
Youth Truth



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Brother Roloff's Traveling Salvation Show

Lisa Freeman

The Rebekah Home for Girls sits vacant and silent on the 600-acre compound of the People's Baptist Church south of Corpus Christi, Texas. Pastor Wiley Cameron makes sure the home is kept in good repair. A new law to restore the home's accreditation could be enacted at any time. Rebekah had been driven from the state before, and had ultimately returned. It could happen again. So the beds remain in the dormitory, the house painted and maintained, always ready to receive a new batch of wayward girls and save their souls—by any means.

The Rebekah Home wasn't *forced* to close in 2001. When Governor George W. Bush's faith-based accreditation scheme was allowed to expire by the Texas legislature, the home was again required to be licensed by the state—a requirement accepted by more than 2000 church-based or religious child care agencies in Texas. But to be licensed, Rebekah would have had to start respecting inmates' religious beliefs and let them read books other than the Bible, stop using restraint, isolation, and ridicule to discipline kids, and curtail its extreme practices of corporal punishment.

Unwilling to comply, the Rebekah Home made its new home in Missouri, a state with even fewer regulations than Texas. Missouri has become the state of choice for many of the most punitive private or religious youth reformatories in the nation. Coincidentally, the corporate office of Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions (AS FAR), whose 'zine you are now reading, is also in Missouri.

Rebekah's founder, Lester Leo Roloff and four members of his choir died on November 2, 1982, when he crashed his single-engine Cessna plane on the way to a gospel meeting. Roloff, known as "Brother Roloff" to his followers, had been battling the state of Texas since 1971; the battle continues to this day, 20 years after his death.

Lester Roloff, born in 1914, was an evangelist who held tent meetings and drove around Texas in his "gospel van" equipped with loudspeakers. In 1944 his "Family Altar" radio show was first broadcast (it remains on the air to this day, carried by over 100 stations). In 1954, when some local residents complained about the volume of the gospel van and the tent meetings, Roloff accused them of being communists. For controversial remarks such as this, Roloff's radio show was cancelled, but his popularity continued to grow. The first "Roloff Home", a rescue mission for alcoholic men in Corpus Christi, opened that year.

With "love gifts" from followers, Roloff Evangelistic Enterprises bought the radio station that had cancelled his radio show and resumed broadcasting. In the mid-1950s Roloff acquired land in Georgia as well as Texas, establishing new rescue missions and rehabilitation centers for alcohol and drug abusers. In 1958 he bought his own small plane.

In 1968 Roloff helped two followers open a home for unwed mothers and delinquent girls; it was soon filled to capacity. A year later Roloff purchased a 600-acre parcel to accommodate his "City of Refuge", including the Bethesda Home for pregnant teens and the Rebekah Home, for girls from "jail houses, broken homes, hippie hives, and dope dives". A second Rebekah Home was soon opened in Mississippi.

In response to charges of neglect and brutality against the homes, the Texas Department of Public Welfare notified Roloff in 1971 that his youth facilities had to be licensed by the state. In 1973, reports of children being beaten with leather straps and wooden paddles, handcuffed to drain pipes, or locked in isolation for days were investigated by the state's Attorney General. Roloff did not deny his use

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Buzz

What the Heck, Sign It Anyway

An online petition opposing mandatory school uniforms can be seen—and signed—at <http://www.petitiononline.com/7767/petition.html>. The page for signing the petition, however, restricts “eligible signatories” to “citizens over the age of 13”. Oh, well, as age restrictions go, we’ve seen far worse.

Redirect

Bill Ellis of A Coalition for Self-Learning informs us that Paolo Friere’s classic *Deschooling Society* can be read online at <http://philosophy.la.psu.edu/illich/deschool/intro.html>. Readers are also welcome to check out the Coalition’s own book, *Guidebook and Directory of Consultants for Creating Learning Communities*, which is online at their web site at <http://www.CreatingLearningCommunities.org>.

An article in the November 2002 issue of *Reason* explains how the prevention program DARE manages to keep going and going, even in the face of all the evidence of its ineffectiveness; the article appears at <http://www.reason.com/0211/ci.js.constant.shtml>.

