**HAPPENINGS IN THE CHURCH**

 *By Dr. Riley B. Case*

*THE SUPREME COURT AND EVANGELICALS: GUILTY AS CHARGED*

 The past several weeks have not been good for Christians, at least for evangelical Christians. In a fast-moving world shifts in culture and morality are changing even faster than innovations in technology. Representative Lois Capps (D-Ca) is introducing in congress a 57-page bill that would move to expunge words *husband* and *wife* from official documents and replace them with gender-neutral alternatives. A Utah man has applied for a marriage license to permit him to marry a second wife (polygamy) which should be allowable under Supreme Court logic. In Oregon a Christian baker needs to pay $135,000 for refusing to bake a cake for a homosexual marriage. Recently the county newspaper wrote a rather glowing article about a local school district, Eastern Howard, in Indiana, mentioning the strong Christian presence at the school. The school is known for academic excellence, service to the community and school spirit. Never mind. The Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) threatened a lawsuit against the school, voicing objection to. “teaching Christian values to students when those values are continually shown to include homophobia, the oppression of women, science denialism, and violence against religious and nonreligious minority groups.” Someone has commented that the culture wars are over and the Christians have lost.

 That assessment is overly-pessimistic. God is still in control. Social progressives, including secularists and atheists, have strongly influenced the media, the entertainment world, and the academic world, but 70% of Americans still identify as Christians. Here are some issues as Christians seek to confront an increasingly hostile cultural environment.

 1) **Authority**

 . Christians believe that the nature of ultimate reality is revealed, not discovered by unaided, autonomous human reason. . God exists and has revealed himself in history through the events recorded in the Bible. The revelation includes not only a plan for history but a moral code. God sets the standards, not the puny minds of men and women. This puts Christians in conflict with views such as that expressed by Supreme Court justice Kennedy who has written: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.” This statement suggests that the autonomous person is the judge of all things good and true and right and beautiful. Christians point out that because of the fallen nature of humankind, the “autonomous person” is a sinful, self-centered, prideful, spiteful, prejudiced person who is not nearly as “autonomous” as he or she believes, but is subject to sin, selfishness, and easily influenced by demigods, to say nothing of advertising and the uncontrolled rants of social media. This autonomous self without regard for God and God’s standards, has led humankind to systems like Nazism, Communism under the Soviet Union, Maoism, and all manner of destructive societies where corruption is rampant, human life is cheap and disposable, and where survival of the fittest and the law of the jungle prevail. The secularists of the world believe that modern advancements in education, sciences, and the social sciences protect the world from tyrants, but one might argue that just the exact opposite is true: education and scientism have the potential for leading the world to greater and greater evil. Education and scientism cannot and perhaps are not even interested in changing the human heart. We today have only the educated groups of the world to fear.

 2) **Freedom**

 In the secular world freedom is associated with license. One man declared this understanding of freedom: “Freedom is doing what you want to do when you want to do it how you want to do and with whomever you want to do it.” That is the recipe for anarchy and moral chaos, especially when this understanding of freedom is interpreted as a human right. One woman blogs that in her freedom she has discarded the authoritarian restraints of church and parents and government. Now she is prepared to throw off the restraints of convention: she argues for polyamory and against the very concept of marriage with its restraining vows.

 In the Bible freedom is associated with release from bondage. The bondage may be the outward oppression of governments or laws or kings, but it is first and foremost inward bondage, to “principalities and powers and the rulers of this world.” From this Christ sets us free so that we are empowered to love and live above the temptations of the world.

 3) **Nature**

 It is a secularist and progressive article of faith that human nature, that is, the preferences and inclinations we are born with, are good and to be affirmed. The world, and especially the religious world, if it declares otherwise and supports conventions that restrain these preferences, is to be declared as judgmental and intolerant. Thus same-sex attractions are good, as well as, as some now are arguing, attractions some associate with incest or pedophile or gender identification. The argument has been made that human beings, especially men, are not by nature monogamous. . For hundreds of years the teaching “celebate in singleness and faithfulness in marriage” has been taken as a high ideal. Now it is seen as unnatural and restrictive.

