




## Agitators in Christian Clothing

When will sincere Christians (or American patriots of any religious persuasion) learn that the deck is stacked against them and play to win? It has happened again: A textbook case on how professional agitators take down a legitimate institution. 

Last Thursday (June 10), in a long-awaited decision, Virginia's Supreme Court overturned a lower, Fairfax County, court judge's earlier determination that an 1867 statute allowed religious parishes established before that date to keep their own properties if they split off from the umbrella denomination.

The Falls Church, located in the old township's namesake, Falls Church, Virginia, was one of nine in the Diocese that had voted to break ties in the wake of the consecration of an openly gay (and divorced) priest, V. Gene Robinson, as Bishop in New Hampshire in 2003.

The Falls Church — located the Washington, D.C. Metro area — had been thriving in a locale infamous for its cynicism toward religion. George Washington is said to have worshipped there; its cemetery shows gravestones dating to the early 1700s. It was on the cusp of a vast expansion project, having purchased adjacent, run-down properties for development as a school and activities center.

But the five-judge panel of the Virginia Supreme Court claimed that the Civil War-era statute governing how property is divided when denominations part ways was somehow not applicable to the current dispute, and remanded the now three-year-old case back to Fairfax County's Circuit Court to come up with a new (and no-doubt "preferred") decision, a more "evolved" one, in the spirit of a "living" Constitution, to reflect only modern real estate and contract laws.

Moreover, the battle parishioners [thought they'd won](#) will likely [deplete the once-large coffers](#) enjoyed by the traditionalist-Anglican wing of Episcopalians. Like so many fights in which conservatives, traditionalists, and constitutionalists have a stake, the case probably is destined for "a financial black hole."

The *Post* article also remarked that "the Episcopal Church, like much of organized religion, has been losing members in recent decades." It declined to mention the overriding reason: that parishioners have tired of nonstop challenges to their faith, traditions, and theology and have dropped out.

So, what's it all about?

Such cases, at their core, involve a relatively small, radical cadre of professional provocateurs who overwhelm the traditional wing of a large institution. It's part of a larger offensive against traditional mores nationwide, especially affecting standards of morality.

The first mistake that leaders of the nine Episcopal breakaway parishes made in the Diocese of Virginia was the same one political conservatives always make. They assume that whatever controversy is on the table — in this case, instatement of an openly gay bishop, which spurred the split — is, in fact, the issue at hand. But the instatement was a provocation — just one in a long list aimed at undercutting Christian precepts that might interfere with a "progressive" value system supporting a socialist/mental-health-based view of governance, rather than concepts articulated in the Declaration of Independence or the U.S. Constitution.



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This trend is the issue, not the gay priest.

Whether it is the Episcopal, Catholic, Presbyterian, or Baptist denomination, the objective of this liberal-Left cadre is to tire out the “faithful,” to bust the budgets of resisters, and relegate the “church,” as an entity, to a social club, where people network, have fun, and park their kids. They want Christian teachings, per se, pushed out (along with their symbols and icons) — banished from schools, public discussion, the courthouse, and public view. Officially banning religion and its expression won’t work here; that’s too blatantly unconstitutional. But through a well-constructed program of chipping away at Christianity’s base on any pretext — discrimination, hate crimes, child endangerment, the Establishment Clause — they have, in effect, managed just that.

A good agitator first denounces, then sends out rent-a-mobs with protest signs and inserts trained provocateurs into a congregation to stir the pot. This will result in meetings — lots of them. Earnest parishioners, believing they have a duty to speak out, are clueless concerning any professional pariahs in their midst. Even if they knew who the provocateurs were, most folks do not have the background in rhetoric, argument, or debate to prevail. They usually get trounced then and there, followed in due course by a lawsuit.

Whether protagonists win or lose any one court battle is immaterial. Agitation means stirring up the pot, keeping people angry, and sustaining the controversy in the news media until resisters throw in the towel. Miffed parishioners take cover in home churches and small gatherings to avoid the constant appeasement of “cranks and screwballs.” But this tactic is losing ground, too.

For example, in San Diego a pastor and his wife were interrogated by county officials, who then [threatened them with escalating fines](#) if they continued to hold bible studies in their home. According to Attorney Dean Broyles of the Western Center For Law & Policy, officials asked the couple if they held “regular meeting[s] in [their] home,” whether people said “Amen,” whether the gathering prayed, and specifically, whether they said “praise the Lord?” The couple answered affirmatively. They were then informed that any such gathering “with an average of 15 people attending,” was in violation of county regulations, followed up with written notice concerning their “unlawful use of land.” They were ordered to “stop religious assembly or apply for a major use permit” — a process that can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Similarly, by Easter Sunday 2008, the 2,000-plus-member Falls Church had halted its expansion, having spent thousands on litigation to preserve properties, only to have the decision reversed last Thursday.

It was a win-win situation for leftist agitators, whose enormously wealthy backers absolutely, positively do not want even lip-service paid to tenets of the Christian faith. With a leftist President and Congress (and soon-to-be U.S. Supreme Court) firmly in hand, they believe now’s the time to “wrap it up.”