In its December issue, *The Atlantic Monthly* discusses the failure of privately-run “kid-fixing” facilities to help youth—or even to make money off them. The article is online at <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2002/12/press.htm>.

Author Mike Males has been traveling. In the November 2002 issue of *Youth Today*, he compares the youth experience in our “land of the free” with that of kids in other countries and gives his thoughts on the comparison; see <http://www.youthtoday.org/youthtoday/males.html>.

News Links

Pushy Parents Hurt Kids’ College Chances

College admission officials admit in http://www.boston.com/dailyglobe2/324/nation/Fending_off_the_parents+.shtml that they have sometimes rejected students’ applications because of aggressive tactics by overbearing parents.

Georgia, Ohio “Monkey Trials” End In Ties

On September 26 the Cobb County, Georgia Board of Education approved its new policy allowing teachers to “introduce students to different views about the origins of life”, but according to <http://www.cnn.com/2002/EDUCATION/09/26/creationism.evolution/>, the policy will in no way stop or restrict the teaching of evolution in Cobb County schools. And in Ohio, according to <http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=08evolution.h22&keywords=evolution>, supporters and opponents of “creationism” or “intelligent design” reached a compromise on October 14 that seemed to satisfy both sides.

Which Is Worse, the Smoking or the Shoplifting?

In 1997 Texas enacted strict laws against selling cigarettes to minors, with severe penalties for retailers who violated the law. On October 10 a CDC study reported that while the purchase of cigarettes by Texas youths dropped dramatically in the year after the new laws took effect, the number of minors who *stole* cigarettes jumped more than 48%, according to the item at <http://ca.news.yahoo.com/021010/5/pi0j.html>.

Philly Students Sue Schools

Philadelphia students who have brushes with the law now find that they can’t go back to their regular classes. Pennsylvania’s Act 88, passed July 1, mandates that students found guilty of a crime be transferred to special classes for disruptive students—but only in Philadelphia schools. Although Act 88 is a state law, it applies *only* to students in that one city. Their lawsuit, filed September 25 and described at <http://www.jlc.org/home/JLC@Work/litigation/act88pressrls.html>, sounds like a no-brainer.

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Looking at numbers.

A news story came my way on the ASFAR discussion listserv about a tragic car crash in Nevada and a law being proposed because of it. The law is a graduated licensing system (GDL) for the state, and it was introduced to the state senate by a legislator named Barbara Cegavske on behalf of a young accident victim left disabled by the crash. Two other victims, ages 16 and 17, were killed after the vehicle “spun out of control” and “slammed into a light pole”.

I found the article online at http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2002/Nov-17-Sun-2002/news/20079978.html. The GDL being considered in Nevada would ban drivers under the age of 18 from driving “after curfew” or transporting passengers under the age of 21 (except family members) during the first year they hold a driver’s license.

The ASFAR member who posted the story to the discussion pointed out a small fact buried near the end of the news item: the 16-year-old driver of the car had no license at all—not even a learner’s permit. This accident, he commented, wouldn’t have been prevented by this new law or any other licensing system they might devise. Good point.

Here’s another thought: doesn’t a curfew already prohibit the people it applies to from driving during those hours? If there’s a curfew, is another law needed to specify “no driving”?

But the item includes some statistics that deserve a second look. The article claims that Michigan’s 1997 graduated licensing law

... brought about a 25 percent decline in crashes involving 16-year-old drivers. It’s even more impressive when you consider that car crashes are the leading cause of death for teens. Between 1975 and 1996 the death rate for 16-year-old drivers rose 50 percent. In Nevada, the numbers are just as grim. Teenage drivers comprise 7 percent of all motorists, but are involved in 15 percent of the state’s fatal accidents.

Such statistics are tossed off all the time by reporters. Do they really mean what they seem to mean? what do they leave out?

Perhaps there *was* a 25% decline in crashes in Michigan for 16-year-old after 1997. How long did it take for the decline to occur? Were crashes down in 1998, but up again in 1999? Have they stayed down consistently for years? Have crashes for other age groups also declined? if so, maybe the drop in accidents for 16-year-old drivers was part of a larger trend, caused by a factor or factors unrelated to any new law that was passed.

