



Attack of the Theocrats!: How the Religious Right Harms Us All — and What We Can Do About It

Sean Faircloth , Richard Dawkins (Foreword)

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At no time in history has the United States had such a high percentage of theocratic members of Congress—those who expressly endorse religious bias in law. Just as ominously, especially for those who share the values and views of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, at no other time have religious fundamentalists effectively had veto power over one of the country's two major political parties. As Sean Faircloth argues in this deeply sobering yet highly engaging book, this has led to the crumbling of the country's most cherished founding principle—the wall of separation between church and state. While much of the public debate in the United States over church-state issues has focused on the construction of nativity scenes in town squares and the addition of “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance, former politician and lobbyist Faircloth moves beyond the symbolism to explore the many ways federal and state legal codes privilege religion in law. He demonstrates in vivid detail how religious bias in law harms all Americans—financially, militarily, physically, socially, and educationally—and directs special attention to the outlandish words, views, and policy proposals of the most theocratic politicians. Sounding a much-needed alarm for all who care about the future direction of the country, Faircloth concludes by offering an inspiring 10-point vision of an America returned to its secular roots and by providing a specific and sensible plan for realizing this vision.

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From Reader Review Attack of the Theocrats!: How the Religious Right Harms Us All — and What We Can Do About It for online ebook

Dan Gilbert says

Overall, it contained good information. Faircloth's inconsistent use of sarcasm as humor was disconcerting, however, and hurt the seriousness of the book's main points.

George L. Reading says

Very true

Very true the theocrats are here and would be more than happy to dictate every aspect of your life. A very accurate accounting of how the religious right has taken over and corrupted the GOP. Good read.

Thomas Lawson says

I will always have faith in humanity, regardless of the examples that Mr. Faircloth uses in this book. I will always know that the good people of this world outnumber the few that would leave a little girl alone to die in a van or beat a child with a piece of plumbing equipment. But I also know that small numbers of people can do powerful things. Less than 45% of Americans attend church on a weekly basis, yet Washington seems to be under the thumb of these people. Why? Fear, for one. Fear works in Washington and it works in the pews. Second is organization. Secular Americans do not get together once a week and touch base. I don't know how it can be done, but Secular Americans must check in often enough with what is going on so that we can keep that minority of zealots at bay. We must remain vigilant and cease our blind optimism that things will get better on their own. They will not.

The types of people that want to continue to subjugate women and beat their own children with plumber's tubing will not rest until they get what they want. They are beyond reason. These are the types of people that put Jesus before their own mothers and fathers, before their own children even. They hide behind Pro-Life signs while calling for the death penalty. They hide behind proclamations for family values while beating their children and trying to tear apart families of same-sex couples. They hide behind droves of ignorant and confused people that don't take the time to read a newspaper or a magazine, but instead binge on sensational, soap-selling propaganda-filled news channels.

I loved this book. This book is important. Every American that considers themselves to be a patriot should read it. We must return to our Enlightenment roots. If the Enlightenment fostered the birth of our nation, then the last few decades of theocratic encroachment have been a scary week in the NICU. Staying faithful to the ideals of our secular founding is the only thing that will keep the United States from future degradation. Invest in the United States by purchasing this book.

Caaaarlthellama says

Great ideas, horrible writing. I couldn't get over all the qualifications ("some say," "many people") he makes or the lack of quantitative evidence to support his claims. I was disappointed that, although I agreed very closely with Mr. Faircloth's opinions, it was far too easy to rebut them because he had stated them so weakly. In the end I stopped reading a third of the way through; it is the first book in four years that I haven't finished.

Frederick Bingham says

I skimmed a lot of this book. Mr. Faircloth is a very impassioned advocate of atheism and an opponent of organized religion. The best chapter of this book is where he talks about the ability of churches under US law to avoid taxation, and the "prosperity gospel". The prosperity gospel is basically a bunch of charlatans making money from gullible people. Joel Osteen is singled out, but there are many others. (Given their willingness to follow hucksters like Osteen, it is not surprising that evangelicals have voted in overwhelming numbers for Trump.) He contrasts Osteen, who has produced nothing, with secular innovators like Thomas Edison, Steve Jobs and Linus Pauling, whose accomplishments have enriched or saved the lives of millions.

