

Earth Manifesto



The Critical Imperative of the Separation of Church and State

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A strong separation of Church and State is crucial to Golden Rule fairness and expansive protections for individual freedoms. A robust separation of church and state serves as a crucial means for maintaining a healthy constitutional republic, for it functions as an essential check and balance within the system to protect people's liberties, safeguard collective security and promote peaceable coexistence.

In essence, this separation serves as a vital component in upholding the principles of liberty, equality and justice that are enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and rules of law. This contributes to making our society one where individuals can freely exercise their beliefs while ensuring the government treats all citizens relatively fairly.

James Madison, who was a Founding Father and later served as the fourth president of the United States, is hailed as the "Father of the Constitution" for his pivotal role in drafting and promoting the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. He famously observed, "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries." Good call, James Madison!

Voltaire, a prominent Enlightenment philosopher and writer, was known for his satirical critical views on religion, dogma, superstition and religious absolutism. He used his works to express these views, often with wit and humor. Voltaire's writings, particularly his works *Candide* and *Philosophical Dictionary*, used satire and humor to criticize the excesses and injustices he saw in religious institutions and dogmatic beliefs. He championed values of reason, tolerance and the separation of church and state, which were central themes of the Enlightenment Era.

Voltaire viscerally wrote, "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities."

Religious triumphalism poses daunting dangers, especially when espoused with domineering religion-on-the-march superiority and demands for control. The danger to peaceable coexistence of fervently pursued religious extremism results from uncompromising attitudes, insistence on control, intolerance, discriminatory offensives, generated chaos, and provoked antagonisms that fuel conflicts with others. These outcomes heighten potentials for violence and acts of terrorism, and even civil war in defense or promotion of a particular dogmatic faith.

Several of the Founding Fathers warned that "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty". They emphasized the need for citizens to actively safeguard their freedoms and prevent the erosion of democratic values. Vigilance is vitally important in the world today to preserve our society as a free and fair one, particularly due to rising threats posed by authoritarian rule. Such vigilance requires ongoing awareness, engagement and strong commitments to protecting people against threats to personal liberties and national security -- and democracy itself.

Voltaire was acutely aware of the dangers posed by rigid dominionist dogma. He once observed, "Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd." There are degrees of absurdity, to be sure, and when people fervently believe in tall tales told in religious scriptures, they often use their zealous beliefs in offensive ways, and conspire to use insider influence to grab power and impose a mercilessly despotic agenda on their fellow citizens. And they deceive the populace and betray their true best interests, undermining principles of Golden Rule fairness and guaranteed liberties for the people of a nation.

Voltaire's satirical writings had a significant influence on the development of secular and rational thought during

the 18th century in the "Age of Reason" -- the Enlightenment. He wrote, "Superstition sets the whole world in flames; philosophy quenches them." And, "Think for yourselves and let others enjoy the privilege to do so too."

The rule of law and the U.S. Constitution need to be defended. They are fundamental to fairness and freedom.

The Common Good, Properly Understood

We are confronted by a severe challenge to our democracy that is testing whether our nation can endure through trying times, and it is altogether fitting and proper that we should honorably strive to make sure that the voices of demagoguery, deceit, authoritarianism and religious supremacy do not triumph over the common good.

Since 1776, millions of Americans have made the ultimate sacrifice of giving what Abraham Lincoln called "the last full measure of devotion" -- their lives -- to protect our country from external threats. Today, our democratic republic again faces a dire existential threat -- and it now comes from within. This threat is posed by manipulative abusers of authority and those who are taking advantage of insider influence to impose a hard-line agenda on the citizenry. This threat comes from culture war-promoting politicians who have managed to get elected, many of them in extremely gerrymandered congressional districts -- and then push policies that undermine the greater good and violate the Constitution to gain power, despite having sworn oaths to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic", and to do so in "true faith and allegiance to the same."

To be perfectly clear, the main reason that "conservative" politicians threaten our country -- "follow the money!" -- is to perpetuate publically subsidized regressive Tax Cut policy. The 2017 Trump Republican tax cuts were an enormous boon to the wealthy, since they were skewed toward top incomes. But these tax cuts are set to expire in 2025, unless reauthorized by the president and Congress. As Ronald Brownstein reports in *The Atlantic*, one of the most consequential differences between Donald Trump and Joe Biden is over these tax cuts. Brownstein notes, "The best estimates are that the Trump cuts have already cost the federal government about \$2 trillion, and extending them in full for another decade starting in 2026 would reduce federal revenue by an additional \$3 trillion to \$3.5 trillion. If we include the proposed taxes that Biden wants to push through and that he could achieve if he wins again with a Democratic Congress, the difference is even more stark." This would amount to many trillions of dollars if Trump returns to the White House, literally allowing the wealthiest Americans to pocket trillions of dollars "that would otherwise be used for public services."

Religious Zealot Ascends to Become Speaker of the House

Rep. Mike Johnson became the new Speaker of the House in October 2023 after Kevin McCarthy was deposed by MAGA extremists who were angry at his compromises with Democrats that helped prevent a government shutdown. This overthrow led to a chaotic leaderless 22-day Republican debacle. Mike Johnson is a staunch loyalist supporter of former president Trump, and was one of the main architects of the nefarious plan to overturn the 2020 election.

Johnson is a hard-line white evangelical Christian nationalist who has said he opposes the principle of a strong separation of church and state, which is spelled out in the First Amendment's establishment clause that states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Johnson reportedly displays a flag outside his office associated with the New Apostolic Reformation network, which wants to place the United States government under the control of right-wing Christians. On January 6, 2021, rioters took these flags with them into the U.S. Capitol. Johnson is also associated with a right-wing movement to call a convention of states to rewrite the Constitution more to the liking of his God (and right-wing extremists).

