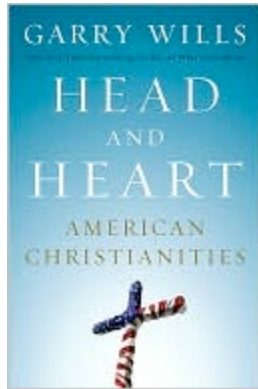




Head and Heart: American Christianities

Garry Wills , Joanne J. Myers

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs. On behalf of the Carnegie Council, I would like to thank you all for joining us this morning.

Today it is a great pleasure to have as our guest Garry Wills, one of our country's leading public intellectuals. He will be discussing his book, [Head and Heart](#).

It is with this publication of his latest work that Professor Wills brings a much needed perspective to an issue that has become one of the more controversial subjects in America today, the relation of church and state. In this lead-up to an election year, references to religion are being heard more and more on the campaign trail, flooding political speeches on both the left and the right, serving to remind us that our nation's roots and values are to be found in the Christian tradition. For example, questions about abortion, homosexuality, [Darwinism](#), and school prayer are continuously being raised as a litmus test for each candidate's religious stance. Just recently, [John McCain](#) said that he would agree with the results of a poll showing that the majority of Americans believe that the Constitution established the United States as a Christian nation.

While our country may be rooted in the Christian tradition, it is the struggle within American Christianity between head and heart, reason and emotion, enlightenment and evangelicalism that has influenced our country in the past and continues to do so today. It is this conflict that is the focus of our discussion this morning.

Garry Wills is known for the extraordinary quality of his observations and the mastery of primary sources that has defined all of his work. But it is his encyclopedic knowledge of the history of religion in this country that informs this particular work and makes it so compelling.

In *Head and Heart* , he examines Christianity's place in American life, from our Puritan roots, marked by extreme passion, but also reason, through the [Great Awakening](#), a period of evangelical revival committed to religious tolerance. Professor Wills believes that this latter period of enlightenment, when tolerance for other faiths and a belief that religion was a matter best divorced from political institutions, made possible the proverbial separation of church and state later enshrined in our Constitution.

He concludes with a discussion of the present-day administration of George Bush, where the lines of separation of church and state have become blurred. For Professor Wills, religion, in this administration, has come to play too large a role in government, a danger he ascribes to unchecked evangelicalism.

As he looks back to the enlightenment and its core value of separation of church and state, Professor Wills insists that separation was meant as a great protector of religion, not its enemy. But that, according to Professor Wills, hasn't stopped fervent believers from continually challenging the concept of separation of church and state as a danger to their beliefs.

Professor Wills is a prolific writer and frequent contributor to *The New York Review of Books*. His previous books include [Lincoln at Gettysburg](#), [Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment](#), [What Jesus Meant](#), and [What Paul Meant](#). His works have received many awards, including the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. He has received the National Medal for the Humanities.

Although he studied for the priesthood, he took his doctorate in the classics. Currently he is professor of history emeritus at Northwestern University.

If you have been sitting here wondering if Senator McCain was correct in his assumption that America was founded as a Christian nation or whether the other Republican presidential candidates' views on evolution are electorally relevant, or even if [Hillary Clinton's](#) Methodist upbringing will impact on her social views, I suggest you listen carefully to our speaker. In the end, you may just want to purchase *Head and Heart*, so that you can discover just how Christian America really is.

Please join me in welcoming our very distinguished guest, our speaker Garry Wills.

Remarks

GARRY WILLS: Thank you very much for having me.

The Democrats set out to close the "God gap" this time out. But it turns out that the Republicans are also having to prove how religious they are, as [Romney's](#) comments remind us.

Romney's comments remind me of [Mark Twain's](#) conversation with [Andrew Carnegie](#). Carnegie, as you know, was a Scottish Presbyterian, a hot gossamer.

He said, "Now, whether you like it or not, Mark, you have to admit that this is a Christian country."

Twain said, "I know that. But so is hell"—[Laughter]—"and we don't brag about that."

The [Dalai Lama](#) has a different take on this. He came to speak in Chicago at the Field Museum. He asked the director to find some people to sit on the stage and ask him questions.