Perspective

Susan Wishnetsky
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Car crashes the leading cause of death for teens? What *are* teens—people aged 13-19? Maybe *one* of those ages accounts for more deaths than others; maybe it’s the 19-year-olds. Are the teens mentioned here necessarily the drivers in these crashes, or might they be passengers in their parents’ cars?

The death rate for 16-year-old drivers rose 50% over more than 20 years? What happened to the death rate for other drivers in those years? A lot can happen in a 20-year period. And that round number of “50 percent” makes me pretty suspicious.

Teen drivers are 7% of all motorists, but 15% of crash victims? Does the count of “teenage drivers” include unlicensed ones, like the one who was driving in the fatal crash described in the article? She may not have been included in the count of teen drivers, but I bet she was counted as one of the fatalities.

I tried to check the statistics myself using the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) database at <http://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov>. It was pretty complicated, but I managed to submit a query. I wasn’t quite sure how to enter the query, or what their terminology meant, but I ended up with two charts—one for 1997, one for 2000—of vehicle crashes in Michigan by age. (Age of driver? Age of any involved? I’m not sure.) According to my charts, the number of crashes listed for 16-year-olds *did* decline between these two years, but only by 14.25%, not 25%. Meanwhile, the number of crashes for 17-year-olds rose 28.5% between those four years. The 18-year-olds, which had the highest number of crashes of any age group in both years, showed an increase in crashes of 4.5%.

But looking through my charts, I found fluctuations for *every* age, sometimes big ones. My own age group, 44-year-olds, showed a 53.3% increase in Michigan vehicle crashes from 1997 to 2000. What can we say is responsible for that increase? What law shall we pass in response?

There are a couple of books that explain how statistics are misused to support individual or group agendas: Darrell Huff’s 1954 classic *How to Lie with Statistics*, and the 2001 book *Damned Lies and Statistics* by Joel Best. I recommend both.

When you see statistics, think about them. Question them. Especially if you live in Nevada.

Dong, Claxton. *Save our star #1 : Luke*. Corona, Calif. : Brown Swan Publishers, 2002.

Time travel in literature is a device which can be used to expose the stupidity, wrongheadedness, or injustices of our present-day society. It can compare our world with future utopias, or show us the horrors our descendents may face if we don't change our ways.

In the first novel of the *Save Our Star* series, time travel is used to focus on discrimination against young people in our 21st century world, a worthy focus and one which should attract young readers who are the victims of that discrimination.

The hero of the story is twelve-year-old Luke, a very ordinary kid in the year 2201. He's recently been promoted to the marketing department of a food company. He plays "virtual-D" games and "trampoline tennis" in his free time. His prize possession is his fabulous car, which he loves to drive; he'd saved up for a year to buy it. He still lives with his parents, although he doesn't have to—in the 23rd century, "dorm rooms" are available for people of any age or income level.

Although life on earth in 2201 seems quite settled and peaceful, danger lurks for the earth and all who inhabit it. Within five years the entire solar system will begin to experience the effects of an approaching black hole. Scientists of the time realize that they cannot solve this problem in the few years remaining; their only hope is to send people back in time. A research station is set up 100 years in the past, but the "wormhole" for time travel can only accommodate small people, so the youngest citizens are recruited for the program.

Uncertain of his commitment to a career in marketing foods, and craving adventure, Luke volunteers for a six-month stint in the program. His adventure turns out to be more than he bargains for: he lands on a sidewalk in Montclair, California in the year 2001. He's gone too far back in time. There's no research station, no free dorms, and no way to get back. He's a kid stuck in a world where kids aren't allowed to be on their own.

Luke has some pretty terrific luck. Mostly by chance, he stays out of the hands of cops and social workers and manages to get through the whole story without ever resorting to crime. He even uncovers information related to his mission, and at the end of the book, he is still "on the job", trying to push a promising scientist in the right direction toward solving the black hole problem.