Election lawyer Mark Elias called Mike Johnson "a ringleader" of Big Lie efforts to overturn the 2020 election, and the most significant elected representative who has not been legally charged for his efforts to overthrow the election outcome. Johnson deviously mischaracterized the lethal January 6 insurrectionary coup attempt as a "legitimate protest". That's ridiculous, for it was obviously an assault on the Capitol Police and the Capitol Building and our elected representatives in Congress by an ugly ragtag rioting mob of Trump supporters, who believed a Big Lie and sought to do Trump's bidding to prevent the peaceful transfer of power after he lost the 2020 election.

Last year, the insightful historian Heather Cox Richardson noted in her *Letters from an American*: "The extremists are doubling down on Trump and his election lies even as his allies are admitting in court that they are, indeed, lies. Trump's former chief of staff Mark Meadows is in trouble with the publisher of his memoir after admitting under oath that the election had been fair. The publisher is suing him for millions in damages for basing his book on the idea that the election had been stolen and representing that 'all statements contained in the Work are true.'" ("The publisher says it has pulled the book off the market.")

"House extremists continue to back Trump even as he is openly calling for an authoritarian second term. In September (2023), former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley had to take 'appropriate measures' for his own security after Trump accused him of disloyalty to him personally, and suggested that in the past, such 'treason' would have been punished with death."

In an opinion piece for MSNBC, columnist Sarah Posner described Mike Johnson as the "most unabashedly Christian nationalist Speaker" in history, who wants to "eviscerate the separation of church and state." That would be very negative for most Americans, because religious authoritarians (like those who are severely curtailing women's reproductive freedoms in red states) present a big threat to the blessings of liberty, and broadly undermine the propitious prospects of unity, true justice, the general welfare, domestic tranquility, social cohesion, reciprocal Golden Rule tolerance, and peaceable coexistence in our country.

To achieve common good goals, it is desirable to *Sow Justice, Harvest Peace!*

Johnson told a Baptist newspaper when he was running for Congress in 2016, "I'm a committed Christian and my faith informs everything I do." In an interview that aired on Fox News soon after his ascension to the Speaker position, Johnson told host Sean Hannity that "Someone asked me today in the media, 'People are curious, what does Mike Johnson think about any issue under the sun?' I said, 'Well, go pick up a Bible off your shelf and read it. That's my worldview."

Right-wing evangelicals like Johnson believe fervently in revelations from God, like those in the Book of Revelation, which is the final 20 pages of the Christian Bible. Many good books have dramatic endings, but WOW!, the Bible takes the cake. Phantasmagorical revelations in that tortuously tall tale are a preposterously apocalyptic doozy!!

The rascally great philosopher and incisive humorist Mark Twain was very well versed in the Bible, and he saw it this way: "It is full of interest, it has noble poetry in it and some clever fables and some blood drenched history, and some good morals, and a wealth of obscenity -- and upwards of a thousand lies."

Evangelical extremists are deeply unreliable witnesses, and their parochial judgments are unacceptably and harshly discriminatory, and they often demonstrate reprehensible stands against truth, fairness and gender equity, and even against integrity, honor, honesty and true righteousness.

On Religious Extremism

Because of the Bible's apocalyptic themes, end-time scenarios and divine judgment, fervent believers are motivated to prioritize these beliefs over political and social stability, sometimes leading to actions that disrupt societal harmony and exacerbate extreme and disastrous political polarization. Rapture beliefs are a con!

Judgmental old men created a judgmental Christian God, for the self-interested purpose of wielding manipulative control of the faithful flock. "Put your money in the collection plate!"

The issue of allowing religious organizations to be exempt from taxes has created significant problems in our society, and facilitated subsidized interference of religions in politics and governance. Shall we continue to allow religious organizations to be publicly subsidized for their lobbying and interfering in politics and governance? Or shall we get the IRS to crack down on tax evasion and religious abuses of political influence?

Conservative evangelicals are predisposed to claim that God and Jesus side with far-right judges, and are pleased that there is a supermajority of "conservative" Justices on the highest court in the land. This is most unfortunate for millions of people, for these eminences in the judiciary are overturning many legal precedents, reversing settled law and inflicting woes on people with terribly malign outcomes caused by having Big Money and religious dominionists dominate the Supreme Court and the House and too much of government's decision-making and

legislation.

Month #1 with Johnson the New Persona of Republican Power

Heather Cox Richardson wrote in her excellent daily *Letters from an American* on Nov. 3, 2023: "Far from trying to work across the aisle, Mike Johnson has been throwing red meat to his base (and advancing the profiteering interests of scheming resource exploiters). In the last two days for example, the House has voted to slash 39% of the budget of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and 13% of the budget of the National Park Service. It voted to require the Biden administration to allow oil drilling in Alaska and off the coast. It has voted on reducing the salary of the EPA administrator, the director of the Bureau of Land Management, and the Secretary of the Interior to \$1 each."

Liz Dunning, a survivor of gun violence, points out that the Speaker of the House responded to a recent heinous mass shooting in Maine by saying, **"At the end of the day, the problem is the human heart. It's not guns, it's not the weapons. ... This is not the time to be talking about legislation."**

Liz Dunning **took exception with this statement.** **"It IS the guns," she wrote. "And now IS the time to be talking about legislation."**

Johnson is wrong about easy access to guns not being a major part of this deadly problem, and his apologist stance in favor of more people having deadly assault weapons is dangerous to public safety.

Johnson is a Trump loyalist who has a near-perfect rating from three gun rights groups, including the NRA. "And the blood money that pads his pockets is evident in his response to the tragedy in Maine. He offered incessant thoughts and prayers of his own and on behalf of the House of Representatives -- placations that neither comfort grieving families nor make us safer. This man is in charge of the very lawmaking body that has the power to stop the next tragedy, and he has the audacity to blame the gun violence epidemic on 'the human heart'."

"Because we can stop the next tragedy with solutions that are proven effective. The shooter in Maine used an assault style weapon to kill as many people as possible as quickly as possible. Our nation once had a ban (for ten years) on weapons like this, which reduced mass shootings and gun deaths, but the NRA made sure it ended. And if gun lobby backed politicians have their way, nothing will be done to get these weapons of war off the streets."

