Independence Day: reflections on freedom

Dr. Donald E. Wildmon
President

"Can freedom of speech survive in a society that sets limits?"

It is, indeed, an interesting question to ponder. And, on the surface, seemingly a not-so-difficult one to answer. Who among us wants our speech limited? In this free country, who would dare seek limitations on one of our most basic of freedoms—the freedom of speech?

"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..." So begins the First Amendment to our Constitution.

On the surface, the statement seems quite clear. But, as with all laws, we must examine and apply the intent of the law, rather than simply engage in a cold reading of the words.

Let me begin by saying that the question has been phrased incorrectly. And, when you begin with an invalid premise, inevitably you come to the wrong conclusion. The proper phrasing should be: "Can freedom survive in a society that does **not** set limits on speech?" After all, it isn't only freedom of speech that we want to survive, it is freedom itself. Speech is only one part of the whole of freedom as we know it in our society.

Well, can freedom survive in a society that sets limits on speech? For more than 200 years freedom in our society has survived in a great part **because we have** set limits on speech.

Consider some of the limits, and their positive contribution to our freedom.

Perjury. What if we did not limit the freedom of speech to forbid perjury? Can you imagine what havoc such freedom of speech would wreak on our system of justice if the witness in a judicial proceeding were allowed the freedom to lie?

Libel. What if we could write or say anything we wanted about anyone? Would justice be served? Could civility be maintained in a society that allowed such unlimited speech?

Incitement to violence. What if we were legally free to call for the killing of others simply because they were of a different color, or religion, or even a different political party?

Take another limit we have set on speech—*divulging military secrets*. How many lives of those fighting for our freedom would be lost if, during time of war, we freely allowed our citizens to provide military secrets to the enemy?

And what about making threatening or *harassing phone calls*. Or even verbal sexual harassment. Do we really want to remove the limits on speech and allow one person to harass or threaten another?

Fraudulent advertising. What if our laws allowed the freedom for a company to make unsubstantiated claims about its product? Fortunately for the consumer, advertisers aren't allowed to misrepresent their product. Remember Carter's Little Liver Pills? They, obviously, had nothing to do with the liver.

Incidentally—perhaps you missed it—the First Amendment itself limits freedom of speech by implicitly forbidding religious indoctrination in public schools. What if every teacher, in every school and every grade, were free to teach in their courses their particular religious doctrine?

And finally, the subject on which my friends at the ACLU are most

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Editor's Note: Tim Wildmon's column will resume next month.

Alcohol takes innocent victims

Even if the USA could stop drunken driving, it would have a long way to go to end all alcohol-related deaths and injuries, federal health officials say.

Alcohol abuse contributes to murder, suicide, domestic violence, birth defects and all sorts of accidents, said officials at a conference on alcohol-related injuries. "There's much more to drinking than dying in a car crash," Surgeon General Antonia Novello said.

Despite some progress in the battle against drunken driving, automobile accidents remain the leading cause of alcohol-related injuries and deaths: Almost half of the 44,529 traffic deaths in 1990 were alcohol-related; such a death occurred every 24 minutes.

In addition, according to research:

• Alcohol is a factor in about half the accidental deaths that happen at home.

• Between 20% and 37% of emergency room traumas involve alcohol.

• Falls that cause injury and death become more common as alcohol use goes up. And, because of poor health, an alcoholic is 16 times more likely to die in a fall than the average person is.

• One Philadelphia study of 588 murders found that the victim, perpetrator or both had been drinking in nearly two-thirds of the cases. Most studies on murder find alcohol involved in at least one third of the cases.

• More than half of rapists were drinking immediately before their crimes, says one study.

• Mothers convicted of child abuse are three times more likely than other mothers to be alcoholics; fathers convicted of child abuse are 10 times more likely to be alcoholics than are non-abusing fathers, says a Harvard Medical School study.

• Up to 36% of suicide victims have a history of alcohol abuse or were drinking shortly before their suicides.

USA Today, 3/25/92

AFA Journal
Volume 16
Number 7

A publication of the American Family Association. Published monthly and November/December. Address: P.O. Drawer 2440, Tupelo, MS 38803. Phone 601/844-5036. Subscription rate: $15 per year.

Executive Editor: Donald E. Wildmon
Editor: Randall Murphree
Editorial Assistant: Jessica Huckaby

AFA is a Christian organization promoting the Biblical ethic of decency in American society with primary emphasis on TV and other media.

Christians & Society **TODAY**

July 1992

A supplement for local bulletins and newsletters

AFA calls for boycott of Levi Strauss, BankAmerica and Wells Fargo after they announce boycott of Boy Scouts

The American Family Association says it is calling for a boycott of Levi Strauss & Company, BankAmerica and Wells Fargo. The three companies recently ended donations to the Boy Scouts of America because the organization refused to accept homosexuals or allow homosexuals to serve as scoutmasters.

