

The Bible not literal?

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"Is the Bible literally true?" interviewer Cynthia McFadden of Nightline [queried President George W. Bush recently](#). "Probably not. ... I'm not a literalist. But you can learn a lot from it," was his reply. There are a number of reasons we should grant grace to the outgoing president on this issue; however, the overarching issue lies squarely at the center of the turmoil we are in as a nation. The answer to that question and its variances have divided families, churches, denominations – and certainly nations. Does it and should it matter what a politician thinks about the Bible? After all, his role is civil, not religious. Is the president alone in his belief that, "I happen to believe that the way to God is through Christ; others have different avenues to God and I believe we pray to the same Almighty"?

We do not expect nor even desire our commander in chief also to be our theological voice for the nation. We do and should, however, expect that someone who professes to be a Christian exhibit knowledge of and commitment to the orthodox principles of the faith.

During the mid '90s, I debated a liberal minister from a mainline denomination before a gathering of pastors in Washington state over a proposed "No Special Rights" state ballot measure that would have prohibited recognizing sexual behavior as a protected class. As I prepared and prayed over how to cut through emotional hyperbole and clearly address the core principles, I felt led to start out with what I believed to be at the heart of the matter.

In the opening comments, I asserted to the pastors that it was really quite simple as to why we could both be standing before them as Christian leaders and take opposite positions on something that the Bible clearly addresses. I held my Bible up and said, "I believe that this is the inspired, inerrant and infallible word of God, from cover to cover." I turned to the minister and said, "He doesn't," and explained that he then had the latitude to make up and modify his positions to suit his own desires, feelings or a myriad of other factors.

The president and this minister (who incidentally belong to the same denomination) are among those who claim to be Christians in the United States and who reject the absolute nature of historic Christianity and the Bible. According to the [U.S. Religious Landscape Survey](#) conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 59 percent of evangelical church attenders believe that the Bible is the "Word of God, literally true word for word."

However, 57 percent of those same evangelicals believe "many religions can lead to eternal life," which is a direct contradiction of the "literal" teaching of Jesus Christ. This biblical schizophrenia plays out in many ways. While issues like ordaining homosexual and women bishops by the Episcopal Church U.S.A. appear to be the "wedges" that are dividing the denomination, the issue is far more foundational.

Archbishop of Nigeria and chairman of African Anglican Primates, Dr. Peter Akinola, stated regarding the continued relationship with the Episcopal Church in the U.S., "Now that we have discovered that they have a *new theology* and a *new religion*, we feel it would be dangerous for the future of our church to continue to send our own future leaders to those institutions." (emphasis added) As Bishop Akinola understands, a rejection of the accuracy and authority of the Bible combined with a rejection of the purpose for the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are a "lethal cocktail" for Christianity itself.

If we serve a God who is incapable of speaking through the created beings made in His image without error, then He is not God. If he could transmit His word to a writer (from Moses to John) but could not assure that it was preserved to pass to future generations without error, then He is not God.

If the above were true, our nation would then be at the mercy of man-centered and created philosophies, ambitions, desires and behavior restrained only by the power of the bayonet, as Speaker of the House

Robert Winthrop wisely observed in the 1830s. President Ronald Reagan, in his [proclamation](#) declaring 1983 the National Year of the Bible, stated:

The Bible and its teachings helped form the basis for the Founding Fathers' abiding belief in the inalienable rights of the individual, rights which they found implicit in the Bible's teachings of the inherent worth and dignity of each individual. This same sense of man patterned the convictions of those who framed the English system of law inherited by our own Nation, as well as the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

If the Bible is not literal, then there are no such absolute standards by which to assert the rights claimed by the founders in those documents and by which to govern our nation today. Since our president-elect is even more pluralistic in his beliefs than his predecessor, the time for reasserting the profound and irreplaceable "true truth" of the Bible and its benefits for all mankind is now – and we must start in the church.

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