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## Religious entanglements

By [Kathleen Parker](#)

It is nearly axiomatic that presidential contests tend to shine a harsh light on conservative Christians — inasmuch as they are viewed as the Republican Party's base and are, therefore, deemed fair game.

Of course, religious folks come in a variety of stripes, checks and polka dots. Many are Democrats. But it is the members of the Christian right — evangelicals and Catholics, especially — who are treated every four years to the sneers of lefties, academics, proud atheists (allow me to [quote myself](#): “There's no dogma like no dogma”) and certain but not all media.

Roger Ailes's Fox News has succeeded in no small part because he doesn't treat Christians as though they're Darwin's missing link.

Fortunately for Western civilization, Christianity has survived worse insults. Lately, conservative Christians in the country that codified freedom of religion have been placed on the defensive. Often viewed as obstructionists to progress, a secular world wonders: What's wrong with those people? Why can't they just get with the program?

Why can't the [Little Sisters of the Poor](#) suck it up and sign off on the Affordable Care Act's demand that their insurance policy include contraception funding? Ditto Hobby Lobby, the family-owned craft business that prevailed in its [Supreme Court fight](#) to not fund insurance covering contraception that destroys embryos.

Hobby Lobby detractors argued that the company was trying to impose its religious beliefs on others. In fact, the family was resisting the government's insistence that they render those beliefs unto Caesar. (The Supreme Court granted the Little Sisters an injunction pending their appeal in the 10th Circuit that protects them from enforcement.)

These issues, I'll admit, can seem arcane and are tiresome at times. But I'm convinced, as [Alan Dershowitz and Ken Starr agreed](#) during a debate last year on these two cases, that the state should always go to extra lengths to protect religious liberty whenever possible.

If only more Democrats and Republicans were as agreeable.

Recent history and more recent comments by the likeliest presidential candidates make it clear, however, that Democrats and Republicans will take very different approaches in future state/religion entanglements.

If Hillary Clinton becomes president, she has more or less promised that the state's interests will crush the individual's as necessary to advance women's rights. Giving a fiery speech last month at Tina Brown's "Women in the World Summit," [Clinton plainly said](#): "Deep-seated cultural codes, religious beliefs and structural biases have to be changed" so that women can have unfettered access to "reproductive health care and safe childbirth."

One would like to imagine that Clinton was speaking only about primitive cultures where children are forced into marriage and childbearing, or where genital cutting is common. But we know that she also meant religious conservatives closer to home whose beliefs get in the way. She explicitly [criticized Hobby Lobby](#) for not paying for its employees' contraception.

By contrast, Jeb Bush, who will become the GOP nominee if Republicans are smart, assumed a much different tone and direction in his recent commencement address at Liberty University.

"How strange, in our own time, to hear Christianity spoken of as some sort of backward and oppressive force," [he said](#). "It's a depressing fact that when some people think of Christianity and of Judeo-Christian values, they think of something static, narrow and outdated. . . . I cannot think of any more subversive moral idea ever loosed on the world than 'the last shall be first, and the first last.'"

He also spoke of what our world would have been like without the "unalloyed compassion, such genuine love, such thorough altruism," as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. described Christianity.

It would be defined, Bush said, by "power without restraint, conflict without reconciliation, oppression without deliverance, corruption without reformation, tragedy without renewal."

In a culture more attuned to the grits-'n'-gravy style of a Mike Huckabee, it is rare to hear Christianity discussed in such elevated terms. Indeed, Huckabee can be expected to go after Bush as a blue-blooded elite who can't relate to everyday Americans. Well, yee-haw, one can hardly wait. But I suspect that even conservative Southern Christians, who can absorb more than one-syllable words, might appreciate hearing their beliefs so eloquently described as by Bush.

To be fair, Clinton likely would have reframed her comments — and maybe even her beliefs and accent — had she been speaking to a Christian audience. But her spoken words can't be deleted and her thinking is clear: Religious beliefs have to be changed.

Or else what, pray tell?

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