

## AMERICA GETS AN "F" IN RELIGION

by Tom Wacaster

A recent article in the U.S. News (April 9, 2007) reported that in America, we get an "F" in religion. Jay Tolson reported that "roughly 9 in 10" of our citizens believe in God, or a Supreme Being. In fact, America is widely acknowledged to be the "most religious of modern industrialized nations." Yet, when it comes to knowledge ABOUT religion, it ranks among the most ill-informed in the Western world. Mr. Tolson pointed out, that "while close to two thirds of Americans regard the Bible as a source of answers to life's questions, only half can name even one of the New Testament Gospels."

The present generation has simply lost its connection to the word of God. History will attest to the fact that the Bible was the first "reader" of the colonists and early Americans, so much so that when they learned to read, they read from the Bible. Early American's conducted many of their most important civic debates, including the debate over slavery, in Biblical terms evoking Biblical principles for decisions in matters of right and wrong on such issues. Churches, schools, households, colleges and tract societies linked social life to the principles of morality set forth in the Bible. Like a giant "chain" that holds the ship to the anchor, the word of God provided a link to social stability and moral direction. But that chain was broken in the 1960's by secularists and since that time the ship has drifted further and further from its moorings. Like so many falling dominoes, we began to see the destabilization of the world in which we live. Supreme Court rulings outlawed Bible reading and prayers in our public schools. The Bible slowly became what Tolson called "a kind of ornament and a source of authority rather than a book that you actually read." Over the past four decades sermons have become more about ordinary life and less about Biblical narratives, and Sunday schools focused more on morality than on the book that taught that morality. The great paradox is that, while we were becoming less knowledgeable about the basic facts of the gospel, our nation was becoming more evangelical. The "Puritanism" of the 18th and 19th centuries gave way to evangelical impulse in the 20th century. The mind set where we focused not only upon the heart, but upon the head as the means of religious learning and practice slowly gave way to a type of thinking where experience and emotion became the predominant force in our religion. Slowly, ever so slowly, Americans turned away from learning the facts of the Bible to expressing themselves in terms of subjective and emotional feelings. The consequence has taught us that we do, indeed, reap what we sow. The fruit of our failing grade in religion is now coming to harvest. Abortion, homosexuality, gambling, drunkenness, rebellious children, filthy language, failed marriages, pornography, increased crime rates, ungodly and immoral leaders (and citizens) all combine to show that America is no longer a "Christian nation." She shed that honorable designation at least four decades ago, if not in terminology, at least in practice.

I am not so pessimistic as to think that the direction can be reversed, but history is against us. Unless God's people let their voices be heard and their lives be exemplary, this nation of 50 United States will continue to receive a failing grade in religion. And the consequences are too horrible to even imagine.