He said, "I don't like to give speeches. I bore people and I bore myself, and we all go to sleep. So have some people ask me questions."

I was one of the questioners. We met him beforehand, and he said, "Don't be deferential to me. Some people are just too nice and they don't ask anything hard. Nobody pays any attention for the rest of the event."

I couldn't think of any really hard question, I thought, but I did say this: "If you were restored to your country, what would you do in a different way?"

He said, "I would disestablish the religion, because the American arrangement is the proper one."

Of course, the American arrangement is astonishing. We were the first country to found itself without an official cult, without an official protector god. In fact, that is the only new thing in the Constitution. Everything else had been around—federalism, bicameralism, tripartite branches, the independent judiciary. All those things had been around in theory and in practice. The only thing that was brand-new was the separation of church and state.

[Jefferson](#) and [Madison](#) both said that this would free religion; it would protect religion. That turned out to be the case. In fact, the religiosity of America is astounding among the developed nations. It took off

precisely after the Constitution was adopted.

There is a myth on the right that we started out as a very religious country and have been getting less and less religious ever since, which is the exact opposite of the truth. We were never less religious than in the 1770s, when only 17 percent of the people were churchgoers. The [Second Great Awakening](#) took off at the beginning of the 19th century, when the Methodists all of a sudden exploded, when there were more Methodist pastors than post officials.

So the country became more and more religious, and there was not the contamination of religion by politics that occurred in other countries and there was not the anticlericalism that was the result of that contamination.

So the separation of church and state did two things. It unleashed evangelical feelings and it tempered them. It tempered them with reason and rationality.

Putting together the head and the heart is not easy, but we have been most successful as a country when that has happened. I try to take some examples of that as I go through.

For instance, in the 18th century, it was almost impossible to launch an abolitionist movement, because slavery is approved in both the Jewish scripture and the Christian scripture. There is no word of criticism of slavery, and there is approval of it, in most cases. Actually, it's mandated in some parts of the Jewish scripture. So whenever you attacked slavery in the 18th century, you got the answer, "You're attacking the Bible. You're attacking God. If it's good enough for God, it's good enough for us."

It was [Anthony Benezet](#) and [John Woolman](#) and Quakers like that, who were undoubtedly very pious men, who said, "Wait a minute. You don't have to take everything in the Bible literally. There are certain things that are time-bound. There are certain things that are culturally conditioned, certain things that are not meant on the same level as the more important revelations." So, although every northern state had slavery at the beginning of the century, only one had it by the end, and the principal motive power in that was the Quaker abolitionist movement.

They were able to look at the Bible in ways that [Augustine](#) had pioneered in the fourth century, when he said that you don't have to take the apocalyptic predictions literally. He said, for instance, that we know that God did not create the world in six days, even though the Bible seems to say that. How do we know? He said, because we have read the Greek astronomers. We know the earth is round. When it's day on one side, it's night on the other. So there is no such thing as an absolute first day, second day, third day. He said this is symbolic language, and we have to try to get at what God is trying to teach us symbolically.

That kind of reasoned faith is something that the great evangelical outbursts have tried to smother. We are seeing it happen right now with Darwin, for instance. We see it when people assert a kind of religious sanction for things rather than reason about them. A good example of that is abortion. We are told that abortion is a religious issue. But it isn't. There is nothing in the Ten Commandments or all of Jewish scripture about abortion. There is nothing in the Sermon on the Mount or in all of the New Testament about abortion. There is nothing in the early creeds and confessions and counsels of the church.

The pope himself has said that it's a matter of natural law. What is the arbiter of natural law? Natural reason, not religion, not revelation, not church authority.

[John Henry Newman](#) said the pope's jurisdiction is revelation, not natural law. He has no jurisdiction over natural law.

So how do you decide a matter of natural law? You go to philosophers, embryologists, neurophysicists, other people who are reasoning on the matter, and you try to sort out what the issues are. For instance, we are often told that it's a matter of protecting life, human life. Ejaculated semen is human life. The ovulating woman's ovum is human life. You don't save those. You don't save every ejaculation. Even when they are joined, half of them fail to embed themselves in the womb. So that's a human life that goes away.

My hair is human life. It's growing; it's human. It's not canine. It's not foliage. We don't have to save it all.

