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**PUBLISHER**  
BRUCE CASINO

**EDITOR**  
DAN FEFFERMAN

**CIRCULATION**  
DIANA WEBER

**WEB SITE MANAGER**  
ALEX COLVIN

EDITORIAL OFFICES:  
7777 LEESBURG PIKE,  
SUITE 309N,  
FALLS CHURCH,  
VA 22043, USA  
PHONE: 703-790-1500  
FAX: 703-790-5562  
E-MAIL: ICRF@AOL.COM  
www.religiousfreedom.com

## Who's Afraid of the Falun Gong?

By Alex Colvin

Chinese Communist Party chiefs have declared that the number one threat to Chinese security—more serious than even the Taiwan issue or Tibet—is the Falun Gong. They may be right. For almost two years now they have been waging a futile war against this organization. What exactly is Falun Gong and why are they proving to be a possible nemesis for the Communist Chinese government?

Falun Gong grew out of a larger exercise movement known as *Qigong*. Qigong is a popular form of exercise similar to Tai Chi that has been practiced in parks and public squares for years without causing any consternation on the part of Chinese authorities. In 1992, Li Hongzhi introduced the practice of Falun Dafa or Falun Gong. In 1993, he published his first book of teachings entitled *Falun Gong*. This book and Li's later publications are available at the Falun Dafa website <http://www.falundafa.org>.

Li maintains that Qigong has existed since prehistoric times. In the introduction to



The Falun Gong emblem features the ancient "wan" or swastika symbol, signifying good fortune.

*Falun Gong*, he explains:

The "Qi" we talk about now was called "Chi" by ancient people. They are, in essence, the same... Through cultivation, the movements of the [Qi] energy substance in human body shall be activated, changing the physical state of the body, achieving the effect of healing and fitness... A person who, through practice, possesses advanced capability emits a high-energy cluster that is manifested in the form of light with fine particles and high density. This is "Gong."

"Fa" means "Law" in the sense of a primary cosmic law that pervades all things in the universe. "Dafa" is "Great Law."

"Falun" means "Law Wheel." The purpose of Falun Gong is to cultivate a person's higher energy or "Gong." This is done not only through physical exercise but more importantly through the development of a person's mind-nature or "Xinxing." It is this emphasis on the development of one's internal character or mind and the stress on a non-material energy that differentiates Falun Gong from other forms of Qigong.

The Chinese people have been bombarded by Marxist materialism for 50 years. The Chinese government, while accepting the impracticability of Marxist economic policies, continues to cling to materialism in its official ideology. Yet millions of Chinese are dissatisfied with a purely physical explanation of reality. They are turning to a wide range of religious teachings to satisfy their spiritual hunger. Movements that present such teachings are a direct threat to the power of the Communist Party because they strike at the very heart of the party's justification for existence—its ideology.

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## Interfaith Convocation Spotlights Religious Freedom and Diversity

Paul J. Rosenbaum

ICRF co-sponsored the President's Day Interfaith Celebration of America's Heritage of Faith February 18, at the Washington Family Education Center in the nation's capital. The Celebration was conceived and inspired by Rabbi Dr. David Z. Ben-Ami, founder of the American Forum for Jewish-Christian Cooperation (AFJCC).

Ministers, DC Government officials, members of the diplomatic corps, noted musical artists, clergy, and members of various faiths all came together to add vitality and joyous celebration to this interfaith service.

Featured performers included Cantor Vadim Tunitsky, who came all the way from Temple Emanu-El in Houston Texas to share several inspirational songs from the Jewish tradition of sacred music; and recording artist

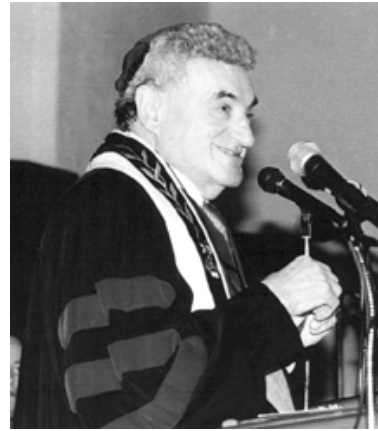
Brother John Michael Talbot, who stirred the crowd with a musical incarnation of the prayer of St. Francis—"Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Thy Peace."

