



## The Coming Persecution of Christians

Sometime after Hurricane Sandy swept across the Jersey Shore, FEMA money swept into the state, helping to rebuild municipalities and morale. But one New Jersey town isn't receiving Federal Emergency Management Agency funds despite having sustained millions in damage, losing half its boardwalk; its whole pier; entire buildings; and part of the roof of its Taj Mahal, an ornate, 6,250-seat auditorium built in 1894. But while it has this damage, it also has, from FEMA's perspective, another problem.



Faith.

The locale is Ocean Grove, New Jersey, and it's actually a place where I've spent some time. But its plight is also a sign of the times — it's one town that serves as a microcosm of one civilization's transition from faith to indifference to anti-Christian animosity.

It wasn't always like this. Founded by a group of pastors in 1869 and governed by the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church (CMA), "OG," as its fans might call it, was just following a long tradition of faith-based American communities. *The Weekly Standard's* Jonathan V. Last does a good job recounting its history, [writing](#):

In 1870 the New Jersey state legislature granted the Camp Meeting Association a charter, giving them the power to hold and maintain their property, establish infrastructure, and even create a police force — all in the name of setting their land aside for "the perpetual worship of Jesus Christ."

In 1879, the state created a new township, called Neptune, and placed Ocean Grove within its boundaries. But while Ocean Grove paid some taxes to Neptune, they continued to provide their own city services and retained independent authority over local laws.

Not surprisingly, OG had different rules than did surrounding communities. Horses and, later on, cars, were banned from sundown Saturday to sundown Sunday; alcohol wasn't sold; the town's beach was closed on Sundays for most of its history; and the CMA owned all land within its boundaries. And, as Last put it, "The state tolerated these local laws because the town would not have existed without its religious foundation, which had, for generations, existed with the explicit approval of the government. It was, all in all, a happy state of affairs."

The efforts to chip away at the town's autonomy began early, but were initially beaten back. After the New Jersey state legislature incorporated OG in 1920, the state appeals court ruled the move an unconstitutional violation of the free exercise of religion, leaving the CMA in charge of government. Yet this changed in 1976 with OG's arrest and conviction of a drunk driver named Louis Celmer, Jr. Celmer appealed the decision, claiming that the "very fact of Ocean Grove's police ... was an unconstitutional establishment of religion. He fought all the way to the state supreme court, which wrote a sweeping decision in his favor ordering Ocean Grove to turn over all municipal powers to Neptune," writes Last.



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on November 25, 2013

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And that was that. There was now a new normal: The CMA had been reduced to essentially a homeowner's association, and its ordinances had become by-laws. Yet this satisfied the secular powers that be — for a time.

FEMA had provided OG with disaster relief in 1992 when a nor'easter destroyed its boardwalk, which OG had always made available for public use. And when the bureaucracy refused to provide aid for a small section of the boardwalk damaged by Hurricane Irene in 2011, the CMA attributed the refusal to the fact that the section had been leased to a private fishing club.

It would learn differently in 2013. After Sandy struck, the CMA applied for disaster relief — and was denied the very same kind of aid it had received in 1992. What changed? FEMA explained that OG was a private, nonprofit organization. Yet it was no more private or nonprofit than in '92. The agency said the boardwalk was a "recreational facility." But it was no more recreational than before. OG's by-laws haven't changed, and it's arguably less religious than ever. One thing was different, however: It put itself on the federal thought police's radar screen in 2007 by refusing to let a lesbian couple perform their civil-union ceremony on OG's boardwalk pavilion.

That explains a bit, doesn't it?

Now, after tangling with the government and ACLU, the CMA did comply with the "law" — by disallowing all marriage/commitment ceremonies at the pavilion. But this wasn't enough for the feds. The CMA had served notice that their faith wasn't just façade; they actually believed. And this sin would not be forgotten — or forgiven.