An Aside on the Golden Rule

My essay *Moderation, True Justice and the Golden Rule* suggests remarkably better ways of acting and being in the world, and it explores extremism and executive coup attempts as well as electoral, judicial and legislative ones.

Golden Rule fairness is a principle that predates the Bible and provides better guidance than moralizing religion with a monotheistic male authoritarian god. As ChatGPT explains:

The Golden Rule of "Doing unto others as you would have them do unto you" is a principle of ethical reciprocity that predates the Bible and many organized religions. It is found in various forms in the teachings of different cultures and philosophies throughout history. There are several reasons why it is often seen as a valuable guiding principle and an alternative to moralizing religion and a monotheistic male authoritarian god:

1. ****Universality:**** The Golden Rule is a universal concept that transcends religious and cultural boundaries. It can be understood and embraced by people of various belief systems, making it an inclusive and widely applicable ethical guideline.
2. ****Empathy and Compassion:**** The Golden Rule promotes empathy and compassion by encouraging individuals to consider the feelings and well-being of others. It fosters a sense of interconnectedness and encourages kind and considerate behavior.
3. ****Focus on Action:**** Unlike some moralizing religious doctrines, the Golden Rule emphasizes practical actions and behavior rather than rigid rules or dogma. It encourages individuals to think about how their actions affect others.
4. ****Freedom of Belief:**** The Golden Rule respects individual autonomy and allows people to act ethically based

on their own values and principles, rather than adhering to the dictates of a particular religious authority.

5. **Adaptability:** The Golden Rule is adaptable to various situations and contexts, allowing for flexibility in decision-making. People can apply it to complex moral dilemmas and everyday interactions.
6. **Promotion of Tolerance:** Since the Golden Rule encourages people to treat others as they themselves wish to be treated, it fosters an environment of tolerance and respect for differences.
7. **Historical Wisdom:** The Golden Rule's presence in numerous historical and philosophical traditions underscores its enduring value as a timeless ethical principle.

While the Golden Rule is a valuable guideline for many, it's important to note that for some individuals, religion and belief in a monotheistic god provide a deep and meaningful moral framework. The value of any ethical principle can vary from person to person, and what matters is the positive impact it has on individuals and society in promoting fairness, compassion, and ethical behavior.

In glaring contrast, religious dogma that champions Biblical literalism and denies evolutionary adaptation is ignorant, stubborn and downright stupid -- and can be dangerous when such dogmatists use their beliefs to push policies and priorities that are extreme in their anti-democratic "conservatism".

ChatGPT clarifies:

It's important to approach this topic with sensitivity and respect for diverse beliefs. That said, the criticism often directed at religious dogma that promotes Biblical literalism and denies scientific theories like evolution and the billions-of-years-old age of the universe stems from a few key valid concerns:

1. **Rejecting Scientific Consensus:** Many scientific theories, such as evolution and the Big Bang theory, have strong empirical support and are widely accepted by the scientific community. Denying these well-established scientific ideas can hinder progress and understanding in various fields.
2. **Inflexibility:** Literal interpretation of religious texts can lead to inflexibility and a reluctance to adapt to new knowledge and insights. Science is dynamic and self-correcting, while religious dogma that is unyielding to new information and broader understandings may stifle intellectual growth and hinder acceptance of others.
3. **Cherry-Picking:** Critics argue that proponents of literalism often cherry-pick passages from religious texts, ignoring other passages that promote tolerance, compassion, and respect for diverse beliefs. This can lead to skewed and selective interpretations of facts and attitudes.
4. **Separation of Church and State:** When religious dogma is used to drive extreme political agendas, it can blur the lines between religious belief and public policy. This can be seen as infringing on the principles of secular governance and potentially leading to policies that discriminate against certain groups.
5. **Social Impact:** Extreme conservatism rooted in religious dogma can result in discriminatory practices against LGBTQ+ individuals, and women, and people in other marginalized groups. Such policies can perpetuate social injustice and inequality.

Fortunately, not all individuals who hold religious beliefs interpret their faith in an overly rigid manner. There are many who find harmony between their faith and an acceptance of scientific principles. Criticisms are deserved for extreme positions that have negative societal impacts. Open and respectful dialogue between science and religion can lead to a more inclusive and understanding society, and to much healthier social cohesion and peaceable coexistence.

Artificial Intelligence Sheds Seemingly Well-Considered Light

Me: I asked ChatGPT to explain why fervent beliefs in the Book of Revelation are a threat to our democracy and democratic fairness and domestic tranquility and the general welfare and individual and collective security, and to the blessings of liberty.

Notice how surprisingly succinct, comprehensive, accurate and valuable the ChatGPT explanatory summary is:

"Fervent beliefs in the book of Revelation can be perceived as a potential threat to democracy and various aspects of societal well-being for several reasons:"

1. **Religious Extremism:** When people hold extreme and unyielding interpretations of religious texts, it can lead to the marginalization of those who do not share the same beliefs. This can undermine the principles of inclusivity and pluralism that are essential for a healthy democracy.
2. **Apocalyptic Thinking:** The Book of Revelation is associated with apocalyptic themes, including end-time scenarios and divine judgment. Fervent believers may prioritize these beliefs over political and social stability, potentially leading to actions that disrupt societal harmony.
3. **Inflexibility:** Fervent beliefs can lead to rigid, uncompromising attitudes, making it difficult to find common ground or engage in constructive political discourse. In a democracy, compromise and dialogue are essential for policy-making and good governance.
4. **Potential for Radicalization:** In extreme cases, fervent beliefs can drive individuals or groups toward radicalization and acts of violence, posing a direct threat to public safety and security.
5. **Undermining Scientific Consensus:** Strongly-held religious beliefs sometimes conflict with science and scientific understanding, potentially hindering efforts to address critical issues such as climate change, public health and education -- all of which are vital for the general welfare.
6. **Social Division:** Fervent beliefs in apocalyptic scenarios may lead to the creation of "us vs. them" mentalities, causing social division and mistrust. This can erode the social fabric necessary for domestic tranquility and democratic fairness.
7. **Interference in Policy:** If religious groups with fervent beliefs wield significant political influence, they attempt to shape policy in accordance with their religious doctrines, violating the Golden Rule and infringing on the separation of church and state, and posing an existential threat to democracy itself.