So the question is not life, human life. The question is personhood. When does a fetus become a person? On that we can differ, because there are arguments on both sides.

In the past Augustine said, "I have no idea what the status of a fetus is, because it's not in scripture." [Thomas Aquinas](#) tried to argue from [Aristotle's](#) successive animations that the fetus begins as vegetable life, then becomes animal life, and only at the end becomes human life, when God infuses a soul. The idea that life begins at conception was not something that the medieval church believed. They went with Aquinas.

So all of the business about denying communion to a Catholic for allowing women to decide this very difficult matter is a misuse of religion. It's trying to intrude religion into the area of human reason, which is always dangerous to religion itself. We find that in war. Religious fanaticism tends to take over in wartime.

You probably read about [Jerry Boykin](#), the undersecretary of defense, a [Rumsfeld](#) protégé, who went around to church groups, in this current war, wearing not his dress uniform, but a combat uniform, and showing slides, saying, "Who's our enemy?"

He put up [Saddam Hussein](#) and said, "Is he our enemy? No."

[Bin Laden](#): "Is he our enemy? No."

None of these people, it turns out, were the enemy. Then he put up a picture of Satan. It was not a good likeness. But he said, "This is our enemy, and only with the help of Jesus can we conquer him."

He was not reprimanded. He was not silenced. There was no action taken against him.

That kind of fanaticism is something that does grow in wartime. It grew, for instance, in the [Civil War](#). In the North, we had "[The Battle Hymn of the Republic](#)", all that apocalyptic rhetoric from the Book of Revelation. In the South, we had really hysterical attacks on [Lincoln](#) as the Antichrist, the enemy of religion, the enemy of Christianity.

What happens in a war, according to [Clausewitz](#), is *Wechselwirkung*, a mutual ratcheting-up. I punch you, you punch back, I punch you, and more and more outrages are committed on each other, and we demonize the others and become more convinced of our own righteousness.

One of the few times when authorities ratcheted down was in that same Civil War. Lincoln, who wrote his own speeches and other people's speeches, too—because he wanted to get it right—wrote the [Fast-Day Proclamations](#) that were issued during the war. They were all professions of profound humility and repentance for war atrocities committed on both sides. To say this during a war is something quite extraordinary.

[Mark Hatfield](#), during the [Vietnam War](#), issued a petition asking for a day of repentance and was attacked as not supporting the troops, an enemy to America. Only then did he reveal that he was just quoting Lincoln.

Lincoln didn't get carried away by religion, although his religion deepened during the war, as everything about him did—his prose, his thought, his humanity. What is interesting is that his religion was very close to that of the blacks. He became quite friendly with [Frederick Douglass](#) toward the end. The only time he ever referred to Jesus as the savior was in a meeting with blacks. What informs his second inaugural address is that feeling that the black religion has that the "whole people" has sinned, the "whole people" must be saved; we are all going to reach the Promised Land; we are all going to ride the Ark.

When he said in the second inaugural that we have all sinned and God is punishing us all, that was a very

black theological point, opposed to the [Calvinist](#) individualism, that we go out and get saved on our own, and then only get accepted into the church.

So this struggle back and forth between reason and religion is something that comes in waves, in wartime, in times of great unrest, when there is a fear of rapid change. The two extremes have to temper each other, and they do in our best moments, in our Lincolns and our Benezets and our [Dr. Kings](#) and other of the great religious leaders in America.

It's a great story. Thanks.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: You made reference to reason and natural law, and the conflict between the two, and you said that we thus have to turn to philosophers and evolutionary biologists. If we turn to [Daniel Dennett](#) as a philosopher or [Christopher Hitchens](#) as a writer or [Richard Dawkins](#) as an evolutionary biologist or [Freeman Dyson](#) as a physicist, we would find out that they constitute what is called "the New Atheism." I am wondering if you would comment on the place of New Atheism in the 21st century.

GARRY WILLS: It's a very small place. Over 90 percent of Americans profess belief in God. They lament that fact, but it's a fact. In fact, poll after poll shows that if you ask, "Who are you least likely to vote for? Who would you least like to see your child marry?", some say that about blacks, some say that about Mormons, some say that about Catholics, some say that about Jews, but the only really strong high number is atheists. People who will vote for anyone else won't vote for an atheist.