The questions traditionalists and strict constitutionalists should be asking are: How does the liberal-left always manage to eat our lunch? Where does the left get all its money? Who, or what, is trying to upend and supplant our traditions, our constitutional freedoms, the curricula taught to our children, our language, our religious heritage and, indeed, our very culture? And how does the Left keep luring naive citizens into a feel-good place where honesty and ethics reign — only to drop the proverbial bomb that proves the ploy a sham?

In the case of the breakaway Episcopal parishes, there was ample evidence that the traditionalist wing was being lured into the “warm and fuzzy.” Virginia’s Bishop, Peter Lee, assured dissident congregations that if an upcoming vote in 2007 showed that some wished to leave the larger body, their



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disaffiliation would be respected and “an amicable settlement” reached. But once the votes were counted, and nine parishes sought disaffiliation, he reneged and threatened litigation.

So, was Bishop Lee a patsy? Or trying to ingratiate himself with Presiding Bishop of the larger Episcopal Church, Katherine Jefferts-Schori (a long-time supporter of ordaining partnered gays and lesbians) in hopes of avoiding legal action against him personally by the larger, national Episcopal Church? After all, Mzz. Jefferts-Schori, had pressured the Ohio diocese to sue their seceding parishes, even four years after the fact.

Determining motives is tricky, but in voting to consecrate the openly gay Gene Robinson as Bishop at the 2003 General Convention, Lee showed his inner-politician. He could [not have been surprised](#) by outrage at home.

Starting with the late 1960s, Marxist agitators began delivering an orgy of provocations: controversies over the “liturgy,” theological revisionism, gender-neutral terminology in both the Bible and Book of Common Prayer; fights over the historic and scientific “provability” of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Jesus. Finally, in the 1970s, Bishop James Pike, referring to theism, declared: “God is dead.”

This pronouncement emboldened agitators in other denominations to push the envelope, to shock and divide, until America’s church-going population no longer felt engaged in their religion. These “agents of change,” as agitators took to calling themselves, used up resources and time that properly belonged to tending the problems of local parishioners, which suddenly got “farmed out” to church deacons, family therapists, and groups like Alcoholics Anonymous.

And what of the 2.2 million members, which the *Washington Post* claims still comprises the “diminishing” Episcopal Church — breakaway factions or otherwise?

In the 1950s, no one considered 2.2 million people trivial. Today, if “only” that number is, say, watching a particular TV show, it is cancelled. This means that perceptions are driven by computerized models — in essence, numerical trend analyses — which are duly reported, but often misleading.

For example, suppose Episcopalians do represent 2.2 million members, and that’s a decline, then one should ask: 2.2 million compared to what, and as of when? Only then can one research the “why?”

There is usually a qualifier to statistics. When it is reported that so-many millions of people are watching a particular show, for example, it typically is worded as a percentage “of the viewing audience.” A reader of a newspaper might think, wow! Thirty percent of people are watching. Incorrect. Thirty percent of the viewing audience is watching. How about the non-viewing audience — the people who rarely turn on their sets — who work 12-hour days, chauffeur kids around to hideous numbers of activities, and refuse to sign up for Cable? Evelyn Richardson, a public relations director in Dallas, once put it: “There’s hardly anything that’s not biased, and what passes for entertainment is bed-hopping and bathroom humor.”

Now, you can take or leave Richardson’s reasons for not signing up. The point is, the woman basically wasn’t watching, except for an occasional few minutes. So, she (and many like her) comprises the “non-viewing audience.” Do network executives know that some people aren’t watching? Of course, why else add the clause “of the viewing audience” except to cover certain legal derrières in the event they ever have to explain the numbers? And face it, obtaining such data is easier now with Cable and satellite dishes — just tap into subscribers’ boxes.



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And what of the reasons for not viewing? Oops, don't take your eye off the ball. We learned in elementary math class that the key to solving word problems is: Ignore unnecessary information. For statistical purposes, no one needs to know why Mrs. Richardson isn't watching TV, only that she isn't watching. The "why" can be left for another day.

Similarly, the why's that are key to parishioners' arguments in court cases are immaterial to agitators, who switch to technicalities. The very first indicator that an "issue" is bogus comes when an outrageous suggestion, idea, demand, or lawsuit appears out of the blue, but with surprisingly significant money and support attached, followed by a salivating press. Leftist protagonists pull off a quick (and shallow) publicity coup, capture attention, then hammer away until their phony "issue" — e.g., same-sex marriage/adoption — is legitimized as part of the American landscape, before a majority of the populace realizes something's up.

Agitation and provocation are now arts. Virtually any hot-button topic can be exploited in the service of Christianity's derailment. Agitators DO NOT CARE whether homosexuality is genetic or learned, whether fetuses are human or "tissue," whether opportunities exist for female religious leaders, whether Jesus would "go green," or even whether the Resurrection is historically accurate. For all they care, even the openly gay Bishop Gene Robinson, whose consecration they used to help launch the breakaway movement in the Episcopal Church, could now fall through the floor, and those who engineered his "promotion" wouldn't notice.

Agitators are too busy "working the system": How much resistance can we expect from the electorate? Which ones will equivocate? How many will give up? And most importantly, which demographics will go to the mat for their freedoms and their faith?

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