In a democratic society, the balance between freedom of religious expression and the principles of democracy, fairness and security is crucial. It is essential to ensure that individuals' rights to their beliefs do not undermine the broader goals of a democratic society and the well-being of its citizens.

The Despicable ADF

Mike Johnson worked for a long time as an attorney for ADF, the Alliance Defending Freedom (formerly the Alliance Defense Fund), a Christian advocacy group.

The ADF is an anti-abortion group that is behind the lawsuit against the FDA that seeks to prohibit medication abortion in the United States. The Supreme Court is grappling with this issue.

The ADF has been termed a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, due to its calls for the re-criminalization of sexual acts between consenting LGBTQ adults, and even for state-sanctioned sterilization of trans people, among other reasons.

The Preamble of the U.S. Constitution is dedicated to securing the Blessings of Liberty to the American people, and it is a pathological farce to have a far-right faction become leaders of a deceitful Party that bellows out for freedom -- but treacherously uses divide-to-conquer tactics to deprive lesbians and gay men of their civil rights, along with bisexuals and trans folks, and people of color, and immigrants. Even worse, it is deplorable for the Republican Party to push to criminalize abortion, depriving women of the right to choose to terminate a pregnancy before fetal viability, or before 15 weeks, or before 6 weeks, or in some states, under any circumstances whatsoever. This is much worse than hypocrisy, and stinks to high heaven.

Divisive culture war issues like this distract the citizenry from the real agenda pushed by rich conservatives and behemoth corporations and other special interest groups. The real priority is to eviscerate government regulations that limit opportunities for profiteering by facilitating the exploitation of working people and natural resources.

Mike Johnson vehemently wants to criminalize abortion and impose a national ban. He told Sean Hannity soon after

being chosen by the increasingly extremist Republican Party that if a doctor performs an abortion, they should be "imprisoned at hard labor for 1-10 yrs & fined \$10K-\$100K." That's wrong.

In addition, Johnson once sued to strike the clause in Obamacare that required insurers to cover contraceptives.

Johnson supports ending Social Security and Medicare as we know it. As a member of Congress, he blamed women who got abortions for the financial difficulties of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. He once declared that if women were producing more "able-bodied workers", those programs -- and the economy in general -- would be much better. Today, he is an original co-sponsor of the "Life at Conception" bill, which would effectively ban all abortions. The bill would grant every "preborn human person" equal rights under the 14th Amendment from "the moment of fertilization." Bizarre. "Keep your eye on the birdie!"

Mike Johnson is not only an anti-abortion extremist who supports a federal abortion ban for religious reasons, but he also has blamed abortion for school shootings and economic woes. And he has (preposterously) promoted teaching the Bible as a history book in public schools.

Faithful America: "Johnson and the religious-right pastors and politicians who back him are trying to package all of these toxic views as inherent to Christianity -- but we know that they're not. We also know that it's wrong to use the government to push any form of religion on others. Let's make sure the reporters covering the new speaker know that, too." ("Thank you for everything you do to love your neighbor by calling out the Christian nationalism infiltrating our federal government.")

Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., said in a post on Elon Musk's X of Johnson's speakership: "Speaker Mike Johnson? Anti-choice, anti-LGBTQ, anti-gun safety, anti-democracy. This is what theocracy looks like."

Mike Johnson is an extremist -- like Jim Jordan, Lauren Boebert, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Matt Gaetz and others. But until being chosen to be Speaker, few knew who he was ("he lacked a national profile"), and he wielded little power. He also supported Donald Trump's Muslim Ban and advocated against the anti-bullying Day of Silence.

When Johnson gave his first remarks as speaker, he immediately invoked his evangelical Christianity, saying, "I believe that scripture and the Bible is very clear that God is the one that raised up each of you and God has allowed us to be brought here to this specific moment and time." Those statements made from the speaker's desk prompted Jamie Raskin to go even further, saying that such words demonstrate "that there are no public policy values that unify the Republican caucus anymore. They don't have a secular program. And so they have fallen back on theocracy as the final binding mechanism of their cause."

Soon after being named the new Speaker, second in line to the presidency, Republicans rallied around the new extremist "and slid him into the job before the rest of the country even had time to learn his name. Proving again how extreme Republicans have become, how far they have moved from rural values and voters, and how little they respect the American people."

When a reporter asked about Mike Johnson having led the effort to overturn the 2020 election, he did not answer, and members of the House GOP Conference yelled "Boo! Shut up!". Trying to silence and censor others is a Republican tactic, and intimidation is one of the worst forms of censorship.

Really, our democracy cannot afford for us to "shut up" or stay silent in the face of another pusher of lies about election fraud having taken control of the House of Representatives.

Subversive Efforts to Gut Public Education in Favor of Schools Promoting Religious Indoctrination

Jordan Zakarian of Demand Progress calls the ADF a "Christofascist legal organization". He has covered the organization many times in his articles. "This summer I produced a piece on the Koch-funded hate group's attacks on public education, which are making their way to a Supreme Court filled with ADF allies, including Amy Coney-Barrett, who has given five paid speeches at ADF events."

"Their goal is to eradicate public education as we know it by making school vouchers legal nationwide and forcing the state to pay for religious private schools."

On the subject of the Alliance Defending Freedom and the destruction of public education, there has been an

interesting twist in the fight over Oklahoma's attempt to establish the first publicly-funded religious charter school. Oklahoma's Attorney General Gentner Drummond petitioned the state's Supreme Court to block a state contract with the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, which recently agreed to sponsor St. Isidore of Seville Virtual Charter School. Drummond had already decided he would not provide resources to defend the school in court, and in his petition told the court that it was unconstitutional for the state to directly fund religious education.

Drummond also said that doing so would defy the will of the people of Oklahoma, who voted down a 2016 ballot amendment that would have allowed public funds for religious education.