As a main character, Luke is no superhero or paragon of virtue. He's resourceful and hardworking, introspective and ethical, but also rather judgmental. In his own time, as he meets the other volunteers for the time travel program, he finds them all less worthy than himself. In one case, his judgment is made without even talking to the volunteer, who looked as if she "couldn't have been more than eight"; on the basis of her looks, Luke doubts her "experience and knowledge"—showing that even in 2201, ageism hasn't been completely wiped out.

For an adventure story, *Luke* offers little in the way of action and suspense. Throughout much of the book, Luke engages in such mundane activities as bussing tables and washing dishes at a restaurant, attending classes at school, playing video games, and searching the internet at a library. The most suspenseful moment comes when Luke, after sneaking into a private laboratory, must dive under a desk to avoid being spotted there.

News Links

School to Control Social Interaction

The rules of East Providence, Rhode Island public schools now prohibit "teasing, name-calling and harmful gossip" as well as "humiliation, shunning, and exclusion". According to http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=6058489&BRD=1713&PAG=461&dept_id=24491&rfti=6, repeated violations could lead to expulsion. The ACLU has sent the school system a letter expressing its free speech concerns.

Mississippi Mall Angers All

The business at the Metrocenter Mall in Jackson, Mississippi has been badly hurt by their new policy requiring people under 18 to be accompanied by a parent or guardian after 3 pm on Fridays and Saturdays. The article at http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/cover_comments.php?id=354_0_9_0_C reports that the mall is often deserted, even at days and times not covered by the "curfew", and that parents as well as kids have been inconvenienced.

Sue's Review

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As a utopian fantasy, the story also falls somewhat short, leaving many questions unanswered. Luke tells us that kids in the 23rd century are paid for going to school—only kids, or *anyone* who takes classes? Are classes age-segregated as they are in our day, or do students of all ages attend the same classes? How do schools pay students for attending, teachers and other staff for working, and still afford to operate? Who pays for it? Are all schools government-run, even colleges? It's clear that students are paid different wages for different classes; apparently the lowest paid classes are those which are most popular (a sort of supply-and-demand system) or perhaps also those deemed to be of the least benefit to society. This is an odd idea to me, since I consider education of benefit not just to society, but to the individual (or at least, it can and should be), and I wonder if this future society has rejected that notion.

Luke points out the freedom and respect kids enjoy in his time, but doesn't address many nuts-and-bolts questions. Children do have parents in Luke's future—are kids born with full rights of citizenship, or must they request their rights, from some agency? Do children ever refuse to bathe or sleep or eat right, and if so, what do parents do about it? (And if not, how'd they manage that—genetic engineering?) If a dependent child commits a crime, are they held responsible for it just as an adult would be? Do they build houses and stores and furniture that can be comfortably used by even the smallest people? Is it okay, in Luke's time, to fall in love, marry, have kids of one's own—at any age?

There is no discussion of the governance or world order of this 23rd century. Have all the nations united? Do they still have armed forces, or have wars ceased? Luke mentions that his studies for his marketing career included "culture studies" and foreign languages, so the entire world cannot have embraced universal sameness. Do conflicts arise from the differences? How are the conflicts resolved?

Supreme Court 5-4 for Executing Juvenile Criminals

Breyer, Ginsburg, Souter and Stevens wanted to hear the appeal of Kevin Nigel Stanford, sentenced to death for a murder he committed at the age of 17. But the majority of the court voted on October 21 not to accept the case for consideration. The story at <<http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/deathpenalty/docs/update1023.htm>> states that, while executions of juvenile offenders do occur in some nations, the U.S. is now the *only* country in the world that doesn't officially repudiate the practice.

Luke doesn't say. Like present-day Americans, Luke is just happy with his job, his security, and his car, and seems concerned with little else. Even the imminent danger which threatens to destroy the planet, the black hole, seems to be taken pretty lightly by all the characters, many of them looking upon it as an exciting opportunity for time-travel, public service, or heroism.

More details about Luke's society aren't needed to follow the story, but they'd give readers a fuller and more vivid picture of the world Luke left behind. Perhaps more of this will emerge in future volumes of the series. The book is no literary masterpiece, but the story did hold my interest. It certainly raised plenty of questions in my mind, and made me think. If only for that, it's worth the cover price.

