breakfast and Banquet will

be held at the Holiday Inn in Williamston. The Breakfast begins at 8:30 a.m. and will feature Three for One. The Banquet will also be held at the Holiday Inn, beginning at 3 p.m., and will feature The Dixie Melody Boys and their special guests, Joel and LaBreeska Hemphill and The Encouragers.

The annual Talent Contest will be held Saturday morning beginning at 10 a.m. at the Martin County Auditorium. The entry fee for soloists is \$75, while the entry fee for groups is \$100. Various prizes will be awarded to the winners of the Talent Contest, who will also perform on the Saturday evening program.

Tickets for the evening concert are \$10 if purchased in advance and \$12 if purchased at the door. Children 12 years of age and under will be admitted free of charge. WDRP/WIAM Radio will serve as the host radio station for this event. Complete ticket information may be obtained by calling 1-800-989-9377 or (919) 523-9306.

Praise Temple Ctr. dedication set for July 12; everyone will be welcome

The Praise Temple Worship Center dedication will be held at 820 W. Albemarle St., Edenton, on July 12.

The dedication is scheduled to begin at 3 p.m. Everyone is welcome to come and join in the celebration.

Want to stay informed about upcoming events? Don't forget to pick up the Herald weekly!

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THANK YOU

I want to express my thanks to everyone for the many cards, visits, flowers, phone calls, prayers, love and compassion you all have shared with us, during the deep sorrow of losing our son Glen.

The outpouring of love and compassion has just been unbelievable. I didn't know so many people in this county and surrounding counties knew and loved him.

I also want to thank Dr. Perry, who wasn't even his doctor, and the nurses at the hospital for their wonderful support. I will never forget their kindness, when we needed it so.

Last but definitely not least I want to thank all the people who took the time to stop and give Glen a ride.

May God bless you all.

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