AFA said the jeans manufacturer has stopped giving between $40,000 and $80,000 a year to the Boy Scouts of America. The size of donations by BankAmerica and Wells Fargo was not immediately known.

"These companies are aggressively promoting the homosexual lifestyle," said AFA president Donald E. Wildmon. "The fact that they would penalize the Boy Scouts because they would not endorse homosexuality shows that they no longer want or desire the business of the overwhelming majority of Americans."

The Boy Scouts have been sued by parents whose young sons have been sexually molested by homosexual scoutmasters.

AFA is encouraging individuals to contact the companies and let them know they are boycotting them. The addresses are:

Chrm. Robert D. Haas, **Levi Strauss & Co.**, Post Office Box 7215, San Francisco, CA 94111, **TOLL FREE 1-800-872-5384**. Levi's jeans and clothing and Dockers clothing.

Chrm. Carl E. Reichhardt, **Wells Fargo & Company**, 420 Montgomery St., San Francisco, CA 94163, **TOLL FREE 1-800-242-4932**. Wells Fargo owns Wells Fargo Realty Finance, Wells Fargo Securities, Wells Fargo Ag Credit, Wells Fargo Insurance Services. West Coast Partners is an affiliate.

Chrm. Richard M. Rosenberg, **BankAmerica Corporation**, P.O. Box 37000, San Francisco, CA 94137, **TOLL FREE 1-800-426-7993**. BankAmerica owns The Bank of California, RA Agency, RA Cheque Corp, Davenport Data Processors, BA Futures, BA Insurance Company, BA Mortgage & International Realty, BA Ventures, BankAmerica International, BankAmerica Sutter Mortgage, BA ATM, Inc., BA Leasing & Capital, Managistics, Continental Auxiliary Company Trustee, Overseas Assets Holdings, Inc., Seafirst Corporation, Seattle-First National Bank, Seafirst Insurance.

Number of single parent families rising

The number of single parents heading their own households rose from 7.5 million in 1985 to 8.6 million in 1989, a 14.7% jump that occurred across racial and ethnic groups according to a Census Bureau report. More than 25% of all families are headed by a single parent. Black and Hispanic single parents are more likely than whites never to have married. That's important, University of Wisconsin demographer Larry Bumpass says, because "never married fathers are less likely to be involved and less likely to pay child support than married fathers." Other findings:

• There were more black single-parent families—57%—than married-couple families.

• Single parents were more likely to have only one child—49%—than married couples—39%.

• Women headed 79% of single-parent families in 1989, but single-parent families headed by men grew more rapidly, from 1.3 million in 1985 to 1.8 million in 1989.

USA Today, 5/13/92

Pupils flip more channels than pages survey shows

Students in this country aren't reading very much—in school or out says a government study. They rarely use libraries, and fewer are reading for fun, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reports.

Here are some of the findings from surveys of 13,000 public and private school students in 1988 and 25,000 in 1990, grades 4, 8, and 12:

• One-third of eighth-graders and 12th-graders and a fourth of fourth-graders read five or fewer pages daily.

• Some 25% of fourth-graders and 20% of eighth graders never discuss what they read in class.

• 37% of fourth-graders, 64% of eighth-graders and 40% of 12th-graders watch three or more hours of television a day, down slightly from 1988. About 25% of fourth-graders watch six hours or more.

• Children whose parents read a lot are better readers, as are those who watch the least television.

Associated Press, 5/29/92

Director uses film to preach his sermons

Lethal Weapon 3 may be the last place you'd expect to get a dose of social consciousness. But between gunfire and car chases, director Richard Donner has slipped in messages:

• Murtaugh's (Danny Glover) daughter sports a T-shirt that says "Pro-choice."

• A truck forced off the road bears a sign: "Only Animals Should Wear Fur."

• A sign on the police station wall urges: "Recycle."

• Riggs (Mel Gibson) drinks gas and spits it out: "Phew! Exxon." It's "our statement against Exxon," Donner says.

He's been doing this for years. In 1987's **Lethal Weapon**, the Murtaughs' refrigerator has a sticker: "Free South Africa. End Apartheid." **Weapon 2** (1989) works that issue into the script and promotes safe sex: Murtaugh's daughter does a condom ad. Plus, there's a plea to boycott tuna. "They kill the dolphins that get caught in the nets," says Murtaugh's wife.

"Under the guise of entertainment you can sneak a lot of messages in," Donner says. "If one person gets interested then you've served" the cause.

USA Today, 5/22/92