Why is that? I think because most people's views on morality have some relationship to their religion, in their past formation or ancillary considerations or whatever. They feel that they can't predict the morality of someone that doesn't share some of these feelings. It makes them uneasy.

I used to ask my students, when I was still teaching, "Do you believe in the separation of church and state?" They all said, "Yes."

I said, "Do you believe in the separation of religion and politics?" Most said, "Yes."

Then I said, "Do you believe in the separation of morality and politics?" "No, of course not."

I said, "Wait a minute. There's some kind of inconsistency here. If you think morality applies, most people have some religious associations with morality, and you would get no morality if you got no religiosity."

The attacks of somebody like Hitchens—he has attacked me for being a stupid believer—are attacks, well-earned, on religious excesses and abuses and misuses. This goes as far back as [Lucretius](#), who wrote, "*Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*": "How suasive is religion to our bane."

That's true. Religion is a very dangerous thing. So is love. So is the family. So are many of the things that affect the spirit at a deep level.

There are good uses of religion. [William James](#) wrote a whole book on the varieties of religious experience. He was a pragmatist. He said, "There's a pragmatic test here. Does it open up more possibilities for you? Does it lift the spirit? Does it suggest mystery? Does it do a whole number of good things?" He decided that, yes, on balance, it does. It works. The pragmatist says, "Does it work?" Well it works, sometimes for good, sometimes for evil.

So the village atheist is always with us, but nobody pays much attention to him.

QUESTION: I will ask a practical question, since we are in the early stages of a political campaign. Yesterday [Bartlett](#), Bush's former communications director, said that no matter what a lot of people say, they would never vote for a Mormon. They won't say it out loud.

I am assuming Romney at some stage will make the Mormon speech, as [Kennedy](#) made the Catholic

speech.

But I would like your view on this. It seems to me incredible to ask anyone running for office to give up the faith of his fathers, whatever that faith may be. That is what he was born into. Would a statement of separation—does that do the job in a campaign? Does that satisfy people that this will never enter into my public domain?

What are your thoughts about that?

GARRY WILLS: Bigotry will never be satisfied by reason. There are bigots, anti-Semites, anti-Catholics, anti-Mormons, in varying numbers and with varying plausibility.

After all, there was a plausible case to be made against Kennedy. The Vatican was on record, when he ran, as saying that democracy is an illegitimate form of government and that separation of church and state is immoral. People like [Paul Blanshard](#), who knew the record very well, said to Kennedy, "Are you going to go along with your church on that?"

He said, "As president, I will go along with the Constitution. That's my first duty."

That satisfied a number of people—not all the bigots, of course. [Billy Graham](#) and others held out until the very end.

So I suppose that that same kind of argument will have to be made by the Mormons.

Mormons are so much a part of our life now. Most people don't know that. But I have had a number of Mormon students, and they were stellar; they were some of the best students I have ever had. It was a little odd at times, when I would be teaching the Declaration of Independence and they would tell me that, of course, it's divinely inspired, that God wrote the Declaration of Independence. We just had to agree to disagree on that. Otherwise, there was not too much problem getting along. I think the same thing will happen with the Mormons.

It took a while, after all, for a Catholic. [Al Smith](#) didn't make it. It is still taking a while for women and for blacks and for others. So we will just have to see what the attrition rate will be for the anti-Mormon bigotry.

QUESTION: I'm wondering what your explanation is for the upsurge of evangelicalism in the United States today? Is there a particular confluence of events right now in our country that is bringing this upsurge?

GARRY WILLS: It's not only in our country, of course. There is a fundamentalist revival around the world. [Martin Marty](#) was given a lot of funding to do an extensive study of that worldwide. He pulled in a whole team of scholars. Roughly, what they said was this: Fundamentalism grows at times of rapid, disorienting change, when people feel that their very roots are being torn up, when there is so much change, and so rapid change, that they feel that reason and science are the enemy, technology is the enemy, and you have to go back to basic family values, et cetera.

The rate of change, both technological and social, has rarely ever reached the acceleration point that ours has. Let me take one concrete example of how things have changed over the last 30 years, in our lifetime.

