

Letter From Alabama

by Michael Hill

Lessons from Montgomery



At 11:30 A.M. (CST) on Thursday, November 13, 2003, Roy Moore, chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court, was removed from office, and the will of the people of the sovereign state of Alabama was thwarted by a unanimous vote of the nine-member panel of the Court of Judicial Ethics. In deciding *Glassroth v. Moore*, the panel charged Moore with violating the canons of judicial ethics by willfully and publicly defying a federal court order to remove his Ten Commandments monument from the rotunda of the Alabama Judicial Building. Alabama Attorney General Bill Pryor, a Bush nominee for a federal judgeship on the 11th Circuit Court, served as chief prosecutor against Moore.

The proceedings of November 13 have their immediate roots in Moore's refusal to obey the federal court order of Judge Myron Thompson issued in August 2003. Thompson ruled that the monument violated the constitutional provision of the separation of Church and state. Thompson gave Moore until 5:00 P.M. on Wednesday, August 20, to remove the monument. Moore refused, noting that the issue in question was not the Ten Commandments themselves but whether the state of Alabama, representing her citizens, could acknowledge God. Who rules Alabama, the people of the state or the federal courts?

The League of the South was one of several organizations to hold a rally in Montgomery on the deadline day in support of Judge Moore. When our rally ended about 4:30 P.M., I joined some 75 other League members, Alabama and Confederate flags in hand, who were making their way from the steps of the State Capitol in Montgomery down Dexter Avenue to the Judicial Building. The mid-August heat and humidity in central Alabama were oppressive. Rumors were flying that Judge Thompson had ordered federal marshals to remove the 5,300-pound monument shortly after the 5:00

P.M. deadline, and we planned to do what we could to prevent such an attempt.

When League of the South members reached the Judicial Building near the deadline for the monument's removal, all of us were dressed quite plainly, most in our standard red shirts and casual slacks or jeans, like men who expected to get their hands dirty with some important work. We did not seek out the media for interviews. We were not there for photo ops. We were there to support Judge Moore and, if necessary, to block anyone from moving the monument.

By contrast, the professional conservative and Christian leaders were dressed to the nines and were energetically grabbing the nearest microphone and preening for the closest camera. One of these men approached us as we ascended the steps and asked us to have "our people" put away their Alabama and Confederate flags and placards because they might "muddy the message." What he meant was that the conservative Christian leaders did not want their fundraising photos marred by any Southern symbols. Nor did they wish to contend with our states' rights argument. In fact, they seemed to prefer quoting Martin Luther King, Jr., to Thomas Jefferson or John C. Calhoun. One "Christian" from faraway Ohio berated us for having a "Klan flag," which actually was the Alabama State Flag (a red St. Andrew's cross on a white field). I suppose he is the fruit of public education.

We refused to comply and were later told by the director of the Christian Defense Coalition, the Rev. Patrick Mahoney (a New Jersey native who has, in the past, allied himself with some suspicious characters on the left), that, because his group had a demonstration permit for the area in front of the Judicial Building, he would have the Montgomery Police Department clear us out if we did not obey his *diktat*. Undeterred, our folks stayed on with flags flying, and the threat against us was never carried out. We left a couple of hours later when one of Judge Moore's legal advisors (a League member) informed us that the feds were not going to try to move the monument that day.

These leaders revealed to us that they had already negotiated with state law-enforcement authorities the terms under

which about two dozen of their "little people" would be arrested and released. I suppose they thought this would impress us, but it did not. It did, however, point out two important things: First, such orchestrated "opposition" was, indeed, a photo op for future fundraising efforts; second, none of the leaders themselves would be arrested. They were "fighting for Jesus on the cheap," as one of my fellow League members put it. These men were not in Montgomery to risk their lives for principle. They were there to grab a microphone and to have others arrested for the well-being and preservation of their professional organizations. Unfortunately, many of these professional folks from outside Alabama (and the South) have wormed their way into Judge Moore's camp. They will not be around very long, however, because they simply do not understand the wide chasm between the American nationalism they champion and the states'-rights issue for which Judge Moore stands.

Alabamians have once again been betrayed by both outsiders and their own elected officials, especially the GOP establishment. Though the press has refused to report it, Karl Rove—and, thus, the Bush White House—has consistently supported those who have opposed Judge Moore, especially Alabama Attorney General Bill Pryor and Moore's 2000 Republican primary opponent for chief justice, Harold See. It is not a stretch to say that much of the campaign against Judge Moore has come directly from the White House. Also, Republican Gov. Bob Riley has consistently refused to stand by Judge Moore during the Ten Commandments controversy. Similarly, Attorney General Pryor and the eight Alabama Supreme Court associate justices abandoned Moore and entered into negotiations with the federal leviathan, Judge Thompson, to keep the state from incurring fines and other punishment for violating a court order.

From August 20 until Moore was removed from office, the elected officials of the sovereign state of Alabama had a rare opportunity to show some pluck and grit. They blew it. Here is what our craven civil magistrates might have said in defense of the people of Alabama: "Tell the federal judge to go to Hell. Alabama is a sovereign state, and federal edicts of this sort

have no force within our borders. We understand the Principles of '98—nullification and interposition—and we shall invoke them. The state will pay not one penny in tribute. We shall call out the state troopers, the Alabama State Guard, and the state militia. We shall withhold all tax revenues from the IRS and remove all federal flags from state property (which ought to be done as a matter of course anyhow). And, finally, we shall tell the *federal tyrants that they are welcome to come and to try to take Judge Moore and the monument. We will be waiting for them at the state line.*" (Well, it did make a good daydream.)