There is also an interesting chapter on the founding fathers and their religious beliefs. Much of the book though was a bit dated and not that new or different.

Marsha says

I didn't have a slight conundrum at the beginning of this: would I give it 4 stars or 5? It was a great book, but there was about a half hour near the end about the Richard Dawkins Foundation and the authors Association with it. But really, I appreciate the things that are pointed out and brought to light about religion on the whole and the nominal foundation of our country! To see how our politicians and government have corrupted the basic ideas represented by our Constitution as well as the way they've corrupted primary religions nominally exercised by the majority of United States citizenry is appalling! I demure from saying that I am an atheist, although I do admit to being a Jewish atheist! And the majority of people I know and know of truly have difficulty believing every "God-given law and rule" without doing a little "pick and choosing" at best!

Whether the reader personally chooses the Richard Dawkins Foundation as his/her "go-to" organization for non-theocratic rights and policies, the book is really good!

Winston says

Concerned by faith-based initiatives, tax and regulatory exemptions for Christian "charities" (but which are conspicuously absent for the other religions out there, including Hinduism, which predates Judaism), Faircloth summons his biting sarcasm and thorough research skills for a well-reasoned clarion call to action. Although most of the theocrats he takes to task are Republicans, he does criticise Barack Obama for failing

to remain faithful (no pun intended) to a pre-election promise.

Chock full of trustworthy sources, Faircloth reveals that unfair, unequal legal standards are applied; one for the religious, and one for everyone else. Faith harming (in some cases degenerating to faith murder) by religious parents who believe in sin, lies by the Reagan administration linking pornography to violence, blackmailing foreign aid recipients on the condition that they forbid reproductive education for women are just the tip of this perniciously polluted iceberg.

Perhaps most importantly, every issue identified by Faircloth here is paired with a reasonable solution that will provide real, tangible benefits for everyone, not just those who share a particular philosophy.

Chapter 1

Separation of church and state is being torn asunder. The First Amendment is being misconstrued and lied about.

Jefferson explicitly stated the Founding Fathers' desire for a WALL of separation (which likely led to Texas attempting to remove him from the state's textbooks). There are numerous cases of faith torture and murder (when parents refuse to get their children even the most rudimentary care) are conducted under the banner of special exemptions for religiously-based "conscientious" objections. One particularly ghastly incident involved a child developing a tumour the size of a baseball on their shoulder. "Special" rights are a common "justification" used to deny equal marriage rights to same-sex couples. This misses the essence of the issue - love and informed, consenting adults. Religious verses are used to justify and promote violence. Let's face it, "Do not kill" is vastly outnumbered by edicts demanding the opposite in the book of Exodus by several dozen orders of magnitude. Rick Warren equated Michael Schiavo to Nazis. Caring more for the brain dead than for those who can still suffer will do that to one's moral sensibilities. Churches are rarely audited by the IRS, which only allows them to flout their loopholes in ever more brazen fashions, including setting up their ministers and their families in lavish multi-million dollar McMansions. Religious groups can fire whoever they wish, even in states with anti-discrimination laws. Numerous politicians advocate mandatory creation classes

Unregulated church businesses (including gyms, daycare centres, etc) are exempt from the usual regulatory standards, leading to atrocious treatment of toddlers in religious daycare centres.

Chapter 2 deals with the founding fathers' actual intentions, private writings, and, crucially, the Treaty of Tripoli, which explicitly states that the US is not founded on Christianity. Sorry Turek, you lose. Most of the Fathers would never be elected to Congress, let alone the Presidency, today.