Keynote messages were given by ICRF executive director Dan Fefferman, on "America's Heritage of Religious Freedom," Institute on Religious and Public Policy president Joseph K. Grieboski on "Celebrating Religious Diversity," and Martin Luther King Family Life Institute director Rev. Levy Daugherty on "Love and Forgiveness Makes America Great."

Rabbi Ben-Ami has been a leading organizer of interfaith activities for several decades. He was assisted in this year's endeavor by Mel Haft of the Jewish Family Federation for World Peace, an association of Jewish Unificationists in the Washington DC area. Also participating were clergy and believers of the Protestant, Catholic, Muslim and Jewish traditions.

According to Rabbi Ben-Ami, the purpose of these gatherings is: "to express in spirit and deed the American spirit of religious liberty which is manifested in the concept 'One Nation Under God.'"

"As Americans representing diverse faiths and races, we give expression to the ideals of equality and fraternity—the ideal of charity to all and malice toward none," he stated. "We take spiritual inventory of where the nation stands in respect to the fulfillment of its own ideals and traditions."



Brother John Michael Talbot sings the prayer of Saint Francis; audience participates in responsive reading. Right: Rabbi David Z. Ben-Ami leads the interfaith ceremony.



# Rating America's Heritage of Religious Freedom

By Dan Fefferman

*Presented at the President's Day Interfaith Celebration of America's Heritage of Faith February 1, 2001.*

Probably more than any country in history, the United States of America is steeped in a tradition of religious freedom. As schoolchildren Americans learn the story of the Pilgrim Fathers' coming to this land in search of religious liberty. This origin story informs our national identity to

such an extent that the ideal of religious freedom is essential to being an American. The Bill of Rights enshrined religious freedom as the first freedom. Although its record is certainly not perfect, the United States is recognized as a

model and leader in the field of religious liberty.

Today's convocation has, as one of its purposes to "take spiritual inventory of where the Nation stands in respect to the fulfillment of its own ideals and traditions." Where does America stand in relation to its ideal of religious freedom? The question really has two parts. How are we doing in terms of practicing what we preach? And how are we doing in terms of influencing others to put this ideal into practice?

In terms of practicing what we preach, I think we are doing very well. This was not always the case however. In our early history, the United States was guilty of serious religious freedom abuses. In Massachusetts, the home of



ICRF executive director Dan Fefferman speaks at interfaith convocation.

Plymouth Rock, the Puritans expelled Baptists for heresy, executed Quakers, and conducted the infamous Salem witch trials. Even after the Bill of Rights became law, some states officially disenfranchised Jews, Catholics, Unitarians, or believers in native religions. Later, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and others suffered gravely because of religious intolerance and persecution. These religious minorities paved the way for the expansion of religious freedom through their legal battles. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

But even in the last century, America's record is not perfect. We should not forget that prior to WWII, this country denied a safe haven to Jews undergoing persecution under Hitler. Anti-Semitism is still a problem today in some areas. Moreover, there has been intolerance and suspicion toward Muslims and other religious groups that have immigrated to the US in the last half of the 20th century.

The advent of new religious

movements has also created challenges. The founder of one new religion, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, was imprisoned on tax charges in the 1980s despite the objections of mainstream churches and civil libertarians alike. During the 1970s, we witnessed the phenomenon of widespread religious kidnapping—under the euphemism of "deprogramming"—in an effort to force religious believers of groups such as Scientology, the Children of God, Hare Krishna, and the Unification Church to renounce their faith. Thankfully, the courts eventually moved to thwart this shameful practice.