St. Isidore is being represented in various lawsuits by none other than the Alliance Defending Freedom, which sees this case as a vehicle for its ultimate endgame: a Supreme Court ruling that finds secular-only public education is unconstitutional because it discriminates against religious people. Such a ruling would pave the way for direct public funding of religious education and indoctrination -- and ignorance -- across the country.

Insidious Efforts to Gain Power by Marginalizing LGBTQ Folks

Jordan Zakarin also noted: "Much of Johnson's work at both the ADF and in elected office has focused on discriminating against LGBTQ+ people. At the ADF, he wrote newspaper editorials that called same-sex marriage "inherently unnatural" and "selfish" (as he wrote in a 2004 editorial for *The Shreveport Times*). He also wrote in support of a ban on sodomy, saying that gay men were not a protected class capable of changing their "abnormal lifestyles", and he led a campaign to encourage kids to express homophobia in schools. He even fought for the rights of bigots to display their hatred on their license plates.

In his rude opposition to gay marriage in the U.S. he wildly claims it will ultimately lead to similar rights being offered to pedophiles. He also wants to ban interracial marriage (so sorry, Clarence and Ginni Thomas). He has even opposed the Violence Against Women Act. Not only does he stand against civil rights for LGBTQ+ people, but he also champions other similar far-right orthodoxy, and indulgently engages in demagogic *Divide-to-Conquer Roguery*.

As leader of one of the furthest-right caucuses in Congress, he defended the publication of materials to aid in so-called gay conversion therapy. Note that some of the methods of conversion therapy include vile electroshock therapy, aversion therapy and dogmatic religious counseling. Most major medical and mental health organizations widely condemn and disapprove of conversion therapy, doing so on grounds that it is ineffective, unethical and often harmful, as when it leads to psychological and emotional distress for individuals subjected to punitive practices.

"His time in the state House was short but equally disgraceful, highlighted by his pushing of a bill to allow people to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people without any possible repercussions from the state. A Supreme Court decision earlier this year essentially codified his proposed law into a national standard, which should help explain just how deeply embedded Johnson is with the far-right Christian nationalist cabal that wields control over many counties and states in the country. As Speaker, he will be able to promote bills that carry the Christofascist agenda, putting them in the spotlight and mainstreaming them so that the next *GOP trifecta* can get push them into law."

Jordan Zakarin called Johnson an actual agent of hate, in his Progress Report. "Nearly the entire *GOP* caucus has become a cesspool of bigotry, corruption, and anti-democratic intrigue, and Johnson's work has helped pave the way for the sewage (and insurrectionists) to take over Congress."

Christian Nationalism

Not all Christians are conservatives. Members of the online organization Faithful America, for instance, "stand for the Gospel's values of love, dignity, equality, and social justice." ... "As a Christian community, we work for democracy because we know it's the best way to protect these values and to recognize the voice of every child of God, especially those on the margins."

"But these values are under attack. It's hard to overstate the threat that anti-democracy, anti-freedom Christian nationalism poses to both democracy and the church today. And now that Christian nationalism has taken the speaker's chair in the person of Rep. Mike Johnson, things are about to get even worse."

"Speaker Johnson really does provide a near-perfect example of all the different elements of Christian nationalism," said Andrew Whitehead, a sociologist at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. He said those included insisting on traditionalist family structures, "being comfortable with authoritarian social control and doing away with democratic values."

Colleagues of Mike Johnson on Capitol Hill describe him as "not particularly verbose or flamboyant, someone who lacks a flashy social media presence and may get lost in a sea of attention seekers. But his more mellow style can mask the fact that he proselytizes extremely hard-line views and has been hitting the right-wing talk show circuit doing that for decades."

Extremely hard-line views, in my strongly held opinion, are unacceptably antithetical to democratic fairness and freedom, as well as to the general welfare and the common good.

Johnson has also recorded over a thousand interviews on talk radio and television -- much of it from his time at ADF -- "leaving a long trail of words that help paint a picture of an arch-conservative who promotes a literal reading of the Bible." He provided legal services in 2015 to "Answers in Genesis", a fundamentalist Christian group founded by Ken Ham that absurdly rejects scientific knowledge about evolution and the history of the cosmos. The organization cites "the Word of God" in asserting that the universe is only 6,000 years old, and suggests that "we simply have been indoctrinated to believe it looks old." The universe is actually almost 14 billion years old, astronomers generally agree, and the proof of a very old world can be found in the evolved DNA of every living thing, and in sedimentary rocks all around the globe that contain remnants of countless forms of life ("index species") from over the eons.

Johnson had a curious involvement with the Noah's Ark theme park in Kentucky, where he was retained for legal services after tourism officials in Kentucky refused to grant tax incentives for the building of the Biblical theme park, citing the organization's plan to require employees to submit a statement of faith. Johnson successfully sued in 2015, arguing that the denial of tax breaks was discriminatory. Churches fervently love taxpayer subsidies.

Johnson praised the theme park, Ark Encounter, which portrays dinosaurs in a 'life-size replica' of the ark (dinosaurs went extinct during the Cretaceous extinction, 65 million years ago). He did this in a 2021 interview with Ken Ham as he guest-hosted the radio show of Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, whom he has called his "original mentor." The Family Research Council uses "anti-gay pseudoscience" to falsely conflate homosexuality and pedophilia, and to falsely claim that the children of same-sex parents suffer from more mental health problems. What such children do suffer from is the rank attacks by right wing politicians and social conservatives on the civil rights, safety and pursuits of happiness of LGBTQ people in our society.

"The Ark Encounter is one way to bring people to this recognition of the truth that, you know, what we read in the Bible are actual historical events, and that there are implications to what you do with all these stories in the Bible there," Mr. Johnson said, expressing his convoluted worldview.

In September 2022, Johnson and his wife hosted Ken Ham on their "Truth Be Told" podcast. In their conversation, the Johnsons again heavily promoted Ham's Creation Museum and the internationally known Ark Encounter theme park in Petersburg, Kentucky. "For all of our friends who have not made a visit, it's hard to describe," Mike Johnson said. "It's really an awesome experience."