Chapter 3 is the longest, and in my estimation, the most crucial. It shows how laws that give special privileges and unearned exemptions to religious organisations hurts everybody, including Christians.

Emergency contraception is being denied to women because pharmacists can cite "religious objections" to dispensing contraceptives. The gag rule and hurdles to women's reproductive rights in foreign countries, under penalty of losing crucial aid, leads to back-alley abortions and death for women. This must be repealed. At present, the rule's enforcement depends solely on who sits in the Whitehouse. Abstinence-only "education" continues to be funded, despite their proven failure, leading to higher rates of STDs/unwanted pregnancies/abortions. If pro-lifers truly wanted to reduce abortion rates (and help teens make mature decisions concerning sex) they would ditch this nonsense. But they don't. Opposition to ESCR, even when embryos would be discarded otherwise, further reveals their hypocrisy and inverted sense of priorities. Death

with Dignity legislation (well overdue) in Oregon and Washington is based on compassion and individual choice. The sooner a federal law is passed permitting this final right, the better. Faith harming/murder is explored in greater detail, as are religious nurseries and day care centres. James Dobson & Daniel Pearl's abusive parenting policies are derived directly from the bible, showing how useless the "good" book is for raising children.

Chapter 4 concerns sexual morality, true morality (harm vs benefits) and the hypocrisy of so-called pro-family groups (and let's not forget Ted Haggard). He is quite right to lambast the excessively PC left-wingers such as Andrea Dworkin.

A repressive, Victorian-era (some would say Puritan) approach to sex is not healthy. Fortunately, it did not lead to Bill Clinton's defeat in 1996. Norman Vincent Peale, spiritual predecessor to the modern-day Prosperity Gospel. Instead of contributing aid to the world's most indigent and emaciated individuals, they con people out of their hard-earned salaries and wages and make a promise amounting to nothing more than "god will repay you sometime in the future." Most of these pitiable victims see nothing, the implication being that their reward will be in the afterlife (while the pastors live the good life in the here and now). Faircloth also spends a good amount of time on Marie Curie, Ben Franklin, Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs and other secularists who have contributed to true charities, improving human well-being by leaps and bounds.

And that's just the first half of the book. The second begins with fifty of the most vile, hateful and extreme "faithful" fundamentalists in Congress, who wield a disproportionate amount of power over all other Americans. Anti-gay hatred, tinfoil-esque conspiracies and whack-job tea party succor are just the appetizer. This book is a much-needed wake-up call to America in the 21st century, and we all owe Faircloth and debt of gratitude for writing this book.

Jim Razinha says

I read James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me* in 1995 and still consider it one of the most infuriating books I've ever read - because it completely disrupted what I thought I knew about history. I can use that same word (infuriating) to describe this book. I already knew most of this,, but Faircloth pulls it all together into one short volume. One short, yet utterly outrageous, teeth-grinding, damning indictment of the scariest trend in modern history.

Faircloth does a pretty good job of presenting his points. He repeats some of the stories, but I think just to reinforce the message. My one complaint is that he doesn't cite any of his quotes. He "awards" 50 of the most egregious legislators (all but three from one party...care to guess which one?) for their actions and statements, a few pretty heinous statements...but no sources. Frustrating that I'll have to track them down myself.

Another book that the people who need to read it won't, and the people who *really* need to read it will try to burn.

Matthew says

Ivonne Rovira says

I've been a faithful church-goer for most of my 57 years, but I have always said that I don't want my church teaching my kids math or my kids' school teaching them religion. Needless to say, I'm a firm believer in the First Amendment's separation of church and state. When I see today's politicians embracing right-wing evangelicalism at the same time as they despise all of the things that Jesus actually taught (e.g., comfort for the poor and afflicted, healing the sick, compassion for prisoners and sinners, an interest in actual born children rather than just zygotes, a zealous dislike of religious hypocrites), it makes my blood boil. Thank God for Sean Faircloth and his *Attack of the Theocrats! How the Religious Right Harms Us All – and What We Can Do About It*. (Forgive me: I just couldn't resist!)