So over the years, some progress has been made. And when serious harms arise, the courts have generally done a good job of enforcing the guarantees of the First Amendment. In no other country do so many diverse religious groups co-exist so freely. So in terms of how we are doing at home, I'd have to give America an A-minus. There is still room for improvement, but, especially compared to other countries, we are doing very well.

In terms influence abroad, the story is more complicated. The United States formally committed itself to leadership in this field through the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. One good thing this did was to put pressure on Japan to enforce its kidnapping laws in deprogramming cases, for which we at ICRF can take some credit. But it has done little or nothing to influence China and Sudan—two of the worst violators—to respect the rights their religious minorities. Even in Europe, where US influence should

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***"Although its record is certainly not perfect, the United States is recognized as a model and leader in the field of religious liberty."***

# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD

By Rick Hunter

## Afghanistan

Dating from the third and fifth centuries, Afghanistan's best known archeological treasures were destroyed by tanks, artillery, rockets and dynamite in March, 2001 on orders of Mullah Mohammed Omar, supreme leader of the Taliban, in order to "prevent idolatry." The two Buddhas, 175 feet and 120 feet high with gold faces and hands, were carved into the rock of the Hindu Kush mountains in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. They were purported to be the largest standing Buddhas in the world.

Omar reversed his earlier position of protection and restoration of the Buddhas and claimed that Islam demanded their destruction along with all statues, images, paintings and religious artifacts. Over 6000 Buddhist works of art and other artifacts kept in the main museum in Kabul are also slated to be demolished. Omar has claimed that the famine that now plagues Afghanistan is God's punishment for the failure of the people to pray five times a day as required by Islam.

## Cuba

According to an Italian bishop who recently visited Cuba, the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Havana recently published a document that includes an expression that worries the Cuban Church greatly: "It is time to 'de-papalize' Cuba." Pope John Paul II paid an historic visit to Cuba three years ago during

which Fidel Castro embraced the pontiff and allowed him to perform an outdoor mass.

Flavio Roberto Carraro, president of the Italian bishops' Commission for the Evangelization of Peoples and Cooperation among Churches, said the communists want "to reduce the possibilities of the Church's charitable aid to people, because if the Church helps the people, it means there is a need. And this would mean that the revolution has not succeeded in satisfying the people's needs."

## Egypt

A United States delegation investigating religious freedom has conducted a five-day visit to Egypt and the Middle East. It was expected to meet both government and religious officials in the region. It planned to investigate the condition of the Egypt's Coptic Christian minority. Coptic advocates for religious tolerance often blame social and economic imbalances, particularly in the poor countryside, for fueling some religious tensions. Church and human rights officials, however, blame police for not doing more to stop the January 2 killings, rioting, and looting that ran along sectarian lines. Violent communal clashes erupted in the village of Al Kosheh over the New Year's weekend, leaving 20 Coptic Orthodox

Christians and one Muslim dead. Scores of buildings were burned and shops looted in the surrounding area.

In February, the Coptic community reacted angrily when a court acquitted almost all those accused of massacring 21 Christians last year. The Muslim Brotherhood has condemned the American delegation's visit, which it said showed a provocative approach to the rights and sovereignty of countries.

## India

Riot police reinforcements were sent to the northern Indian city of Kanpur to quell a wave of communal violence. At least 15 people have died since clashes broke out in March between police and Muslims protesting against the alleged burning of a copy of the Koran by Hindu radicals. The Koran is reported to have been burnt in a protest in Delhi over the recent destruction of Buddhist statues by Afghanistan's Taliban Islamic movement. That was followed by violent protests by a Muslim group in Kanpur, the Student Islamic Movement of India.

## Indonesia

In the Kalimantan province on the island of Borneo, hundreds of Muslim Madurese have been killed and beheaded since February by indigenous Dayak tribesmen. More than 50,000 Madurese have fled or been evacuated from the province while many others are believed to be still hiding in the dense forests of the region.