If other young readers are anything like I used to be, they'll come away from this book remembering the ideas contained in it, if nothing else. The book tells young people that their resentment at their treatment is justified. It recognizes the injustice of judging and restricting people solely on the basis of their age. It contains the seed of hope that the frustration, boredom, and outrage which accompany the process of "growing up" may someday be eliminated. What a holiday present for a kid who thinks no one else shares these beliefs!

Save Our Star #1 : Luke is available from Brown Swan Publishers, 760 Redriver Way, Corona, California, 92882 for \$5.99 a copy. For U.S. customers, shipping is \$2.00 for the first copy and \$0.25 for additional copies. To order fast, visit the book's web site at <www.SaveOurStar.com>.

News Links

Appeals Court to Consider Video Game Law

The St. Louis ordinance barring minors from buying or playing video games deemed "violent" without parental consent was upheld by a District Court judge in April; its enforcement is on hold pending its appeal, which will soon be heard by the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals. Two articles on the case appear at <<http://www.jsonline.com/bym/tech/news/oct02/85808.asp>> and <<http://www.amusezine.com/news/news0911.php>>.

News Links

Young Adults Still Not Voting

Despite years of “Rock the Vote” appeals, the turnout of 18- to 24-year-olds at the polls for the 2000 presidential election was only 28.7%; in the 1998 off-year election, only 12.1% of this age group voted. The article at <http://www.dailyrecord.com/news/02/10/13/news1-vote.htm> mentions that the British are also alarmed at the apathy of *their* young voters (even though the turnout there is somewhat higher than in the U.S.), and a British study recently recommended lowering the voting age to 16 and allowing 18-year-olds to run for seats in Parliament, to “stimulate interest among young people.”

Athletes Must “Volunteer” for Research Study

The Oregon Court of Appeals ruled on October 23 that students in 14 Oregon school districts must participate in a university study of drug use in order to take part in extracurricular sports, according to http://www.oregonlive.com/news/oregonian/index.ssf?/xml/story.ssf/html_standard.xml?/base/news/1035460671113622.xml. The study involves no disciplinary action against athletes who test positive, but some students’ families have filed suit against the schools, on the grounds that coercing students to participate in a research study is a violation of ethical standards for research.

Parody Confused With Pornography

Matthew Schooler, a 13-year-old Missouri student trying to research the White House in his school library, accidentally connected to the parody site at www.whitehouse.org. When Matthew showed the site to classmates, a nearby teacher judged that the site must be pornographic; now, according to <http://www.thekansascitychannel.com/news/1735968/detail.html>, Matthew’s banned from school computers for the rest of the year.

Snohomish Schools to Be Sniffed

Snohomish County, Washington schools have hired a private canine service to bring in drug-sniffing dogs, according to http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/text/134550843_drugdogs09n.html. The dogs will not come in contact with students—all classrooms will be “locked down” whenever the dogs arrive for their unannounced searches of lockers and hallways.

School Desegregation Challenged in Berkeley

Like the schools in Lynn, Massachusetts described in the Sept./Oct. issue of *Youth Truth*, schools in Berkeley, California are now facing a legal challenge to their racial desegregation system, reports an article at <http://www.berkeleydaily.org/text/article.cfm?issue=11-08-02&storyID=15975>. The schools will try to come up with a new plan that will maintain diversity without using race as a factor in school assignment.

Supreme Court to Review CIPA, Megan’s Laws

Federal judges found the Children’s Internet Protection Act of 2000 unconstitutional in May, but the Bush administration isn’t ready to give up yet; on November 12 the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the case. Two articles appear at http://abcnews.go.com/wire/Politics/reuters20021112_593.html and <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2002/11/13/MN50363.DTL>. The court also agreed to hear challenges to two states’ versions of “Megan’s Law”, which establish public registries or other public identification of people convicted of sex offenses even after their sentence is served; some discussion of this issue appears at <http://www.knoxstudio.com/shns/story.cfm?pk=MEGANSLAW-11-08-02&cat=WW> or <http://www.thejournalnet.com/Main.asp?SectionID=1&SubSectionID=113&ArticleID=32540>.

