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POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

On the Framers

It is a good thing that our nation's Founding Fathers did not believe as Thomas Fleming does about dissent ("Loyal Opposition," *Perspective*, August), or we would never have achieved our independence. Freedom of speech is the first guarantee listed in our Bill of Rights. And though, like Dr. Fleming, I do not look to the ACLU as my champion (finding myself in disagreement with its anti-Christian positions), even a broken clock is right twice a day.

Concerning the current reinterpretation of the Constitution, Dr. Fleming writes that "a solution to this dilemma cannot profitably be sought in an examination of how free Americans once exercised their liberties in the Old Republic. That Old Republic died before I was born, and there is little that any of us can do to change it." And again, "At this point, it is futile to expect the government in Washington or in the states to give up their campaign to eradicate the vestiges of the West from American soil, much less to nurture and protect the Christian faith. We are, nonetheless, subject to the rulers of this earth and should not be found wanting in our duties as subjects."

Apparently having given up, Dr. Fleming appears ready to accept what the

Framers would not. They did not see a duty to be a good colonial subject of Great Britain nor to follow its illegal and unjust laws. What we need in this once-great country is not a defeatist conservation of the *status quo* but a revolution to get back the liberties we have lost. As Thomas Jefferson knew, "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants."

—Charles Angione
Bangor, PA

I was puzzled by Thomas Fleming's assertion that "Christians cannot pray in the schools they pay for with their taxes or pretend that their traditions are equal (much less superior) to [various other religions or cultures]."

I was not aware that Christians or persons of any other faith could be prevented from praying in public schools. The devout of any faith are perfectly free to bow their heads, put their hands together, and address prayers to their deity at numerous times during the school day.

I have to suppose that what Dr. Fleming wants is for public-school authorities to organize prayer events on behalf of one or more favored religions. Whether he expects such events always to reflect the rituals of one favored religion or to be apportioned among the various religions or



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nonreligions represented in the student body, I know not.

Similarly, the taxes for the support of the public schools are extracted from the adherents of a number of different religions. Should the apportionment of prayer events be made to reflect the relative contributions of those varied adherents, including atheists and agnostics? Should the events be apportioned *pro rata* among the students or, more justifiably, in proportion to the share of income, sales, property, and other taxes paid by the adherents of each faith to support the public schools of their district? At the very least, this promises to be a serious administrative problem.

I am also not aware that our public schools forbid Christians or anyone else from pretending that their traditions are equal to or superior to others, although I can see where such a prohibition might ward off some schoolyard holy wars.

Dr. Fleming's religious program for the public schools seems to me better suited to an Islamic theocracy than to a free society.

—John McClaughry
Concord, VT

Dr. Fleming Replies:

There is no fool like an old fool, unless he is the fool that makes a dupe of himself. Over the years, John McClaughry has convinced himself that he could be governor of his state and lead a secessionist movement, while remaining thick as thieves with the Republican establishment in Washington. A man who has never ceased to defend the Islamic terrorists in Kosovo should have better sense than to hurl the insult "Islamic" against Christians who believe, in principle, in defending their own religion. If McClaughry would like to go and experience firsthand the joys of living under Albanian rule, let me be the first to make a contribution to the "John McClaughry Expatriation to Pristina" fund. Better take a copy of our October issue on self-defense.

As usual, McClaughry has missed the point of my essay. Since he knows that I oppose the very existence of public schools and that my standard proposal for dealing with them is to let the neighborhoods decide what sort of religion or nonreligion they want, I do not see how even he can imagine that I am in favor of using the

schools to impose my religion. He thinks that inaudible private prayers are sufficient. Of course, there are private prayers that one can say in the mind, and prisoners of conscience may often have nothing but that form of prayer to console themselves with. In robust Christian communities, however, the faithful take part in corporate prayer, and no sane Christian would want his children to be deprived of such an opportunity in those places that form their character. McClaughry's conception of prayer is like a conception of money that is stripped of all social meaning. Such money would merely be play money that one could not spend. What McClaughry really wants, of course, is a God-free society paid for with the tax dollars of Christians. That is what he means by calling himself a libertarian.

Mr. Angione apparently believes that the Founding Fathers were all like the hooligans who destroyed the private property they stole from honest merchants at the Boston Tea Party. When the nearest thing we had to legitimate governments—though they represented only a minority of opinion—seceded from the British crown, it was quite a different matter.

"You say you want a revolution?" Fine and dandy—but with this caveat. Those who wish to take up arms against the system had better be clear about their motives, their objectives, and the probable consequences of their folly. Blowing off steam in a letter to the editor may be a harmless prank, though, in these days of PATRIOT Acts, I would not be too sure; to involve friends and family in an insurrection, however, could prove very costly. Admittedly, the *status quo* stinks, but I do not see that suicide is the best response.

On Jefferson on Iraq

In his essay "What Would Jefferson Do?" (Views, August), Stephen B. Presser implies that Thomas Jefferson would support efforts to silence the critics of the war in Iraq. While it is true that, during his second term, Jefferson supported some

illiberal measures (the embargo episode being a prime example), Dr. Presser ignores Jefferson's Kentucky Resolution and the Revolution of 1800.

In the summer of 1798, the Federalists made criticism of the national government a crime *via* the Sedition Act. Jefferson and Madison drafted the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions to combat both this oppressive measure and the liberal interpretation of the Constitution that gave birth to the Alien and Sedition Acts. Under the Sedition Act, at least 25 people were arrested and 14 were indicted—many of them for criticizing President Adams' efforts to wage war against France. Though the Sedition Act expired just before Jefferson assumed the presidency, he pardoned those convicted under this oppressive measure. As for those Americans who had supported the acts and the Federalists, Jefferson described them as "dupes of artful maneuvers, and made for a moment to be willing instruments in forging chains for themselves." Such actions and words simply do not support Dr. Presser's characterization of Jefferson as one to inclined to circumscribe the parameters of political debate.