During a discussion Mike Johnson had with Ham, he blamed the teaching of "atheistic evolution" for corrupting the youth and leading them to turn away from the church. He argued that instead church leaders and parents need to teach children how to defend church doctrine through biblical study and argument so that they will know and be able to properly argue that "the fossil record wasn't laid down over millions of years, that's the graveyard of the flood." Biblical literalism can be seen to be absurd!

"To teach them all these things -- that's what's been missing from the church," Ham said. And Johnson replied, "I think that's right." I personally think such antediluvian views are ludicrously erroneous -- and wrong!

As the famous astronomer and philosopher Galileo Galilei stated, "I do not feel obligated to believe that the same god who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use."

At the end of their conversation, Johnson again praised Ham's Creation Museum and the Ark Encounter for "doing maybe the best work right now in our generation of pointing people to the truth."

Truth?! That's downright Orwellian, as if a new slogan from the novel *1984*: "Lies are Truth". George Orwell, in his great novel, concocted the concept of the control and manipulation of information by authorities, who present falsehoods as facts, and citizens are expected to accept them as truth (or else). Big Brother! This is a blatant form of indoctrination and abuse of power in an attempt to control people and distort understandings and promote the power and influence of those seeking to exert domineering authority.

George Orwell's novel contained several famous sayings that reflect the dystopian and authoritarian nature of the society depicted in the novel:

1. "War is Peace" - This slogan emphasizes the idea that a state of perpetual war keeps the population obedient and focused on a common external enemy, thereby maintaining the ruling party's control.
2. "Freedom is Slavery" - This slogan implies that the absence of personal freedom, where individuals are entirely subject to the party's will, is equated with a form of security and contentment.
3. "Ignorance is Strength" - This slogan suggests that keeping the population ignorant and uninformed is a source of strength for the ruling regime, as it prevents dissent and resistance.

These slogans are a manipulation of language and distortion of truth in the imagined authoritarian world of *1984* (it was written in 1949). They illustrate the concept of doublethink, where contradictory beliefs are simultaneously accepted as correct, and the power of propaganda in manipulating the populace to maintain control over them.

The ruling party in *1984* uses doublethink to twist words and ideas, essentially redefining what is considered "positive" or virtuous. By promoting concepts like "War is Peace" and "Freedom is Slavery," they control the narrative and brainwash the citizens. These are satirical and ironic ways of showing how a regime can use propaganda to invert traditional values and virtues and make people accept contradictory beliefs as truth. Orwell's form of satirical ridicule highlights the absurdity of the regime's manipulation of language and values. And it's a commentary on the power of authoritarian governments to control and shape the beliefs and values of their citizens by manipulating and distorting language and ideas.

Mike Johnson apparently wants to leverage the supposed Word of God and stories told in the Bible to impose strictures on Americans that will make it resemble a dastardly repressive theocracy. Big Brother rule, especially by religious authorities, is abhorrent to the populace.

Theocracies in Iran or in Saudi Arabia, for instance, are governed in ways that are oppressive to people and contrary to many of the values and principles the American people cherish. Fairness-oriented and admirable values -- such as those established in the Constitution to create a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.

Florida Rep. Byron Donalds, who ran unsuccessfully for speaker against Johnson, said Johnson's decision to seek the position was about "being obedient to the Lord". He proclaimed this to be a good thing for House Republicans. History will likely prove him to be demonstrably wrong, most likely in the 2024 elections, and events will even more probably prove that this religious grab for dominion will be very bad for the American people.

Christian nationalism essentially posits the idea that America is founded on God's laws, and that the Constitution is a reflection of God's laws. Therefore, any interpretation of the Constitution must align with Christian nationalists' suspiciously twisted interpretations of God's laws. Freedom for them means freedom to obey God's law, not freedom to choose to do what you want to do. Christian supremacy and a particular type of conservative Christianity is at the heart of Johnson's portrayal of the U.S. Constitution and our government.

Johnson may be less blustery than the snake Jim Jordan, but by having led the legal fight to overturn the 2020 election, he may be even more culpable and deserving of blame. This is a serious concern as big issues requiring consensus action arise -- and as the 2024 elections approach.

The Ominous Influence of Opus Dei

Massive amounts of dark money from conservative individuals and groups have been involved in getting MAGA extremism infiltrated into the highest rungs of power in the U.S. This is true especially of extreme hard-right MAGA politicians in the House, who raise big bucks to exert their black influence. It's also true of the three Trump Justices, who came to their positions of power with the help of two political operatives who were part of "a byzantine web of right-wing dark money, operating with little to no accountability."

Huge quantities of right-wing dark money were involved that are basically an integral part of the institutional bribery that is built into the current system of campaign financing and lobbying, which gives outsized influence to special interest groups that care more about profits, power and their own (improper) influence than they do about the public good.

In my essay *Unbalanced: Supreme Court Politics, Chicanery and Corruption*, I argue that conservative Justices have been PRE-BRIBED, "for they sure as hell would not have gotten their positions of great eminence and power without Leonard Leo and the Federalist Society and the Judicial Crisis Network providing tens of millions of dollars of support. And they are treacherously joined by other conservative groups, like multi-billionaire plutocrat Charles Koch and his coldly-calculating self-interested front group, Americans for Prosperity."

Far-right Justices on the high court have wrongly given official sanction to election cheating schemes that include voter suppression laws in Republican-led states and extreme gerrymandering that unjustly (and wrongly) skews political representation, and has the further radically negative impact of hyperpolarizing politics and the populace.

The religious Trump Justices show a blatant disregard for the separation of church and state because they have been chosen in part for their religious dogma-dominated worldviews -- and "the dogma lives loudly within them."