Edison May Drop Off NASDAQ

A report at <http://www.workingforchange.com/article.cfm?ItemID=14103> mentions that the Edison charter school chain will be removed from the NASDAQ stock exchange listing if its stock price doesn’t exceed \$1 per share by the end of November.

Tennessee Town Considering Curfew

The town council of Pennington Gap will hold a public hearing December 16 to discuss a proposed curfew, according to http://www.timesnews.net/article.dna?_StoryID=3141006. The curfew would ban kids under 16 from public places after 10 pm; for 16- and 17-year-olds, the curfew would start at midnight.

Schools Fear They’ll Fail Federal Exams

Two items at <http://www.kgwn.tv/schools/headlines/150867.html> (from Wyoming) and http://www.thehollandsentinel.net/stories/111902/loc_111902018.shtml (from Michigan) indicate that some schools are starting to worry that they won’t measure up to the demands of the “No Child Left Behind” act.

Stillwater Students’ Samples Held by School

On November 19, trusting Oklahoma parents lined up their kids in their school cafeteria to get their mouths swabbed for DNA samples, as local Police Sgt John Schetting brushed off privacy concerns. According to <http://www.njherald.com/news/newspro/viewnews.cgi?newsid1037804875,63452>, the samples are collected to help identify kids who have disappeared or been injured. The system is endorsed by John Walsh of the TV show “America’s Most Wanted”. The school will store each child’s sample as long as they’re enrolled in the district, after which the samples will be turned over to the student or the parents.

No Warrant Needed in Dartmouth Dorms

The New Hampshire Supreme Court recently ruled: not only may campus police enter and search on-campus dorm rooms without warrants, but any confiscated evidence handed over to police *may* be used in criminal prosecution; see <http://www.thedartmouth.com/article.php?aid=200211080103>.

Brother Roloff

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of harsh discipline in the youth homes. “We whip ‘em with love and we weep with them and they love us for it,” he declared. “Better a pink bottom than a black soul.” But at Roloff’s homes, the bottoms were often black and blue, or bloody, or covered with welts.

Some homes were closed temporarily following the investigations, but Roloff never submitted to the state’s licensing requirements. In 1974 the Texas Supreme Court ruled in Roloff’s favor, allowing the homes to continue to operate, but in 1975, the state legislature countered with the Texas Child Care and Licensing Act, which took effect in 1976. Roloff was jailed twice for failing to comply. The homes were again temporarily closed, but allowed to reopen as Roloff filed appeals. On October 2, 1978 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Child Care and Licensing Act, and the state again demanded that the homes be licensed by June 1979. With the deadline approaching, Roloff called upon his followers to join him in massive protest rallies; hundreds of the faithful encircled the complex, arms linked together, to prevent state officials from entering.

Then Roloff and his lawyers came up with an even better stalling tactic. The residents of the Texas homes were bussed to other Roloff homes in Georgia and Mississippi, and the homes were shut down before the June deadline. The ownership of the property was transferred from Roloff Evangelistic Enterprises to the People’s Church. When the homes were reopened in September 1979, the state had to start its case all over again with the new owners.

Court battles and appeals continued over the years. Residents continued to be tortured and brainwashed, hidden inside the Roloff homes, with only more punishment to answer their cries. Former inmates of Rebekah describe being forced to assume a sitting position against a wall without a chair, or a kneeling position, with a Bible on each outstretched palm, for hours. In the isolation room, where a speaker constantly played Brother Roloff’s sermons, girls at Rebekah were confined for weeks, not permitted to bathe or exercise. Inmates were forced to write testimonials for the home; some refused to criticize the home for years after leaving, still unable to believe that they were safely away from it.

The homes continued to fight the state until the end of 1985, even after Brother Roloff’s death. On New Year’s Eve of that year, Wiley Cameron, Roloff’s successor, loaded the

teenagers onto buses to new homes in Missouri. Two years later, when the Kansas City Times reported on physical abuse at the Rebekah and Anchor homes, Cameron reportedly sent the teens to homes in Montana and Louisiana. Then he returned to Texas, awaiting an opportunity to reopen the homes there, free from state intervention. “To take a license is to admit that there’s someone above God”, he insisted.

