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Attack of the Theocrats!

Sean Faircloth
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On December 19, 2011, a Nashville newspaper carried a story about the construction of an all-faiths chapel at the nearby Fort Campbell military base that will cost taxpayers $8.4 million. A smaller article in the same issue noted that a much-used juvenile detention center in the area will be shut down because of a shrinking state budget. The irony of neglecting real-world needs while lavishly supporting speculative otherworldly ones would almost certainly enrage the author of this book. It also poses the question: what does religion have to do with enhancing military preparedness?

Sean Faircloth's *Attack of the Theocrats!* is both an analysis of religion's intrusion into the public sphere in America and a list of suggestions for rolling it back. A former Catholic and a graduate of the University of Notre Dame, Faircloth served as Maine's assistant attorney general for three years, then went on to spend ten years in the state legislature, where he eventually rose to the position of majority whip. It was during his years of public service that he concluded fundamentalist religion was a distinct social menace.

In his bill of particulars against the religious right, Faircloth cites cases of specific children who were allowed to die, many in agony, because their parents were "faith healers." He points to religion's widespread assault on science, from thwarting government sponsorship of stem-cell research to discounting global warning without presenting contrary evidence. Religion, he asserts, is particularly harsh on women, not only lobbying against all forms of legal abortion but also restricting access to birth control devices. (In seeking the Republican nomination for president, former senator Rick Santorum said each state should have the right to regulate birth control.) Faircloth also demonstrates how "faith-based" programs have drained off taxpayers' money to further their own ideological ends. Quoting copiously from Washington, Jefferson, Adams, and Madison, Faircloth lays waste to the fundamentalist canard that the founding fathers designed America to be a Christian nation.

The last section of this book is given over to methods by which fundamentalism in government can be reversed through creating greater awareness of its impact on all citizens and lobbying more effectively to curb its reach. Regardless of how one feels about the role of religion in public life, *Attack of the Theocrats!* is a thoughtful and provocative addition to the discussion.

EDWARD MORRIS (Spring 2012)

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