Of course, we'll hear many perspectives. Some will point out that accepting government funds invites state puppeteering; others contend that religious entities shouldn't receive such aid at all. And there's hypocrisy: OG's boardwalk was a "public accommodation" when the government wanted to impose secular "values," but it suddenly becomes "private" when asking for government money. Yet none of this is the point here. This isn't about storms, aid, boardwalks, and buildings. It isn't even mainly about homosexuality, faux marriage or what the church/state relationship ideally should be. Rather, it's about a systemic problem, a certain dark transition.

America once had state churches, and the Bible was once taught in schools. The United States was a thoroughly Christian nation, which is why the Ten Commandments are posted right above the Supreme Court's bench; crosses and other religious symbols long dotted our public arena and cities have Christian names (e.g., San Francisco, Los Angeles); Congress opened with prayers; and French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville, after touring the United States in 1831, remarked that he found her greatness in her churches. None of this was questioned. It was the default.

But this faith slowly eroded, and government policy changed commensurately. Whereas the Supreme Court stated in 1892 that our "laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teachings of The Redeemer of mankind ... and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian," it gave us the "separation of church and state" ruling in 1947 and the decrees outlawing school prayer in 1962 and school-sponsored Bible reading in '63. Whereas teachers in the late 1800s were often [expected](#) to attend church, a century later they wouldn't even be allowed to mention God in the classroom.

What changed? As with OG and its by-laws, the First Amendment of our supreme law of the land, the Constitution, certainly hasn't. Society has.

As to this, most today don't think teachers should be pressured to attend church or that we should have



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“emphatically Christian” institutions. But, again, what the ideal role of religion is in civilization isn’t the point. Cultural trajectory — and where it will take us — is. Whether it’s the microcosm of OG or the wider society, the pattern is identical: First overt and passionate religiosity is accepted and sometimes applauded. Then it is tolerated. Next only a lesser degree of visible faith passes muster. Then less, and less, and less, as tolerance gradually transitions into hostility and forces religion into the closet. This is when people start saying things such as “Faith should be a private matter.”

But will it end there? Do you really think this transition will suddenly halt? It’s as with the mathematical progressions in school: 2, 4, 6, 8... What comes next is plain.

And we already see it in Barack Obama’s attempt to enforce a contraception mandate on religious entities. It wasn’t enough that faith-oriented employers were stripped of the right to apply their own morals in their own businesses. It wasn’t enough that religious organizations couldn’t receive government funds available to secular counterparts. Now they’re expected to fund activities that violate their beliefs — in a move that’s a radical departure from our long-held understanding of church/state separation.

Why is this happening? Someone once said that stigmas are the corollaries of values; if something is to be valued, it follows that what is contrary to it will be devalued. As approval of homosexual behavior starts to be thought a moral imperative, for instance, it follows that anything that disapproves of it will start to be thought immoral. And history teaches that when something is considered immoral enough, legal prohibitions follow.

Yet, again, this goes beyond homosexuality. The real problem people have with Christianity is that it doesn’t allow for the relativism that not only justifies all sins, but, in fact, the idea that there is no sin. It erects an absolute standard of morality that non-negotiably judges our behavior, and people don’t like being told they’re wrong. For sin to become a “right,” Christianity will have to become a wrong, a civilizational conscience that, for people to proceed with minimal guilt, must be destroyed.

So where does this end? It doesn’t, really. The battle against evil won’t end till the end of time. And Christians have always been persecuted, starting with the Romans, exemplified by the martyrs, and continuing in the modern era with groups such as the Soviets, the Spanish Popular Front leftists, the Red Chinese, and today’s Muslim jihadists.

And with American secular jihadists intensifying their efforts, we’re in for a wild ride. Unless something disrupts our cultural trajectory, I wouldn’t be surprised to see leftists one day propose that having known Christians vote or receive Social Security violates the “separation of church and state” principle. Whatever the details, however, purging our foundational faith amounts to a destruction of Western civilization. And, contrary to what the song says, suicide — especially the cultural variety — is anything but painless.



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