



## Christian protests that produces ungodly behavior

Middle Tennessee is known as the Bible belt. "A church on every corner" is how we are depicted. For every church, there are five associate ministers waiting to hear "the call" to start their own church or begging God that main preacher will allow them to preach one Sunday. We have several national Christian organizations that are headquartered in Nashville; the Southern Baptist Convention, the National Baptist Convention, and the General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church are just a few examples. Lifeway, RH Boyd, and the United Methodist Publishing House are Christian entities that produce church material for church folks to gain a better understanding and knowledge of God daily.

This area is home to several colleges that have Christian roots or missions; Belmont, David Lipscomb, Fisk, Meharry Medical College, Trevecca, and Vanderbilt are all titans in secondary education. These colleges have produced some of the most intelligent, nationally recognized folks who are highly respected throughout the world. Many national Christian conventions are held here as well. *The National Religious Broadcaster (NRB) is one the most successful conventions held here annually. National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) is a non-partisan, international association of Christian communicators whose member organizations represent millions of listeners, viewers and readers.* If you want to be on the television or radio and you want to call it a ministry, NRB is a conference you should attend. The Middle Tennessee area is also the number one region in the country for home school families. Many home school families cite religion as their primary reason for homeschooling. The number of private Christian schools in the area are too numerous to even begin to list.

With all Christ centered organizations mentioned above, the behaviors of some church folks are keeping Middle Tennessee in the national spotlight. The spotlight seems to say we are church goers who are deeply devoted to our religious beliefs but are not practicing the tenets of loving our neighbors and Christ like acceptance of others. We are wearing hypocritical halos. I have received several calls from curious media friends from around the country asking what is happening in my beloved Volunteer state. My friends were stating that the many stories I have written about the Volunteer state's generosity and philanthropy endeavors to those in need did not seem like the same state that is producing extreme ungodly behavior towards others who not of the Christians faith. It is a phenomenon that I am having a hard time trying to explain because I am perplexed as well.

Lately, there have been several protests against proposed Mosques in our area that have become very heated and have evoked fear in Christians that Islamic extremists are taking over. Really? With thousands of churches in the Middle Tennessee area that serves millions of Christians, three Mosques are a threat to the faith to Tennessee Christians? Hmm, let that soak for a minute. Protesters have gone from lawfully honking horns, signing petitions, and protesting Mosque locations at council meetings to someone crossing the line by burning construction equipment on the site of the property of the Murfreesboro's Mosque, which is criminal. With the South's ugly history of protests that have lead to the burning of property, the burning of the construction equipment was too close to numerous stories that I have heard from my parents and grandparents on the Civil Right battlefield. Many of the protests have been cloaked in biblical poetry and using constitutional sounding words that sound very unconstitutional. All of this protesting had me digging deep to separate fact from fear with a friend.

Since we debate political issues often for sport, I shared with her some of my concerns of where the protests can lead if voices of reasons do not speak up soon. Damaging property leads to harming individuals physically and neither are Godly behaviors. My concerns were deflected with her view that Islam was becoming the "new" religion of our country which she stated was founded on Judaea Christian values had us nursing coffee cups for three hours.

For several weeks, her emails were sounding the alarm to take the country the back and the need for us to remember the constitution was founded by our Founding Fathers. I would reply that I refuse to live in fear. At our coffee summit, I gave her a copy of the Bill of Rights with the First Amendment highlighted. I asked her to read it out loud.

She read, "'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.'" After she read it, we both sat in silent for a moment. I could feel her becoming angry in her silence. I said to her, "Fear can provoke us into mayhem and madness." The constitution that my friend want us to get back too gives us the; the *Freedom of Religion*, no matter who we worship; it gives us *Freedom of Speech* to say what we want no matter how sane or vile it maybe; it gives us the right to read this blog weekly in the *Tribune* through the *Freedom of the Press*; it give us the right to the *Freedom of Assembly* so we can meet to protest or pray and allows us to complain about our government because we have the *Right to Petition the Government*. That is what separates us from countries like Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan.

"Try calling the leader of China a socialist and see where it gets you," I said to her with a smile. After another pot of coffee, we realized that we were going to have differing views on the actions of burning the equipment at the Mosque site. I finally pleaded how can we read our bible daily and allow the hate and fear of others to fester from our pores. "Isn't that the opposite of being a Christian," I asked sadly. "I don't hate them," she said quietly. I was not trying to change her mind on any issues, I only wanted to her understand and respect my family's heritage of non violent protests that I strongly believe in today. I have friends from all different backgrounds. We have dialogued about the Mosques buildings that have the media swarming in Tennessee like termites.

Tennessee has become a haven for national corporations over the last decade or so. With trade and industry booms, diversity in ethnicity and religion has followed. As we have opened our arms to invite others to Tennessee for economic reasons, we have to accept with those invitations an influx of other cultures. Those cultures which at one time were in the background are more visible because of the growth in our population, the anti-Muslim political climate, and the ever present media hype without a purpose.

In this age of social media, it is easy to adopt a Twitter mindset of follow and unfollow the constitution depending on how we feel about a particular subject matter. But as Christians, folks are supposedly to think and act different, right? Since there are Christian groups and church folks as numerous as the stars above in the Middle Tennessee area, I would have thought a leader would have stepped forward from one of the many national Christian organizations that are based here and calmed the masses with words that would curtail violent behavior knowing our Southern heritage of protests followed by cruelty. We are in desperate need of leaders who preach the gospel to remind us to practice the words that printed in our area by the hour. Let me close with the verse that I closed my coffee session with my friend.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

As great as the constitution is it is not as powerful as His word.