I went to an American Bar Association meeting in the early 1990s, and to the Women's Caucus lunch. Ten years or so before, there was no such thing as a women's caucus in the Bar Association. Before the formal talks, the woman at the dais said, "Before we begin, I'd like to ask all of you here who were the first women editors of your law school journals to stand—the first to be made senior partners in your firms, the first to set up your own firm in your own little town, the first to be district attorney, the first to be a local judge, the first to be a federal judge, the first to be dean of a law school."

There were hundreds of firsts standing up there. It had all happened in their lifetimes.

The same thing is happening in the military, in the religious ministry, in the press. We were the first society to take seriously the idea that women are equal to men.

That is very disorienting to a lot of people. If you change the relationship of man and woman, you are going to the very nexus, the inmost ties of society. You are changing the relationship of husband to wife, of mother to children, of daughter to parents, of woman to siblings. All of that has changed, and changed extremely rapidly.

So that is something that makes the fundamentalists feel, "Where's the family going? Where is woman's submission to man going? Where is patriarchy going?" They react with great panic. It's fear that drives them, as you can tell just from the tenor of their rhetoric.

It's interesting that the three times when there has been this kind of surge of fundamentalism were at the beginnings of a century—the 19th, the 20th, and the 21st. With the 19th, it was the Second Great Awakening, which led, eventually, to the [Scopes trial](#) and to [Prohibition](#) and to other things, which also was a reaction to rapid technological change. That was the Second Great Awakening. The 20th is what led to Prohibition and the Scopes trial. Then the 21st is what we are experiencing now.

One of the interesting things, I think, is that the period of virulence is getting shorter. It was about 30 years the first time and about 20 the second time. It has been about 10 now. I think it has just about run its course. There are several reasons for that.

The first one was almost entirely independent of government. There wasn't all that much government around yet. It was self-funded, self-starting. It was do-it-yourself religion. It was the revivalist period.

The second one, on the other hand—government had grown by then—they wanted to use the government to ban Darwin, to institute Prohibition, and things of that sort. When you use the government, you start ringing alarm bells about separation of church and state, and you become more suspect more rapidly if you are using government.

Of course, the use of government by this administration has been just staggering, in things like abstinence-only education. Millions and millions and millions of dollars have been thrown away on that stupid program, which doesn't work and has been proved over and over again not to work. That is just one of a whole range of things, which I itemize in the book, where this group has done things—no other president has ever said, when asked who his favorite philosopher is, Jesus. No other president has said that, no matter how religious. But that was the way he presented himself, and they have lived by that code ever since.

QUESTION: You mentioned the growth of evangelism, but another aspect of religion in America is the decline of the mainline churches and of the non-Hispanic elements in the Roman Catholic church.

What do you think of the future of liberal Protestantism, for example, and the mainline religions in this country?

GARRY WILLS: The knock on the mainline religions is what an Episcopal friend said to me some years ago. It's not so much true now. He said, "You should join my church, because we can believe anything, but we rarely do." [Laughter]

That is the attitude that a lot of people have towards the mainline religions, it seems to me. The Episcopalians are being torn apart now on the gay issue. So they do have contending beliefs now.

I think that mainline religion, which tends to be the more enlightened kind, will make a comeback as the evangelical fever abates. It will probably never be as dominant as it has been in the past, for a lot of reasons.

You are quite right to bring up the Hispanic kind of religiosity—although there was a very extensive poll, the most extensive one that had been done, to find out whether Hispanic Catholics who come to America

were different from their coeval age-mates, and they found that by and large there wasn't. They expected, for instance, there to be more opposition to women priests among the Hispanics. It turned out not to be the case. The ones who were in America had quickly picked up the same attitudes as their young compatriots.

It's interesting. Catholics under 30—and this was in the 1990s—it said, "Do you believe that the pope is right to ban contraceptives?" The answer was so small, it fell within the margin of errors, so that, statistically, it's nonexistent. Catholics under 30—none of them follow the pope on that.

So there are all kinds of different developments. There are now more lay women ministers in the Catholic church than priests. That is obviously the face of the future. Rome denies it, but that's going to change the fate of that kind of religion.

