

## The Ignominious Pretension of Falwell/Robertson

September 24, 2001

A multitude of concerns occupies America's leaders as a consequence of the September 11 terrorist attacks. One interpretation of those events that we must not allow to pass without criticism was offered by Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson on CBN's 700 Club, September 13.

In conversation, the two agreed that the terrorist attacks should be understood theologically as God's judgment on America because of the secularization of our society caused by pagans, abortionists, feminists, gays and lesbians. "I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen,'" Falwell said.

"And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad," Falwell added. "When a nation deserts God and expels God from the culture ... the result is not good."

From a biblical point of view these comments are deplorable on at least three counts. The first error is the pretension of the speakers to know the secret will of God. Falwell asserts that America's "secular and anti-Christian environment" left us open to God's judgment rather than protection. But why would Falwell adopt this rather than some other interpretation? Maybe God loves America so much that he thwarted other terrorist plans, allowing only three planes to reach their targets and saving thousands more people from destruction. How does Falwell know that God's judgment and not God's protection explains the events. False prophets have always abounded, claiming to know too much.

The second error is that the two television preachers confuse America with God's chosen people. When Falwell, with Robertson's agreement, criticizes all "who have tried to secularize America," his underlying assumption is that there once was a time when America was not secularized, when it met with God's approval as his chosen nation. Falwell speaks as a modern Jeremiah lamenting the sins of God's new Israel, America. The roots of this mindset reach back to the Puritans who established a new covenant community in New England—a city set on a hill. But modern, new-Israelite nationalism has no biblical justification. On New Testament grounds, the chosen people of God are the faithful in Jesus Christ throughout the world, not the citizens of America or any other state. Moreover, even as a political entity, the American republic was, from the beginning, shot through with injustices deserving of God's judgment. The Falwell/Robertson theology of church and state is fundamentally unbiblical.

Finally, Falwell and Robertson exhibit one of the sins most condemned by Jesus and his disciples, namely, self-righteousness. These pretentious priests of God's supposedly chosen nation point an authoritative finger to a circle of sinners that happens not to include them. If it weren't for the abortionists, gays, and lesbians, God would apparently have had no reason to judge America. If America was filled with the members of Falwell's church and the listeners/donors to the 700 Club, the attack would perhaps not have been necessary.

Did it ever cross the mind of either man that if God is judging America, it might be, in part, because of the self-righteous, ungodly practices of those who claim to be Christians and who are preaching and practicing a way of life that, on biblical grounds, is disobedient?

Christians should be spending their time ministering to the suffering and conveying the good news of God's forgiving love in Jesus Christ, who is fashioning a new people drawn from all nations on earth. And in their civic capacities, Christians should be helping to design and support just public policies to protect the innocent and to punish those who take vengeance into their own hands.

—James W. Skillen, *President*

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