Sean Faircloth, onetime state legislator from Maine and current director of strategy and policy for the U.S. branch of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, has authored a powerful book that combines a very brief history of freethinkers in America, a critique of the fundamentalists' hold on Congress and state legislatures and their abysmal ignorance of U.S. history (particularly the Founding Fathers' distaste for mainstream Christianity), and a blueprint for restoring the separation of church and state in the American landscape. Alternately enlightening and entertaining, Faircloth does a fabulous job. How fabulous? I bought the Audible version in which he reads his own book; however, Faircloth cites so many pithy quotations from the likes of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, and Abraham Lincoln — and others — that I had to buy the Kindle edition so that I could highlight these quotations and his excellent statistics for future use. Recommended for atheists and thoughtful theists alike.

Book says

Attack of the Theocrats: How the Religious Right Harms Us All - and What We Can Do About It by Sean Faircloth

"Attack of the Theocrats" is the brief yet effective book on how the religious right has used their political clout to cause harm to the rest of us. Sean Faircloth's interesting secular manifesto is a product of an interesting background that includes: his formal education as a lawyer, his years as a politician serving five terms in the Maine Legislature, his leadership and vision led to the creation of a children's museum in Maine, executive director of the Secular Coalition of America, and most recently director of strategy and policy for the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. This 168-page book is composed of ten chapters: 1. Introduction: The Crumbled Wall between Church and State, 2. Our Secular Heritage: One Nation under the Constitution, 3. Religious Bias in Law Harms Us All, 4. Genital Morality vs. Real Morality, 5. Two American Traditions: Religious Huckster and Secular Innovators, 6. The Theocrats (aka the Fundamentalist Fifty), 7. The Secularists, 8. Secularism - Born Again, 9. Our Secular Decade: A Strategic Plan, and 10. A Vision of a Secular America.

Positives:

1. Well written, engaging prose.
2. Great defense of secular principles.
3. Insightful, eye-opening accounts on how religion harms us. Accounts involving dangers to our children

are most troubling.

4. Thought-provoking quotes, "Fundamentalists tell us to fear the specter of special rights for gay citizens, though of course gay Americans aren't after special rights - merely equal rights. The irony is that special rights actually do exist in this country - for religious groups."
5. The special rights of religious groups in detail.
6. American exceptionalism in proper perspective.
7. A brief look at our Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson a personal favorite.
8. A look at how fundamentalists obtained political clout.
9. How tax money to religious organizations violate our Constitution's central principles.
10. Many great examples of how religious bias hurts us all. Great stuff!
11. Interesting court ruling decisions.
12. Religiously motivated policies that focus on sex. Sexual morality discussed.
13. Amusing stories. My favorite, the story of radio station KLUE.
14. Politicians and religion, such a dangerous mix.
15. The chapter on the Fundamentalist Fifty is priceless and disturbing.
16. Congressman Stark.
17. In defense of America as it was designed, a secular, constitutional Republic.
18. Secular strategy and vision in detail including the Ten Guiding Principles of a Secular America.
19. An inspirational plea for action.
20. A brief discussion on how secular societies around the world flourish.
21. A brief discussion about the ten groups that today form the Secular Coalition.
22. A bibliography.

Negatives:

1. A couple of mistakes of little consequence. As an example, Governor Sanford from SC was canoodling with a woman from Argentina not Brazil.
2. No notes or links.
3. The book may be a little preachy in the latter chapters.
4. The book's focus is on recent history and the future of secularism in America. For more in depth look at the history of secularism, I highly recommend Susan Jacoby's masterpiece, "Freethinkers".
5. I really didn't like the cover. A serious and inspirational topic deserved better.

In summary, I enjoyed this book. Sean Faircloth makes an inspirational plea to defend our secular Constitution. The book is thought-provoking, enlightening, and makes sound arguments based on reason. I recommend this book.