## Japan

Shoko Asahara, the founder of the AUM Shinrikyo (Supreme Truth) movement which perpetrated the Sarin gas attack on a Tokyo subway in 1995 may have become mentally incapacitated, say his lawyers. If so ruled, this would mean Asahara would escape punishment for the multiple charges he faces in the subway attack in which 12 people died. Meanwhile, the town of Sanwa in the Ibaraki Prefecture had a rally of over 1,000 people insisting that the AUM Shinrikyo movement (renamed Aleph) leave town. The group continues to maintain a facility there despite the expiration of its lease at the end of February. AUM spokesman Hiroshi Araki responded to the mayor that it had apologized for "past incidents" and taken remedial steps.

## Pakistan

Over 35 people have been killed in sectarian violence that erupted in different parts of the country following the hanging of an activist of the extremist group, Sipah-e-Sahaba, on February 28 for murdering an Iranian diplomat 10 years ago. In response to this and other violence, the government has decided on a new law to ban the religious groups that engage in sectarian violence. It also directed provincial governments to strictly implement its orders to launch a crackdown on those who displayed weapons and made inflammatory speeches. Presided over by the military ruler Gen. Pervez Mushrraf, a joint meeting of the National Security Council and the federal cabinet took a serious note of spiraling sectarian violence between the extremist organizations from the majority Sunni and the minority Shia sects.

## Romania

Shortly after a visit from French anti-cult official Alain Vivien, Romania has reintroduced a restrictive religion law that favors the Orthodox Church, which now refers to itself as the "Romanian Orthodox Church – National Church." Minority religious groups are gearing up to protest the legislation which would require state registration of all religious organizations. It is virtually identical to the measure that was withdrawn a year ago after most religious groups except the Orthodox Church protested. The bill creates two principal categories of religious organizations. If passed, the law would automatically recognize 14 denominations. It would be all but impossible for a religious association or group other than the 14 to be recognized.

## Spain

On February 20, the Spanish Constitutional Court recognized the right of the Unification Church of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon to be officially recognized and registered as a religion. The court overturned two lower court judgments in making this finding. And English translation of the ruling can be found in the "what's new" section at [www.religiousfreedom.com](http://www.religiousfreedom.com).

## United States

The US Supreme Court has turned down a California high school valedictorian's argument that the school preventing him from giving a speech in which he planned to ask the audience to "accept God's love" and live by "Jesus' example" violated his civil rights. Chris Niemeyer had refused a request by his school to tone down the religious references in his speech.

## Vietnam

Although dissident cleric Father Tadeus Nguyen Van Ly had been banned from traveling to the US to give oral testimony to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, he did manage to submit written testimony in February. He urged the U.S. Congress not to ratify an historic bilateral trade pact because of rights abuses. He said Washington should not give support to Vietnam's communists to "prolong their totalitarian dictatorship." Ly had been under close police surveillance since his release from a ten year prison stay in 1992.

A 75 year old Buddhist woman committed suicide by publicly setting herself on fire in late March with the last words, "Religious freedom for Viet Nam!" Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thu, who was head of the women's association of the Hoa Hao Buddhist sect, made the ultimate political statement in front of several hundred Hoa Hao followers in Tan Hoi village in the Mekong Delta. The Hoa Hao sect has several million adherents in Viet Nam and is officially recognized by the communist regime albeit suspiciously due to the sect's armed opposition to communism during the Viet Nam war.

The self-immolation came shortly after the detention of the Hoa Hao sect leader Le Quang Liem, 82, his deputy, and several supporters. Liem's arrest came only two weeks after he joined three other religious leaders, two Buddhists and two Catholics, to form the Vietnam Interfaith Council to promote religious freedom. One of the four was Father Tadeus Nguyen Van Ly who was arrested earlier in March for urging the US Congress not to ratify a trade pact with Vietnam.