 The argument is usually made that homosexual attraction comes from nature and is not a choice. Now, however, we hear that sexual attractions might change from day to day, or from partner to partner. While secularists and progressives speak of “mutual consent” and “being responsible” such phrases hardly restrict people from doing what they want to do when they want to do it with whomever they want to do it.

 In contrast Christians believe that human nature is sinful, and fallen. Only God in Jesus Christ can restore us to full humanity. By nature we are not loving or sacrificing. As a professor of mine once used to say: when we are doing what comes naturally we are not loving our neighbor as ourselves There is probably nothing that infuriates secularists as much as this teaching. Quoting the Bible verse “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” is guaranteed to alienate secularists.

 Christians, and others for that matter, believe that the compromising of Christian morality in the present day, is directly related to the breakdown of the family, to the increase of violence and rape and poverty and inequity. There is more accumulated wealth in our land than ever before and yet there is more inequity. There is also more unhappiness. Nearly two-thirds of Americans do not see a hopeful future for America.

 Evangelical Christians are also convinced that part of the reason for the decline of mainline denominations is the result of compromises on the part of religious progressives, who sometimes seem obsessed in wanting to be “relevant” and in tunes with the times. The phrase “the world is ahead of the church” on matters of sexual morality is an indictment of how far we have fallen.

 Oh yes, the local school district accused of being “too Christian” and

 Behind the modern

 As opposed to the secular view of reality the Christian offers Jesus Christ. Jesus called himself the “Way, the Truth, and the Life.” Those who are his disciples are told “You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). For the Christian “truth” is much larger than what can be observed under a microscope. Truth is the reality that there is a moral order to the universe; the originas of life are with God and history is moving toward the fulment of life in God. The key concept in the Bible

 The secular world will be tolerant of Christians if the Christian religion helps persons to cope with problems and makes them feel better, if Christians keep their beliefs to themselves, and if they do not try to force their beliefs on others. But that secular world goes ballistic in the presence of religion that makes truth claims that supercede scientism’s views of nature selection, unaided autonomous reason, and revealed moral codes based on an ancient book (the Bible) that

 For many years, and as a part of Western civilization a Christian world-view strongly influenced understandings of justice, truth and reality. Even non-believers were supportive of moral codes that stressed justice, truth telling, faithfulness, respect for the individual. Even persons who were skeptical of the many of the Bible claims were supportive of th3e idea that the Bible contains high moral teachings and values that have served as the basis of western civ8ilization. The Enlightenment may have craitical of the idea of supernaturally revealed truth but it still believed there was a unified system of truth.

 But even that can no longer be assumed in the presence of the new atheism and of expanding secularism. Supreme Justice Kennedy, who cast the deciding vote on the Supreme Court’s decredd on gay marriage has declared that This rejects all external truth claims and moral claims in favor of the autonomous self, no matter how preidiced, how broken, how misled, how sinful and how punty that autonomous self is.

 It then opens the door to all behavthat feels right, or seems right, and which advances self- fulfillment and personal happiness.

 Michael Carey writes for Slate, that

sThe role of government then Ideas of external authority and fixed reality are rejected in favor of self empowerment, self-

are in the nature of things, of a unified system osf truth, of respecrt for the invididual, of ;rotection for the less privileged,

 Supreme Justice Kennedy

 Christians make a controversial claim: because of the fallen nature of humankind autonomous human reason and feelings are affected by sin and are therefore not all that reliable.

 This opens Christianity to charges of authoritarianism, prejudice, rigidty, intolerance I remember discussion from long ago I had with a college roommate in a secular school.

, . and that scientism is the only ideology that is allowed to ponntoficate about origins or life, moral standards, and

 In that light let us clarify some issues. There are serious differences between Christians and seculalists and it is important to know what some of these are.