

THE CONTRACT WITH AMERICA

VOICE FOR FEAR

BY J. D. JENKINS

Since the huge victory of the Republicans I have heard a tremendous amount about the "Contract With America." I am at odds with this 'contract' for several reasons. Mainly I think it's because I distrust people who work at creating fears in others and at the same time have a well thought out plan for fixing it.

Millions of people have been frightened by faceless voices in the night, voices with political agendas. The result has been masses of frightened people voting for the candidates hand picked by the voices that created the fear and who are tailoring the solutions. One ideology was able to get out a majority vote for one election by exploiting people's fears. Now we must all live with frightful laws being created by these voices of fear.

This 'contract' is not a victory for democracy. It is a victory for powerful voices that would control this country by the use of fear. It is an ideological coup that is not unlike the massive ideological wave that took over Germany just prior to the Second World War. Just recently I listened to the Congressional House shouting and booing down remarks that disagreed with the majority ideology. It was reminiscent of the Fascist brown shirts who violently fought and rudely ridiculed all opinion that disagreed with their own. Coercion, suppression of diverse opinion, and the clever manipulation of news events has made large portions the public believe a lie. Although clever men of power can fool all of the people some of the time, it ought not be and I hope it will not be for long.

A good principle I try to incorporate into my life is, "I will not allow fear to control my life." If I don't allow fear to control my life how can I feel good when I see fear controlling my nation?

When I was in school I trained for the ministry. Toward the end of my training I changed my mind about the course I was headed for.

At the school I attended there was a speaker at an assembly who was known to all of us. He spoke of a new revolution that was beginning and that we as future leaders of Christendom should be a part. He told us about the strategy meetings that were taking place to forge political alliances and about the formation of lobbies that would give 'true believers' a new and mightier voice in American politics. The expressed purpose was to bring "Godliness into government and sanity to the law." Outlaw abortion. Stop drugs. Stop the general disintegration of morals in America. I remember we left that assembly encouraged that perhaps one day things would be set aright and God's way would be the law of the land. What I heard I liked; after all, I was already caught in the fear cycle. Fear was aroused in me for religious control and fear was relieved by the fear controllers. The topics presented to us were deliberately universal and designed to play on our pre-existing fears. Who doesn't want a world free of crime and disorder? No one would ever seriously disagree. What was not mentioned were the ramifications of these proposed changes, the means by which these changes would be brought about, and the true goal of these changes.

There is a world that is infinitely larger and more diverse than any one book. Hundreds of thousands of news stories are written every day. If a person sets out with a opinion to support and has a large enough staff to research it, just about anything desired can be 'proven'. The days when a clear distinction was made between news and commentary are gone.

Fear can be created by gathering select news, making it a commentary and presenting it as objective fact. The more polished and impassioned the commentary the more people will embrace the position presented. The commentator leads the alarmed audience to a predetermined solution by means of fear. The usual aim is to convince the listener that only the commentator's solutions will eliminate the source of fear generated by the commentary. The commentator has gained power over the listener and is able to change opinions and alter behavior. This



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formula has been successfully used by religion from the beginning. Applied to mass media for political ends this formula is generally referred to as "brainwashing." I hesitate to use the term in this context because of the negative connotations associated with it. The only other term I can think of to fit the scenario is "snake oil." There is little difference between the oldtime medicine show and its modern media version except the afflictions and nostrums are mental.

What has this got to do with the Contract With America? Everything. There was a time when conservatives were a laughing stock. People saw through them and their fear-mongering. People sought social progress, power over their own minds and bodies, and truth from politicians. Old walls of prejudice were finally falling down. There was a vision for the future. A war ended, a crooked President was displaced from office, and opportunity was more equitably applied than ever before in history.

The conservative movement hated the defeats it sustained. From the conservatives' point of view the people were out of control and there was a great fear of total anarchy. They made a plan to insure this would stop and not happen again. A marriage of conservative institutions was arranged. The political and religious conservative powers joined forces to restore order.

Fear was the tool used to turn people to their cause. Large radio networks were the key to communicating their message. Eventually the message caught on and the result is what we see today. This is not a grassroots movement. It is orchestrated by very high powers both religious and political and is the product of 20 years of planning and hard work. The Contract With America is the fruit of this union.

The phrase "Contract With America" is a buzzterm created by a group of individuals with a purpose and a goal. The purpose is to control the nation's people; what we do, where we go, and what we think. The goal is power. I've thought at times that it is primarily a political movement, but it's not. This is a religious *I see the Light* movement screwed into a political *We have the Power* socket.

When I broke free of the religious fear that controlled my life, I thought more and more about what had been said that day. A religiously motivated political movement with fear as its fuel was not for me. I changed my mind. Fear was not going to run my life. Religious/political alliances lead to disaster. Fear clouds sound judgment; it doesn't clarify it. Religious fear should not enter the Congressional halls to cloud judgment in political decisions. The founding fathers were wise in distancing Church and State. It would be wise to remember to maintain that distance.

The school I attended during my training for the ministry was a well known school that was associated with many different endeavors. A radio station that broadcasts to the entire Midwest was in the heart of the school. There was in fact a network of radio stations that gave this one bastion of conservative religious thought a very large audience. I learned about radio in those years and the authority that one perceives when something is heard on the radio. I learned about the power of the clergy and the authority they wield with their parishioners. I learned about the power of words when presented by a person in authority over the radio.

If a news item comes over the radio the public believes it. We believe it more than a news item on television. TV can make a person's words seem suspect as a result of appearance and setting. Over the radio there is no judgment drawn on the basis of looks or staging, only the audio effects. If what the audience hears sounds real it is accepted. In 1938 Orson Welles demonstrated just how powerful that influence is with his famous broadcast of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. After the panic and hysteria induced by that broadcast a code was enacted to distinguish fact from fiction. For decades afterward fictional programs were not allowed to imitate the format of a news program. We were not going to be a society that intentionally subjected our countrymen to panic and fear simply to sell soap. The distinction

between news and fiction, news and commentary, news and any other biased message was to be made clear. This has changed.

Today it is very difficult to tell what is sensational commentary and what is accurately reported news. The result is a lot of confusion. Some are presenting only selective 'news items' that reinforce their own political or moral position. During the time of my religious conversion I often examined beliefs to determine their validity. I would examine a widely held belief such as "There is only one God" and would go to scripture and from scripture prove there is only one God. There was little objection because nearly everyone listening already agreed with the conclusion. But take that same principle to a less agreed upon subject such as "What is right and wrong in interracial sexual relationships," and the result is quite different. Separate factions will support their conclusions by selectively choosing scripture -- the *news* that proves their pre-existing conclusions and prejudices.

When you mix politics and religion you wind up with Bosnias, Northern Irelands, Lebanons, Irans, Israel/Palestinian struggles. Lands and peoples divided and freedom for average citizens forgotten. I am an average citizen and I made no contract with any political or religious group, and I don't want one.

The Contract With America is no cure for this nation's woes. It is quackery created to shrivel fears stirred by the people selling the cure. The snake oil salesmen will lose their power if we as individuals refuse their nostrums. If we say in our hearts and minds "I will not allow fear to control my life" and with our mouths and votes declare "I will not allow fear to control my country."

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"He didn't say 'al dente,' did he?"

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