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Church and state

Jeff Jacoby reaches mightily in his suggestion that the Founding Fathers would approve of the religious right's attempt to inject religion into America's education and governance ("Today's sensitivity to religion would have surprised forefathers," Opinions, July 3).

Perhaps we might reach a different conclusion if we ask how Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and company would have responded to a church-state controversy that took place in Little Ax, Okla., in the early '80s. There the conflict was between the faithful themselves.

Two Little Ax women, one a Nazarene and one a Church of Christ member, asked the local school board to stop allowing Bible and prayer sessions at school expense, as well as the passing out of Bibles in class. After the school board ignored them, the families turned to the American Civil Liberties Union, which filed suit on their behalf.

During the course of the suit, the plaintiffs were repeatedly accused of being atheists and "commies." One of the women was hospitalized from an attack by a school cafeteria worker. The good citizens of Little Ax took up a collection to pay the attacker's expenses.

A school board member reckoned that "those who play with fire get burned." Later, the home of one plaintiff burned to the ground in what was ruled an arson fire.

The Little Ax residents who showed such intolerance and violence to those who did not share their views are well represented in the religious right, and only the naive think they are not dangerous when they achieve political power.

— Bill Becker
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