# Faith-Based Funding and Religious Freedom

By Alex Colvin

President George W. Bush's proposal for federal funding of faith-based programs has unleashed a whirlwind of discussion from across the political and religious spectrum. Organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State have argued that the legislation will violate separation of Church and State. Representatives of Catholic and Jewish organizations have questioned whether it is possible for the government to provide funds without "strings attached" that would result in interference in religious affairs.

Others have expressed concern about government funding of controversial alternative religions. For instance, Pat Robertson wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* article on March 13:

No matter that some may use brainwashing techniques, or that the founder of one claims to be the messiah and another that he was Buddha reincarnated. Under the proposed faith-based initiative, all must receive taxpayer funds if they provide 'effective' service to the poor. In my mind, this creates an intolerable situation.

In a recent interview on Fox News' *The O'Reilly Factor*, Steve Hassan, a prominent proponent of the "anti-cult" movement, said that initially he feared the initiative because it would provide funding for "cults." However, Hassan told O'Reilly, he has now come to believe that debate over faith-based funding provides an opportunity for the government to adopt guidelines for distinguishing between legitimate reli-

gions and dangerous ones. Writing to John Dilulio in the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Hassan says:

One of your most serious challenges will be to distinguish authentic faith-based organizations from fraudulent and destructive ones... It is precisely those who seek help from faith-based initiatives that are at greatest risk of being recruited into such groups... The good news is that it is possible to identify a destructive group based on its behaviors, and not beliefs.

The question of funding religious organizations raises several First Amendment concerns. One major issue concerns the Supreme Court's consistent assertion that government may not prefer one religion over another. Supporters and opponents of government funding for faith-based initiatives alike refer to this principle.

For example, in a debate on National Public Radio with Rev. Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Rev. Jerry Falwell stated that he supported the faith-based initiative and that all religions. He also said that he that religious organizations engaged in social ministry should not be barred from teaching their religious ideas, because that is what makes them effective. Rev. Lynn agreed that the faith engendered by the religious message makes church ministries effective. He was adamantly opposed, however, to the idea that the government should fund programs that propagate religious doctrine or result in conversion to a particular faith. As an alternative he proposed liberalizing tax

exemptions so that citizens would be encouraged and free to support those religious ministries.

Is it possible for the government to provide aid to churches for social work without passing regulations that will infringe on those groups? Will dependence on government funding have an effect on a church's organization or sense of mission? If churches come to view government grants as a source of funds for their ministries, how will competition for those funds affect the political and electoral process? These are some of the questions that are legislators will need to examine and that the courts may face as we seek the thread that leads through this labyrinth.

Moreover, fear of "cults" adds to the volatility of this mix. If government funding is provided to religious organizations, will legislators be able to resist pressure to define and classify religions as acceptable and unacceptable? Will administrators resist the efforts of self-appointed arbiters of faith who have been chomping at the bit to align themselves with government agencies?

Faith-based organizations are effective at solving problems. Their role is crucial. It is important that public officials are aware of the role of religious organizations and that our community organizations cooperate in ameliorating the quality of life in our communities. It may be that a formula can be found that provides public funding for faith-based organizations while ensuring religious liberty. Or it may be that the better solution lies in amending tax policy to increase private donations to faith-based ministries.

## Falun Gong

from page 1

The Falun Gong found fertile ground for rapid expansion among the myriad Qigong practitioners. It was only a matter of time before Li Hongzhi and his followers—with their emphasis on nonmaterial reality accompanied by teachings concerning the opening of the “third eye,” dangers of “demonic influences,” the promise of supernormal abilities, and the ability to heal diseases—would draw the attention and the ire of

Chinese authorities. Suspicion toward Falun Gong was magnified in 1998 when Li moved from China to New York. Directing the activities of his growing movement from the United States added the fuel of “foreign influence” to an already unwelcome mix of attributes.