Further recommendations: "Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism" by Susan Jacoby, "Society without God" by Phil Zuckerman, "People's History of the United States" by Howard Zinn, "Doubt" by Jennifer Hecht, "American Fascists" by Chris Hedges, "Republican Gomorrah..." by Max Blumenthal, and "The Conservative Assault on the Constitution" by Erwin Chemerinsky.

Alex says

While admittedly a liberal and not religious, the author seeks to gain support for a separation of church and state from all groups that are interested in this task. This would include libertarians and moderates with links to religion. His arguments are more important than removing the 1954 addition of one nation under god to

our pledge.

The arguments he makes are the injustice of giving religious organizations special privileges similar secular organizations have to follow. His examples include a child care center that was shut down due to violations that simply reopened as a religious child care center that no longer had to deal with these regulations for child protection. The many states that allow for faith healing to be invoked that allow children to suffer intense pain for the rest of their short lives with illnesses that could be easily treated.

The author argues that religious fundamentalism is not just a problem in the middle east, it is a problem in the United States as well. Religious schools that do not have to follow the same laws as public school even regarding corporal punishment, and that these schools take tax money.

The book is a call to action to anyone that does not think religious fundamentalists should have the influence they have and a reminder of the laws that have injured the innocent in favor of religious fundamentals.

Larry Cahoon says

A very good book overall. There is though one glaring weakness. In two significant sections of the book, the second when he lists 50 members of the U.S. Congress and the harmful things they are doing in the name of religion, where the author comes across as making a rant rather than as making a reasoned argument. I think there are better ways to make that case for the harm that is being done to people based on religious beliefs. There are better ways to show the harm that is being done. One example of this is Greta Christina's book "Why Are You Atheists So Angry?: 99 Things That Piss Off the Godless," which despite the title presents of good case for why both the non-religious and the religious are harmed by the behavior coming out of the conservative fundamentalist sector of the U.S.

In spite of that weakness the author presents a good case for the harm being done, for how one part of our society is now dictating morals and behaviors that suit their particular religious beliefs to the detriment of the rest of the people in the country, and in many ways harming their own adherents to their beliefs.

I would have enjoyed a fuller discussion of the material in the final chapter where he lays out a plan for how to return the country to the secular roots of the founding fathers who understood very well the benefits of separation of church and state. The author correctly points out that many of the approaches taken have done more to anger those on the right on minor issues when it would be better to focus on the very real harm being done in the name of religion.

Zena Ryder says

Not including references is an unforgivable sin. I've no problem with anecdotes — indeed I agree with Faircloth that they're necessary, in order to pique people's interest and activate their compassion — but the claims he makes necessitate references. Even if he wanted to keep the book thin and readable for the "average" person (a fine aim) the references could be put on a website. There is no excuse.

As for the material, much of it is incredibly disturbing. Religious extremists on the Christian right do seem to hold a disproportionate amount of power in the US. (If indeed what he says is true. I am inclined to believe

that it is, but that could be my own confirmation bias talking.) It is written in an upbeat, lively style. A quick, enjoyable read that panders to your already-held beliefs, if you're a passionate secularist.

I was particularly looking forward to the "what we can do about it" part of the book. First, as I was aware, this is a book just about the United States, and much of the advice doesn't apply to elsewhere (I'm in Canada). Second, some of it is plain silly for the "average" person, such as running for office! Third, on a personal level, I was disappointed because I'm already doing many of the things (because I help run a branch of the Centre for Inquiry). I wanted something revolutionary and exciting, after hearing Faircloth's inspiring speech at the Imagine No Religion 3 conference. But I didn't find it here.

However, if this book encourages more Americans to be less complacent about the erosion of the wall between church and state, that's a good thing. If it encourages some of them to do something about it (donating to and/or joining a branch of the Center for Inquiry or donating to American Atheists, for example), then that's fantastic.

Shaz says

Though I am sympathetic to his cause, this book is repetitive and boring.