So all of the religions are undergoing the pressures of these great changes that I have been mentioning. It shows in the attitudes toward gays, toward women, toward the previously excluded. Religion that doesn't take human rights seriously, it seems to me, is going to have a very rocky time of it.

QUESTION: I wonder if you would want to comment on the state of the head in American religion—that is, theology, philosophy, and so forth?

GARRY WILLS: People have noticed that we are not in an age of great theologians. The [Barths](#) and [Niebuhrs](#) and others have not been around. We are in an age of innovative theologies, feminist theology, for instance—there is some very interesting work on that—and the theology of human rights, which is being pursued. It's a quieter thing than in the past.

We are also told that this is not a great age for civil rights. We don't have the Dr. Kings and leaders, et cetera.

On the other hand, the quiet changes that have been taking place—it is not only the rights of women, but of blacks, of Native Americans, of gays, of the disabled. We are in an age of great recognition of human rights, and people that don't recognize human rights are more and more discredited and dishonored.

So a kind of quiet theology is at work, I believe.

QUESTION: Could you say something about the tension between the United States and religious forces in the Islamic world? Four weeks ago, [Mark Lilla](#) stood where you are right now and his theme, among others—he talked about "the other shore" and how people in the United States like to think that the Islamic world is the other shore, far away, not believing in the separation of church and state. Actually, in his analysis, we are the other shore. That is, most people in the world actually subscribe to a kind of theological view of the connection between the state and religion. Hence, the Islamic world—the religious forces in it, anyway—is enormously critical of the United States. Therefore, we don't get any resonance in the war on terror and so on.

Could you comment on your analysis?

GARRY WILLS: Remember the Dalai Lama. He is not the only one who thinks that separation is the proper attitude. The mere fact that some forces have become fanatical is a mighty persuader to people that what we have to do is separate the state and religion.

Our danger is that we will take such panic at foreign fanaticism that we will replicate it. We will become the mirror of our foe. A lot of the rhetoric that is being used right now is bringing that about. It's Jerry Boykin rhetoric: "We have to get Jesus on our side so we can smash the infidel."

We shouldn't give up on the Enlightenment. It has done too much for us and for the world, and people like the Dalai Lama know it.

QUESTION: Getting back to the earlier question regarding mainline religion, the separation of church and state was pretty much to take God out of things. But the mainline churches have moved in a

different direction. What they have done is to put politics into the religious sphere, whether it's the rights of women and black or something else.

About a year ago, I moderated a panel with some rabbis at Temple Emanuel to look at what was happening to the Jewish religion. The question was, to a large extent, what is Judaism? Is it a religion or is it a social movement? Does religion really mean that it is a way of setting a path between human beings and the power that is greater than themselves, which they often call God?

If at some point in time the mainline religions are not offering that kind of pathway, whether it is Christian or whether it is the Jewish various denominations, then something or other is not being fulfilled for human beings.

GARRY WILLS: That goes back a long way. Will Hertzberg said that he was afraid the rabbi was becoming a social director, back in the 1950s.

Religion and politics necessarily mix, as I said. For one thing, the First Amendment not only separates church and state; it guarantees the free exercise of religion. You exercise that, obviously, any way you want.

The civil rights movement was a very religious movement. It was very much a matter of the Baptist preachers leading. That has been true of many reforms in our past—women's suffrage, Prohibition, and of course, abolitionism. All of these were extremely religious in their motivation.

The difference between separation and motivation is brought out by Senator [Danforth](#) in his really quite good book. He said that it's a very powerful thing to want to work for the poor because you love Jesus. Jesus said, "Whoever does this to the least is doing it to me." But you can't make that the motive for the state. The state can't love Jesus. There you have to argue for equity and justice and fairness and humanity. That doesn't preclude, of course, your motivation being stronger, perhaps, than it would otherwise be because of your religion.

So there is never a question, it seems to me, of separating religion and politics, just because you separate church and state.

QUESTION: You indicated that the fevers of evangelicalism will abate at some point and mainstream religions will reassert themselves. But I wonder if the power of religion as an entertainment is not a terrific attraction, particularly to younger people. I wonder if you could comment on this notion—think of the megachurches; think of television and the way it magnifies this very notion—and how this is coming along.