In 1995, Governor George W. Bush created a task force to explore ways to deregulate faith-based facilities; most of the appointees were members of the clergy. Wiley Cameron met with the task force in 1996 and gained their support. Based on task force recommendations, two state legislators, Rep. John Smithee and Sen. David Sibley, co-sponsored HB 2482 to allow the formation of private accreditation agencies through which church-affiliated facilities could bypass state approval. No religious groups came out in favor of the bill, and the state’s recent experience with the Branch Davidians in Waco gave the other side arguments against giving free rein to religious “fringe” groups. But with the strong support of Governor Bush, and the insertion of a sunset amendment allowing the new law to expire in four years, the bill passed easily.

The bill’s supporters expected several private accreditation agencies to be formed, and *hundreds* of facilities to seek accreditation through them. Supporters of programs like Roloff Homes (or the drug treatment center Teen Challenge, which resembled the Roloff Homes in its fundamentalist approach) were so determined and vocal that they *seemed* to represent a huge demand for alternative accreditation. But the thousands of youth facilities in the state, religious and secular, had long accepted state licensing requirements and had learned to function within state guidelines; they saw no reason to change their method of accreditation. Only a few extremist groups refused to budge.

Long-time Roloff supporter David Blaser, Wiley Cameron and four other like-minded individuals quickly formed the Texas Association of Christian Child-Care Agencies (TACCCA). They gained the state’s approval to provide accreditation for child care facilities after proving that all six board members had experience in child care. The Rebekah Home was the first to apply for TACCCA accreditation; Cameron recused himself from the approval process to avoid a conflict of interest. But for this board, the approval of Roloff homes was essentially automatic.

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Brother Roloff

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In the four years that followed, TACCCA was the only accrediting agency formed to approve faith-based child care facilities, and only eight homes applied for approval through TACCCA. Allegations of abuse surfaced for two of the homes almost immediately, the Rebekah Home for Girls and the Lighthouse boot-camp program—both among the original homes established in Roloff's "City of Refuge" in the 1960s.

In 1998, Wiley Cameron's wife was found guilty of abuse after a Rebekah Home resident was beaten and left tied to a bed. In 2000, two teens at Lighthouse were tied together after trying to escape; their heads were banged together several times and then they were forced to dig in a pit of sewage throughout the night. But TACCCA renewed the accreditation of the two homes without a murmur just a few days after the Lighthouse abuse allegations became public. During its four years of existence, TACCCA also failed to perform and report on its required inspections of the eight homes it approved.

In the spring of 2001, the Texas legislature declined to renew HB 2482. TACCCA was dissolved, and the eight homes it accredited were required to obtain state licensing or shut down. None has pursued state licensing. The Rebekah home is again exiled to Missouri, which has not yet learned the lesson of Texas.

Despite the poor results of his "faith-based experiment" in Texas, President George W. Bush remains enthusiastic about encouraging church groups to participate in social

service activities, by deregulating on the federal level, or providing federal funding. On October 3 of this year, 21 federal grants were given to religious and community groups to carry out social service or humanitarian missions. One of the recipients was Pat Robertson's foreign disaster relief agency "Operation Blessing", which has been accused in the past of fraud and abuse of donations.

So far the grants are limited to large scale operations, not intended for small-time operations like youth homes. But who knows? Vouchers are now available in many states for parents who want to send their children to religious schools; tax dollars help pay for the tuition. Who's to say we won't soon see vouchers to help pay for religious homes or boot camps for "troubled youth" such as Roloff homes?

The Bush Administration promises that faith-based funding will be denied to any religious group that "preaches hate", but Pat Robertson has been quoted as calling Hindus "devil worshippers", the prophet Mohammed "a killer", and Methodists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians "the spirit of the Antichrist". If tax dollars can go to Robertson's mission, why not Roloff homes?

The Bush Administration readily condemns nations and leaders that accept or support the most extreme, radical, fundamentalist forms of Islam. But as Governor of Texas, Bush bent over backward to help the most extreme, radical and fundamentalist forms of Christianity. These extreme factions aren't considered terrorists, although they have terrorized hundreds of children. They don't engage in mass attacks on our citizens; they just attack individual minds and bodies, one at a time.

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