Two of the political operatives and biggest fundraisers for religious judges are members of Opus Dei, "an enigmatic and highly secretive society within the Catholic Church. According to a 2013 investigative report from the liberal group Catholics for Choice, members of Opus Dei 'vehemently oppose legislation that allows divorce or civil marriages, as well as homosexuality and contraception.' Critics have also alleged that the group has internally supported various authoritarian world leaders." For these reasons, the influence of Opus Dei can be seen as sinister.

This is reminiscent of the intrigue in Dan Brown's thriller novel *The Da Vinci Code*, but more chillingly real. In that novel, Opus Dei itself was threatened, and by more than just journalists and critics who besiege it by "saying the organization is a religious cult with luxurious trappings and a suspect spirituality that discriminates against women."

As explained in *Behind the dark-money web that put Barrett (and Kavanaugh and Gorsuch) on the Supreme Court*, political operatives under Trump were on a mission of loading up the judicial branch with right-wing Catholics. Amy Coney Barrett is the sixth Catholic on the Supreme Court, having joined Chief Justice John Roberts, Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Brett Kavanaugh (and Sonia Sotomayor, who is more honorably liberal). Having two-thirds of the Justices on the highest court in the country be Catholic excessively over represents religion and social "conservatism" in the judiciary.

Big Money, of course, was only the final push involved in getting the Trump trio of partisan political judges ensconced for life on the Supreme Court. It was the cunning and morally bankrupt scheming of Mitch McConnell and Senate Republicans that stole a seat from President Obama after Antonin Scalia died -- and then they used bare knuckle politicking to rush the confirmation of Amy Coney Barrett, after the great Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg died while early voting was already underway in the 2020 election. This was diabolical Machiavellian intrigue, and it proved that conservatives trying to "own the libs" are willing to sacrifice gender equity, women's reproductive freedoms, the common good and environmental protections to ambition, ideology, male supremacism, and insider intrigue.

This is a sad state of affairs in "the land of the free and the home of the brave", as Francis Scott Key admirably

called it during the War of 1812, when he wrote what has become the national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner".

Noble conceptions and honorable stances once held a much higher regard than in today's Republican gutter level politics, with its unhinged cult leader who is a despot, bully, misogynist, libertine liar, conniving rogue, disrespectful violence-threatening demagogue and an immature, deeply disturbed malignant narcissist with a mob boss mentality.

Evangelism and Its Disingenuousness

The extremism demonstrated by some evangelicals is revealed in the documentary film *The Mission*. In this film, the director of training for a missionary group asserted that to not tell people about Jesus is a "violation of their human rights." That's a contorted rationale for really violating the rights of others. Live and let live, brothers and sisters!

The Mission examines the zeal of John Chau, a young man evangelically committed to be a firebrand carrying the torch of proselytizing his faith. He did this with such radical fervor that he illegally went to North Sentinel Island, a remote island in the Andaman archipelago that lies between Thailand and India, for the purpose of converting the natives, supposedly believing that the tropical island was "Satan's last stronghold." Absurd!

As a counter narrative, the movie introduces linguist and former missionary Dan Everett, who lived for many years among Brazil's Pirahã people, where he learned their language with the goal of converting them to Christianity. "He came to feel guilty, and ultimately abandoned not only his mission but also his religion. Everett's descriptions of the Pirahã's utter mystification at the idea of Jesus suggest what Chau's conversations on North Sentinel might have been like, had he learned the native language and lived long enough to attempt to proselytize."

"When John Chau came to fight for the souls (of the people on North Sentinel Island), the Sentinelese were fighting for their lives. In a sense, the American people find themselves fighting for their lives (especially pregnant women), as well as for their cherished freedoms. This is because religious fundamentalists wield excessive power over them, due to the illegitimately excessive influence of Supreme Court conservatives and MAGA extremists in the House of Representatives (and in the Senate).

How Conspiracy Theories Can Hijack Clear Understanding

Right-wing extremists have a nefarious agenda when they make up crazy conspiracy theories like those about Jewish space lasers causing wildfires, or Democrats running a ring of pedophiles devoted to the abduction, trafficking, sexual abuse and cannibalization of children. Or when they claim there was "massive influence of communist money through Venezuela, Cuba and likely China and the interference with our elections here in the United States", through the use of voting machine software "created in Venezuela at the direction of [former president] Hugo Chávez."

Here is a conspiracy theory based on much more extensive evidence and likelihood of truth. The secretive Roman Catholic clerical and lay organization Opus Dei is involved in gaining and abusing power and influence in the U.S. government, and specifically in the federal judiciary. The reason this theory is not farfetched and seems probably true is that Trump managed to get three Justices put on the Supreme Court for lifelong positions of power with help from large amounts of right-wing dark money amassed by Opus Dei-affiliated Leonard Leo and his co-conspirators.

Opus Dei, founded in 1928 in Spain, is a secular part of the Catholic Church that has members and supporters in countries around the world, and members dedicate their professional talents "to the service of God and to seek to win converts through their missionary zeal."

In Spain under the dictator General Francisco Franco, members of Opus Dei were happy that Franco "accepted the law of God according to the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, a faith which will inspire its legislation."

Opus Dei is Latin for "Work of God", and hence the organization is often referred to by members and supporters as *the Work*. When this work subversively interferes in national and state decision-making and policies and priorities, and violates tenets of the separation of church and state, it can have unacceptably harmful impacts on society.

Top Republican Priority: Enabling Tax Avoidance

MAGA loyalists show their true colors (and idiocy) when they march lockstep with anti-tax zealots, and seem to be profoundly stupefied by propaganda promoted by Big Money interests and collaborating religious fundamentalists.

There is an illuminating echo through history, maybe not repeating but rhyming, an echo of the original Zealots in the Bible. This was a Jewish sect in the 1st century CE that opposed Roman rule and the Roman tax collectors, and was known for resistance to authority and rebellion against perceived oppression. Zealots hated Roman tax collectors in part because the Roman rulers back then certainly did not give fair representation to those in occupied Palestine in how their taxes were used -- or in how they lived their lives.