GARRY WILLS: The revivals were very entertaining. They set the model for political conventions. The torchlight parades and all those things in the 19th century—that was politics taking over the entertainment value of religion. So that is always there. I don't think that is a threat to mainline beliefs.

It's not necessarily unhealthy in itself. It is the direct tie with the state that I find dangerous in what is going on now.

There has been a very strong reaction to it. Danforth himself is leading a movement against it. Eighty-one percent of the people thought that Congress should not have interfered in the [Terry Schiavo](#) case. So there is this kind of feeling that we have gone too far. That is happening on the Darwin front, for instance.

So I think it will always be entertaining. Good preachers have always been entertainers. Bishop [Sheen](#) was. Dr. King was. The best speech I ever heard was on the morning after Dr. King's death. I got on a plane with [Bill Coffin](#) and others and went straight there when I heard that he had been shot. The next morning at the garbage strikers' hall, where he had been organizing, preacher after preacher got up. Given the time, the setting, emotions were really running high.

I said to Bill Coffin, "Are you going to speak down there?"

He said, "If they ask me."

I went over later and I said, "Are you going to speak now?"

He said, "No. This is the big time." [Laughter]

The best speech was, unfortunately, by a guy who later turned out to be a crook. He was stealing [SCLC](#) [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] money. But he was brilliant — [Jim Bevel](#). He got up and he said, "I don't like what has been said in this hall all morning. There have been people going around saying that they've shot our leader. That's nonsense. Dr. King was not our leader. Dr. King was no leader to us at all."

People were going, "Where is this going?"

He finally said, "Our leader walked out of a tomb. Our leader changed water to wine. Our leader walked on water. Our leader will never die. One of his prophets died, but our leader will never die. They can't kill our leader."

The crowd went crazy. He built it, of course, much more artfully than I can do.

Anyway, that is the power of great religious rhetoric.

QUESTION: I would like you to comment on the difference between fundamentalism and evangelicalism. You seem to use the words interchangeably. In my mind, they are distinct approaches to Christianity.

GARRY WILLS: "Evangelicalism" is a broader term. In general, it means a belief in being saved by Jesus and having to take that message to other people, with the great emphasis on the emotional decision for Christ.

Fundamentalism came about in the beginning of the 20th century when certain kinds of evangelicals declared some fundamentals of the faith that had to be held, no matter what. Virgin birth was one. There was a list of five and a list of 15. Literal inspiration of scripture was one, so a lot of people think that literalism and fundamentalism are the same thing. But again, one is a broader category and one is a subset within it. They overlap and are mutually intersecting.

QUESTION: I just want to ask you about the Supreme Court. I just recently read an article where certain issues that were on the table for the Supreme Court had been effectively avoided for the ensuing year. What do you think about the role of the Supreme Court now?

GARRY WILLS: It's pretty scary that the vetting of the last two appointees for the Court was largely done by [Dick Cheney](#). It was his office that really quizzed these two, and they quizzed them primarily on one thing: Not on abortion, but on executive power. They were put in there to guarantee that the usurpations, as I believe they are, of this administration will be protected in the Court. I'm afraid that that is the likely prospect.

QUESTION: It's encouraging to hear that it's only ten years, this time, that the evangelical movement might last. But I wonder if also something parallel is going on in the evangelical movement, which might be a shift politically toward the left. [Rick Warren](#), well-known author of *The Purpose-Driven Life*, invited [Barack Obama](#) to come and created a huge stir. These communities are getting involved in fighting AIDS in Africa.

So I wonder if they are moving themselves from fighting abortion and so on to taking the Sermon on the Mount more seriously and moving their congregations in that direction.

GARRY WILLS: Especially that is true with the environment. There is a large evangelical new commitment to the environment. So, yes, I think they are withdrawing themselves, some of them.

That Rick Warren meeting was an interesting one. He invited [Sam Brownback](#), to take the curse off of

having invited this guy.

Brownback got up first and he said, "Well, Barack, the last time we met on a platform, it was before a black audience. Now, I want you to know, you're in my house."

He got up and said, "Sam, it's my house, too. It's God's house."

JOANNE MYERS: I thank you for fulfilling the needs of both our head and our heart this morning. Thank you very much.

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