

Bob Fu determined to keep himself the focus of drama and controversy at the International Religious Freedom summit

Columbia, Maryland May 3, 2023 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Separation of Church and State is becoming a very endangered ideal in America and many other parts of the world. There are many reasons why, one of the main instigators is that there are obtuse, well-funded groups, looking to use these freedoms to perpetuate their own, often contradictory opinions.

From right-wing nationalist groups to extreme evangelical organizations, to the Falun Gong and its myriad media outlets, American politics system is being bought, lied about, and manipulated in order to confuse and influence public opinion. We live in a world of purposeful misinformation which presents a real threat to our way of life. Add widening this platform to include religion in politics opens the door to religions ably spreading their own misinformation, and disciples going along with misinformation as a badge of honor in maintaining their religious identity. This has been used time and time again in recent political battles.

"In America, we don't turn to government to restore our souls. We put our faith in the almighty God," - President Donald Trump on the closing night of a Republican National Convention steeped in religious rhetoric. (1)

"Not only is American Christianity increasingly intertwined with Republican partisanship, but religion itself provides tools for resisting information from secular sources of information. Evangelical Christians are taught to resist "worldly" influences in favor of trustworthy, Godly resources."(2)

Those who get their news from a variety of sources are aware of acts by controversial religious groups or individuals and their seeding of misinformation through the purchase of online media such as Facebook Ads, other news coverage and even paying for these opinions to advance their own agendas (usually hidden), under the guise of honest reporting or fact. Unfortunately, this practice stealthily hijacked parts of the recent International Religious Freedom summit in Washington.

A good example is an attendee at this rally was Bob Fu, a minister who seems determined to keep himself the focus of drama and controversy, while he continues to tell governments and countries what they have to do. His evangelical Christian Aid association has been accused of forceful religious tactics that are the same or similar to many other high pressure American Evangelical missionaries abroad over the years; Evangelical missionaries who have been accused of blackmailing the weak and starving into "finding God".

A conference about religious freedom should take a more inclusive view on the wide array of global religious beliefs, or even non-belief. Bob Fu's Christian Aid appears to have a very narrow view of what an appropriate religion is supposed to be and a very specific sense of acceptable beliefs and practices. In a free and tolerant society, dictating that one's belief system is superior to another is not conducive to preserving religious freedoms.

The U.S. exists on the world stage as a place where Church and State are separated, where there is an understanding in the value of a free and honest press, and where religions are generally respected for the work they do through their religious doctrine and charity, not for grand standing, or paying for false "news".

Michael W. McConnell, Professor and Director of the Constitutional Law Center at Stanford Law School and a former circuit judge succinctly stated in a recent interview, he mentioned the separation of church and state is a slogan, it's a shorthand or colloquial way of expressing a legal idea. The actual legal idea is expressed in the First Amendment of our Bill of Rights, and it provides that Congress, which now means any level of government, that Congress shall make no law restricting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, it's a restraint on government. Actually, there are many examples of religious organizations and influencers pushing a political agenda with money and misinformation in order to sway popular opinion and political parties. In the United States most organizations are free to voice their opinions, but when an organization purposely hides their origin, ownership and agenda, media consumers are left vulnerable to fake news and savvy propaganda campaigns with hidden agendas. It was unfortunate to see the latest International Religious Freedom summit in Washington, DC get caught up in this weaponized form of lobbying, as it does a disservice to the safeguards and values for which it stands.

All of which makes sense, as it is an American tenet to protect the rights of the individual. But, what about when the individual is in a position of highly influential religious power, with a mission to take their version of religious doctrine into the political arena? What if they are willing to do anything to get there? Shouldn't the first amendment also protect American citizens from this threat?

A religious leader, such as Bob Fu, might argue that it is a first amendment right to spread false information, if the propagator believes it to be true, and many, including judge Michael W. McConnell would deftly defend this right, yet even he believes on a personal level that this is not right, stating in the same recent interview that: "I personally believe, I mean I personally adhere to a religion that does keep politics and religion separate, and the reason for that is because I believe that it's important for the gospel to be accessible to people you know different orientations about other things. And I'm really opposed to the politicisation of so many things in America."

In 2023 however, Americans have become suspicious of these bedrock tenets of society, and rightly so.

The truth today is often contrary to the American ideals of the past. America is now in a time where savvy religious and media organizations can use their vast resources to gain more influence than they ever have. Facebook appears happy to take their significant media buys. "Far-right sources of news and information that spread misinformation have even higher engagement than far-right sources overall, generating on average 65% more engagement per follower, according to [a recent] study. (3)

Sadly, wealthy organizations with undeclared agendas, and which purposely stay in the shadows to blur the lines between religion, media and for-profit businesses, have gained an outsized influence. This model purposely mocks the idea of separation of Church and State as it walks a fine line and seeks to turn religion into a powerful financial and influence peddling tool. It doesn't seek independence from government, but involvement in which to aggressively shape it. This is evidenced in ongoing headlines and articles, such as this one by Jason Wilson for the Guardian: Falun Gong-aligned media push fake news about Democrats and Chinese communists, The Epoch Times, believed to be linked to the Chinese religious movement, is part of an anti-CCP influence operation tapping into the US right, according to a media watchdog (4)

It's important to understand that using vast resources (obtained through religious tithing) to promote false media affects not only the opinion of American citizens, but American ideology, and ultimately the vote. People are swayed by lies.

According to an article in Statista dated June, 2022, 38.3% of Americans shared fake news, 67%

believe it causes a great deal of confusion while only 26% had confidence in their ability to identify misinformation. “In the meantime, fake news will continue to be a problem, and reporting, avoiding, or identifying it will fall mostly to the consumer.”(5)

Notes

(1)Amen Gashaw, In God We Trust: How American Christianity Became Republicanism, Harvard Political Review, January 9, 2021 ,<https://harvardpolitics.com/in-god-we-trust-how-american-christianity-became-republicanism/>

(2)Ben Gaskins, Faith and Fake News: How Religion Influences Political Trust, The LSE Religion and Global Society interdisciplinary blog, October 21, 2021 <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2021/10/faith-and-fake-news-how-religion-influences-political-trust/>

(3)Jessica Guynn, What's popular on Facebook? Extreme far right political views and lies, study says, USA Today, March 3, 2021<https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2021/03/03/facebook-extreme-far-right-politics-lies-popular/6895670002/>

(4)Jason Wilson, Falun Gong-aligned media push fake news about Democrats and Chinese communists, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/apr/30/falun-gong-media-epoch-times-democrats-chinese-communists>

(5)Amy Watson, Fake News in the US – Statistics & Facts, June 21, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/topics/3251/fake-news/#topicOverview>

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Break: <https://original.newsbreak.com/@mh-rifad-1592800/3006728915709-bob-fu-determined-to-keep-himself-the-focus-of-drama-and-controversy-at-the-international-religious-freedom-summit>.

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