House Speaker Mike Johnson made a "huge and consequential blunder" soon after he assumed the job of top Republican in the House, according to a senior Democratic-leaning political strategist. This was because he tried to tie \$14 billion in additional military aid to Israel to a cut in Internal Revenue Service funding. The bill would have eliminated military assistance to Ukraine, which the Biden administration strongly advocated in support of our allies.

Efforts to slash funding for the IRS are blatant forms of public corruption, and morally bankrupt.

In one of his first moves as Speaker, Mike Johnson tried to slash IRS funding allocated in President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act. Johnson claims this is an "offset," but the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office projects that his bill would have added billions of dollars to the national debt, increasing the deficit rather than reducing it. This devious "offset" is a budgetary gimmick that the CBO estimated would actually have resulted in lost revenues of \$27 billion. The gambit was thus NOT an honest or fiscally responsible action, and revealed Johnson, who went along while the national debt increased by almost \$8 billion during Trump's administration, to now be a charlatan trying to pretend he is fiscally conservative. Actually he was just shilling for the rich and high income earners, trying to let them get away with cheating on their taxes by reducing the number of IRS tax auditors.

In a statement, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre condemned Johnson's proposal, which was not likely to win approval from the Democratic-controlled Senate. She said: "Politicizing our national security interests is a nonstarter." *The Atlantic* staff writer Yair Rosenberg observed, "This is not what you do if you care about the safety of Jews. This is what you do when you care about other things and are willing to hold the safety of Jews hostage until you get them."

In this case, Mike Johnson revealed that he values rich people being protected from audits of their tax returns over the safety of Jews. MSNBC's Brian Tyler Cohen persuasively argued in a video that the GOP's so-called concerns over the deficit are all "smoke and mirrors".

Mike Johnson loaded up bills with poison pills so that his Republican "conservative" caucus would be happy. But so much chaos resulted that Johnson has subsequently been forced to ally himself with Democrats to provide most of the support for necessary government actions, like passing budgets.

The libertarian writer and conservative political commentator *George Will* wrote in his article *Surging GOP isolationism is a dreadful development in a dangerous time*, "If Trump becomes, for the third consecutive time, the party's presidential candidate, one of our two major parties will be more isolationist than either party was during the 1930s high tide of 'America First' isolationism." That would NOT be good for either the American people or peoples in democracies around the world!

American voters, let's not let this happen!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

June 12, 2024 (updated from initial version in December 2023)

Appendix - Top Ten Trump Commandments (for a Good Laugh)

Following the election of Mike Johnson as House speaker, attorney *George Conway* ripped House Republicans with

an updated, Trumpian version of The 10 Commandments, putting a terrifying Donald Trump spin on the biblical Ten Commandments, as told in *George Conway Ridicules House Republicans With Ten MAGA Commandments*.

Conway shared the mocking list on X, formerly Twitter, in response to Rep. Greg Steube's (R-Fla.) praise of new House Speaker Mike Johnson's strong Christian faith, which critics fear will negatively impact the running of the House.

Here are George Conway's Ten Trump Commandments "To be posted in all Members' offices per order of the Speaker:"

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me, except thou shalt followeth thy Orange Jesus over any moral cliff.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, unless thou shalt have purchaseth it on the website <http://DonaldTrump.com>.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, except when thou shalt attacketh Brandon or thy RINOs.
4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy, unless thou attendeth a musical production in Denver. (This was a mocking reference to MAGA Republican Rep. Lauren Boebert of Colorado and her bizarre behavior at a Beetlejuice play.)
5. Honour thy father and thy mother, and burieth thy mother on thy father's golf course.
6. Thou shalt not kill, but thou shalt shooteth looters on sight, and puteth alligators in thy moat to keepeth out the Mexicans.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery, but if thou shalt do so with thy porn star, thou shalt payeth her off through an intermediary and falsifieth thy accounting records.
8. Thou shalt not steal, unless thou needeth to stealeth one moreth than a certain number of popular votes or unless thou can hideth thy stolen documents at thy bathroom in thy resort. (This commandment ridiculed Trump's bogus election fraud claims and illegal efforts to find more votes for him in Georgia, and his alleged mishandling of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago and refusal to return them.)
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness. LOL.
10. Thou shalt not covet (but seeth nos. 2, 4, 7, and 8 aboveth).

Addendum:

I referred early in this essay to the issue of allowing religious organizations to be exempt from taxes, pointing out that this has created significant problems in our society by actually subsidizing religions in their interference in politics and governance.

In response to such issues, a satirical movement arose as a form of social commentary that critiqued the teaching of intelligent design and creationism in schools. Known as Pastafarianism, the new religion centered around a deity in a mock religion known as the Flying Spaghetti Monster. The religion gained attention for advocating that it receive the same tax treatment and rights as established religions. These demands highlighted inconsistencies in the treatment of religious beliefs.

The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster was founded in Kansas in 2005 as a way to protest the state Board of Education's decision to incorporate "intelligent design" into public school science curricula. The activists who created the church wrote to the board and requested that their god -- a huge mass of spaghetti that flies through the sky -- also be included in science classes.

A lawsuit ensued, and finally a federal court decided that Pastafarianism, also known as the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM), is satire rather than a real religion, and should therefore not be accorded protections under the First Amendment. The U.S. District Court for the District of Nebraska asserted that no one would seriously believe that the church was real. To believe such a thing, the court ruled, a person would have to have failed in "basic reading comprehension."

The court weighed in on this matter after Stephen Cavanaugh, a Nebraska prisoner who claimed to be a Pastafarian, sued to get access to the group's literature and the right to wear its "traditional" headgear while incarcerated. (Pastafarians sometimes wear colanders on their heads). He also requested the right to dress like a pirate, an outfit commonly worn by church supporters.

"This is not a question of theology," the *Cavanaugh v. Bartelt* decision read. "The FSM Gospel is plainly a work of satire, meant to entertain while making a pointed political statement. To read it as religious doctrine would be little different from grounding a 'religious exercise' on any other work of fiction." The Bible, of course, is also a work of fiction, as are the Koran and the Book of Mormon.

We must demand that our representatives strengthen the separation of church and state!