Our public officials are much too timid and housebroken to pursue this or any other principled plan of action. Unfortunately, the good people of Alabama cannot recall them from office. But they have shamed those officials (if that is possible) and pestered them incessantly with phone calls, e-mails, and faxes, and the people down here are counting the days until the next election. Moreover, many radio talk-show hosts and their guests and callers are beginning to have some serious discussions about the Principles of '98, states' rights, the Tenth Amendment, and even secession. And before the month of November is out, God willing, there will be some big news coming out of Roy Moore's camp.

The crown of victory will never grace the brows of hypocrites and compromisers. Paleoconservative traditionalists should never again waste their time and energy in any cause espoused by this gaggle of national "conservative Christian" leaders and mainstream politicians. They are either grandstanders or time-serving hacks who never really intend to accomplish anything of value. The perpetuation of their power and position is their real goal. They will do nothing to oppose the unconstitutional American Empire because they are its biggest cheerleaders. *It is not God they turn to to save America, but George W. Bush.* Their only effect is to siphon off the attention, energy, and money of the grassroots and deceive them into thinking that something worthwhile is being accomplished. The best thing real conservatives can do is to cut loose from these people altogether and to take their misled rank-and-file with us. They can and must be made to see that their leaders are the dead past and that we are the future of any true conservative movement on these shores.

Old wineskins cannot hold new wine.

By God's grace, we are the new wine. All those old wineskins used by the professional "conservative Christian" leaders—the Pledge-of-Allegiance, hypernationalistic, God-Bless-America, Old-Glory-Waving, John-Ashcroft-loving, let's-bomb-the-bastards-back-into-the-stone-age, neocon-enabling superpatriots with their mass rallies; their safe, guaranteed-before-hand-to-be-ineffectual-and-riskless protests; their nonconfrontational "confrontations"; their slick and respectable professionalism; and their feckless gestures of serving principle—we must discard forever. Instead, we must fight as the outnumbered have always fought: by leveraging our limited strength on the margin. We must fight for clearly defined goals and principles, not ill-defined and misleading generalities borrowed from the French Revolution; and, even if we lose, we win by having fought.

Roy Moore has given us a focal point in Alabama, and it is the issue of states' rights *versus* the tyranny of the federal courts. As *Chronicles* has rightly pointed out, conservatism as a movement has been kidnapped and pierced through the heart by a new class of leaders who seek respectability rather than a real fight with the left. If a stand is to be made in defense of the principles and traditions of the old American republic and of Western Christian civilization itself, it will have to be made by the sort of folks who read *Chronicles* and who join such organizations as the League of the South.

Michael Hill is the president of the League of the South.

Letter From St. Petersburg

by Curtis Cate

Monumental in Everything



I have before me, as I write these lines, a handsome white envelope, marked in pale-blue characters with the six-pronged, anchor-fish-hook-crown emblem of this once imperial and still maritime city, which was offered to me by a friend as I was leaving St. Petersburg. Inside, against an elegant dark-blue background illuminated by six colored pictures of various

city landmarks and the dates 1703 and 2003, I was informed that this was a *pamyatnoye svidyetelstvo*—a "commemorative testimonial," thanking me for having sojourned in the city during the "year of its 300-year-old jubilee." Today, I cannot contemplate this touching testimonial without an ironic smile—given the extraordinary difficulties I encountered in visiting Russia as a self-reliant individual rather than as a docile member of a tourist group.

Incredible as it may sound more than a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, no foreigner can visit Russia today without being formally invited by some specific institution or accredited tourist agency. In October 2002, I rashly thought I had solved this problem when I volunteered to join a group of Parisians whom a Russian guitarist was recruiting to accompany him to St. Petersburg in mid-February, when the temperature often drops to 20 or 25 degrees (centigrade) below zero. A couple of weeks later, however, the cold-footed "group" disintegrated, and I was left to fend for myself. In despair, I appealed to a Swedish friend, the widow of a Russian merchant-marine captain, who had left her native Stockholm to study Russian at the Alexander Herzen University in St. Petersburg. Yes, she could arrange the tourist invitation and have me occupy an empty bedroom in an apartment inhabited by a Swedish schoolfriend.

The apartment my benefactress had found for me was located on the Zagorodny (literally, "suburban") Prospekt—a long, nondescript avenue leading in a southwesterly direction from the Vladimir Mother of God Icon Church, whose golden domes Fyodor Dostoyevsky could almost see from his nearby corner-house apartment, past Russia's oldest railway station, the Vityebsky Vokzal, to the massive redbrick building that now houses the city's Technical Institute. A "*prospekt*" (there are about a dozen of them in St. Petersburg) was the optimistic word that Peter the Great and his imperial successors coined for a series of long, broad avenues, which were supposed to offer their *telega-, droshky-, or calash-borne* inhabitants a splendid view—if not of the Neva estuary, which surrounds central St. Petersburg on three sides, at least of the once-wooded hinterland east and south of the city.

The proximity of my humble lodgings to the Kuznetskaya *ulitsa* (the Street of Blacksmiths), where Dostoyevsky spent