Until two years ago, most people had never heard of Falun Gong. Early in 1999, as part of a

general crackdown on unapproved spiritual and religious groups, physicist He Zuoxiu wrote an article attacking the Falun Gong. He Zuoxiu is a science delegate to Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference that advises the Chinese legislature. He is also a crusader against supernatural and “unscientific” thinking. His article caused concern among Falun Gong practitioners and helped to prompt the protest rally by 10,000 Falun Gong members in Tiananmen Square in April 1999 that caught the government totally by surprise.

The campaign against Falun Gong began in earnest in July 1999 when the government outlawed the organization and began to arrest its leadership. In October 1999, the national legislature passed a law enabling authorities to sentence members of “evil cults” to up to seven years in prison. Thus, Falun Gong leaders were tried under a law that was passed after they were arrested.

In the past two years, hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong members have been arrested and 10,000 or more have been sentenced to labor camps and reeducation centers. According to the Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Hong Kong, 62 Falun Gong members had died in custody through November of last year. Three hundred or more have been sentenced to 18 or more years in prison.

Yet despite the heavy hand of repression, Falun Gong has not only survived, but has continued to carry on demonstrations against the government. On October 1, 2000, they embarrassed the government by holding a rally interrupting the 51st anniversary celebration of the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China. Moreover, the movement has been gaining a wide support among expatriate Chinese throughout the world.

The persecution of the Falun Gong has caught the attention of the human rights community. In January, newly appointed Secretary of State Colin Powell raised the issue of Falun Gong in his meeting with outgoing Chinese Ambassador Li Zhao Xing. In February, the Bush administration announced its decision to ask the UN Commission on Human Rights to censure China. During the same month Dutch Foreign Minister, Jozias Van Aartsen, can-

celled a trip to China because the Chinese government would not allow a planned meeting with Falun Gong members to take place in Hong Kong during the minister’s visit.

The clash between Chinese authorities and Falun Gong continues to intensify. The Chinese government has sought to use the self-immolation of several apparent Falun Gong members to incite popular feeling against the group. Falun Gong leaders maintain that suicide is unacceptable and that the victims were therefore not real members. Anti-Falun Gong scientist He Zuoxiu recently accused the US Congress of funding the Falun Gong in an attempt to undermine the government of China.

Intensifying the persecution has strengthened the resolve of Li Hongzhi and his followers. Li has taught that practitioners of Falun Gong must expect tribulations as a test of one’s faith and discipline. Last November, Li released a speech in which he instructed members that they may abandon “forbearance” in their opposition to government persecution. The attitude of Falun Gong members has changed over the past two years. Originally, they wished only to be left alone to practice their chosen path. Increasingly they see the Chinese government as an enemy possessed by evil forces.

Where will these dynamics of polarization and confrontation lead? It is hard to tell. In the campaign that the Chinese government is fighting against unregulated religions, “Falun Gong” has become China’s obsession and the focal point of international attention. China’s leaders may have opened a can of worms that reveals their Achilles heel.

***“Movements that present such [spiritual] teachings are a direct threat to the power of the Communist party because they strike at the very heart of the party’s justification for existence.”***



**International Coalition for  
Religious Freedom**  
7777 Leesburg Pike, Suite 309N  
Falls Church, VA 22043

## America's Heritage

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be substantial, serious government abuses occur. To name only a few:

- France will soon pass repressive legislation to liquidate "cults"
- Germany officially treats Scientologists as untouchables
- Several countries have created a state system that discriminates against small or new religions

- Some European governments humiliate Muslim schoolgirls by forcing them to remove their headscarves in public schools
- and Rev. and Mrs. Moon are banned from entering Europe through the actions of Germany and France under the Schengen Treaty.

So the US gets an A- for practicing what it preaches—and this is indeed the most essential part of

leadership. But it gets only a C in terms of directly influencing other nations. It remains to be seen whether the new administration will do better or worse than its predecessor in promoting religious freedom abroad. In any case I hope we will all increase our awareness of religious freedom and work to encourage our government to support it vigorously both at home and abroad.

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