

CHANGE AND CULTURAL POSITIONING



CHANGE

By Barry Cassidy

Since the onset of civilization, there has been the practice of religion. Belief in God. I say belief because there is no proof one way or the other that there is a god. That is why people talk about their faith, as they have faith that god exists. I am not here to debate the existence of god, but in the changing political and social climate, the practice of religion has come under attack.

There was a time when people thought they had the moral high ground if their religion occupied Jerusalem, which was exemplified during the Crusades and the pilgrimages to the city by people of all faiths. Now Jerusalem is not as important, but people still kill in the name of god, as can be seen by the Muslim extremists.

By those standards of conflict, what I would like to discuss is a little more mundane. In America, many immigrants came to the new world in order to have freedom of religion. The founding fathers were so adamant about that freedom, they made it the first amendment in the Bill of Rights.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

For years, the nation was very religious and people who did not believe there was a god were looked at as "less than" and at times shunned. I remember a woman by the name of Madeline Murray was looked down upon because she was an atheist. If you did not believe in god, it was not considered a positive in society to speak up and state that you were a non-believer.

In the last few decades, there has been a gradual shift away from organized religion in America, and in many cases, people have shifted away from religion totally. As our cultural values are changing. In the cities,

more and more people look for a secular way of life. The broad countryside in rural America continues living in a culture that embraces religion in greater numbers.

Folkways are sometimes created in conjunction with mores, as the customary way of conducting yourself in a society that has moral beliefs or mores. These are rules that are much less formal, and are embodied in your customary way of life.

In many religions, homosexuality is not accepted because of the sodomy aspect of the equation. In my lifetime, I can remember people wanting to keep their homosexuality a secret because of backlash. Now things have moderated, some and gay marriage is allowed, and people are proud to proclaim themselves as gay. In many of the rural communities, there were customary folkways that grew around the prejudice and that included a business person's store or service delivery. As the moral fabric of America changed, the orthodox view of those who do not accept the changes remains, because of their religion convictions.

We saw the Kentucky court clerk of Court's Kim Davis refuse to issue a marriage license to a gay couple she was over ruled by higher authorities. The legality had been established and she was elected to do what is legal. I think everyone saw a siff repudiation of that kind of behavior by a public official.

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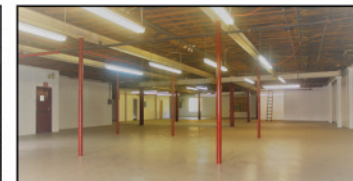
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CHANGE

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I see it a little different when you come to the mom and pop shops that are more likely to operate in rural and semi-rural suburban areas. For years, if you wanted to have a birthday cake and you wanted the wording to be X-rated, there is a good chance that the moral judgement of the shop owner would be the final word. That developed a customary pattern in dealing with similar situations. Most of the decisions were made on whether the cake shop owner reacted in a certain way was more of a customary decision than a moral decision.


Now flash forward to today. You still can't get the X-rated printing on a birthday cake, but with gay marriage being legal, what the small shop owner has to deal with is that which offends him through what he has been taught practicing his religion.

So, the question is when you read the above first amendment, did the state make a "prohibiting the free exercise thereof" law on this small business sole proprietor that is making cakes? This is just one example, as there are hundreds and hundreds of similar incidents happening every day. As a law changes the mores by legally allowing an activity, new folkways develop that clash with existing folkways.

People do not, honestly in their heart, think they are discriminating against anyone in these situations, but just doing what they think is right. It is backed up by their experiences, and in many cases their god. So as the confederate statues come down, and people want to take down pictures of Thomas Jefferson and George Washington from public places, many feel alienated. As they feel more alienated, they become more entrenched in their opinions and beliefs.


There is no cure for this problem of cultural positioning, as it involves changing mores and changing folkways and in many cases, is originating from the cities, and presents cultural choices that rural and suburban areas have a hard time reconciling. The problem is exacerbated by social media and the vitriolic responses on both sides of the issues.

Is George Washington worth saving? Is the new name of the Capitol of the country really going to be New Jack City? Or does it really matter that someone making a cake in Butte, Montana will not write happy Anniversary John and Melvin? I am not sure any of it will be resolved in the short term.




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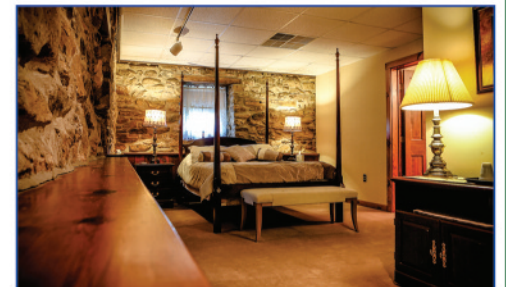
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