—William J. Watkins, Jr.
Greenville, SC

Dr. Presser Replies:

What Dr. Watkins writes regarding the Federalists' seditious-libel prosecutions is certainly correct, and I think he nicely underscores the point that, for Jefferson, dissent is perfectly permissible—indeed, to be encouraged—when he is out of power and wants to criticize those he wishes to replace. Once he is in power, however, his toleration for dissent seems to decrease dramatically. Those wishing to explore the information that leads me to conclude that, for Jefferson, civil liberties were a matter of whose ox was being gored will enjoy Leonard Levy's book, *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1989).

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The Iraq Quagmire

The lies and distortions surrounding the stated rationale for the war against Iraq now appear crude, clumsy, and embarrassing. While it would have been unrealistic to expect Messrs. Bush, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz to display Bismarckian finesse in setting up Saddam Hussein, six months after the war was declared over, their actions should be judged by the objective criteria that have not changed since the Iron Chancellor's days: Has the operation made the United States more or less powerful, affluent, respected, and secure? While no final answer can be given until all U.S. troops have been withdrawn from Iraq, the longer that withdrawal is postponed, the more likely it is that the verdict will be negative.

In terms of the "War on Terror," Iraq is a fiasco. The war against Saddam Hussein—planned and desired by its executors long before September 11—was made possible by the terrorist attacks two years ago. In addition, it was partly justified by the claim—notably emanating from the Pentagon's Office of Special Planning—that Saddam had links to Osama bin Laden and other terrorists. The claim was false: Iraq under Saddam did not maintain such links, and she was not a terrorist threat to the United States. One unintended but predictable consequence of the war and occupation has been Iraq's rapid conversion into a breeding ground for homegrown terrorists and a catalyst for violently anti-American activism throughout the region.

The attackers killing American soldiers on a daily basis are variously described as Iranian agents, Al Qaeda operators, and Syrian infiltrators. While it is possible that some or all of the above are involved in the attacks that have claimed close to a thousand lives thus far—over 150 of them American—it is unlikely that resistance would cease without foreign intervention. Violence against Americans, other foreigners, and their Iraqi helpers is fed by a restive population—especially in the Sunni center—that resents the foreign presence and wants it to end. This nationalist sentiment will grow as long as American troops remain. Bringing in more U.S. troops would only make things worse, and, in any event, the option is un-

attractive to the Bush administration only months before an election year. Even if U.S. forces were to withdraw immediately, Iraq would remain a "country of concern" for decades to come.

In terms of credibility and prestige, America's international standing has been jeopardized by the strain caused by the military occupation and political management of Iraq. While there was less than meets the eye in President Bush's call (on September 24) for the United Nations to help reconstruct Iraq—it was neither an admission that America has hit the limits of her might nor a major departure from his administration's insistence on maintaining control—the fact that he felt compelled to appeal for help at all reflects a retreat from the heady days of May and June. A few months ago, Mr. Bush's *volte-face* would have caused chuckles and gloating in Paris and Berlin; today, however, many "old Europeans" are as uncomfortable with the prospect of America's hasty and humiliating retreat from Iraq as they are with the thought of assuming the burden themselves.

The difficulties in Iraq have curtailed America's ability to influence events in other important theaters. Emboldened by the rapid fall of Baghdad, President Bush launched the "Road Map" for peace in Israel-Palestine, his top officials issued threats directed at Syria and Iran, and North Korea was openly mentioned as the next target. The emerging Iraqi quagmire has emboldened Ariel Sharon and Yasser Arafat to destroy the "Road Map," and the mullahs are now more firmly in control of Teheran than ever, while Syria continues to garrison Lebanon and to support Palestinian militants. North Korea, too, feels the heat is off and shows no sign of giving up on her nuclear program.

One important consequence of last August's bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad is that other countries are reluctant to commit troops, policemen, or administrators. The signal from the bombers was unambiguous: Whoever comes to Iraq, under whatever auspices, will be treated as an American stooge and targeted accordingly. In the immediate aftermath of the war, an approach

by the Bush administration to the United Nations with an offer of a Security Council-sanctioned mission in Iraq would have been welcomed in "Old Europe" and elsewhere—but the notion of sharing the fruits of victory with those who had opposed the war was regarded as unthinkable in Washington. Today, the roles are reversed: President Bush wants a Security Council resolution that would retroactively legitimize American action and bring soldiers from various member-countries—under U.S. command—to help maintain a semblance of law and order in Iraq, but its approval is unlikely.

If the Security Council refuses to adopt the kind of resolution that Washington wants, it will be a blessing in disguise. It is in the interest of the United States to hand over power in Iraq to a local government—or perhaps several governments, running the Kurdish north, Sunni center, and Shiite south—and to withdraw all troops as soon as possible. The democratic credentials and ideology of those authorities taking over for the United States are immaterial.

By contrast, if Iraq were to become a U.N.-approved and managed mission, the outcome would be disastrous for all concerned. The troops, including many Americans, would stay until the job of "nation-building" is complete—that is to say, forever. A self-perpetuating, self-serving, and corrupt bureaucracy would inevitably emerge, *à la* Sarajevo and Pristina. Even if the blue helmets were placed under U.S. command, the political decision-making process would become *de facto* multinational and "multilateral." American soldiers would continue to die, but their deaths would be even more senseless than they are today. <C>

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