

# Two prominent Baptist thinkers criticize Beck's 'Restoring Honor' rally

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WASHINGTON (ABP) — When popular conservative radio and TV personality Glenn Beck called for “revival” on the National Mall Aug. 28, he was making a hash of both patriotism and faith, according to published comments by a pair of prominent Baptist leaders.

“Something beyond imagination is happening. Something that is beyond man is happening. America today begins to turn back to God,” Beck, who is a Mormon, said from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during his “Restoring Honor” rally.



Russell Moore



Robert Parham

In an event that Beck insisted was apolitical — although it featured conservative politicians like Sarah Palin — he made repeated references to religious concepts, such as America turning to God and experiencing revival.

“If you find out who God truly is, I warn you, I warn you, if you know who he is, it will be the biggest blessing in your life. But it will also be the biggest curse in your life,” he said.

Beck also had a group of ministers — including Southern Baptist Convention leader Richard Land and other prominent evangelicals — appear behind him in a segment on what he has called his “Black-Robed Regiment” or “Black-Robed Brigade.” The term was used for Christian clerics who, during the American Revolution, were some of the first and most prominent colonists to speak up against oppression at the hands of British authorities.

Despite Land’s appearance at the rally, both conservative Southern Baptist educator Russell Moore and moderate Baptist ethicist Robert Parham expressed concerns about the rally's strong overtones of “civil religion” — a lowest-common-denominator patriotic faith that conflates authentic Christianity with generic civic piety and nationalism.

“What concerns me here is not what this says about Beck or the ‘Tea Party’

or any other entertainment or political figure. What concerns me is about what this says about the Christian churches in the United States,” said Moore, dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, [in an Aug. 29 post](#) on his blog, "Moore to the Point."

“It’s taken us a long time to get here, in this plummet from [Francis Schaeffer](#) to Glenn Beck,” Moore continued, referring to the late evangelical theologian many consider the intellectual father of the Religious Right. “In order to be this gullible, American Christians have had to endure years of vacuous talk about undefined ‘revival’ and ‘turning America back to God’ that was less about anything uniquely Christian than about, at best, a generically theistic civil religion and, at worst, some partisan political movement.”



Richard Land

Meanwhile, Parham, in [a commentary](#) for the *Newsweek/Washington Post* “On Faith” website, said Beck had used the rally to fabricate “a pottage of civil religion that says America has a divine destiny and claiming that a national revival is beginning.

He observed that Beck referred to American founding documents such as the Constitution and the Gettysburg Address as if they were as divinely inspired as Scripture itself.

“What is important to Beck is belief in God — God generically — not a

specific understanding of God revealed in the biblical witness, but God who appears in nature and from which one draws universal truths,” Parham said. “Not surprisingly, Beck only uses the Bible to point toward the idea of a God-generic. He does not listen to the God of the Bible who calls for the practice of social justice, the pursuit of peacemaking, the protection of the poor in the formation of community. Beck has little room for God's warning about national idolatry and rejection of fabricated religion.”

Land, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, has said that he does not believe Beck's Mormonism is compatible with biblical Christianity. However, he [told the Washington Post](#) that he and other evangelical leaders who met with Beck in the planning stages of the rally were impressed with the authenticity of the Fox News personality's faith.

“We walked back to the hotel after and said: ‘That was extraordinary,’” Land said. ‘I’ve never heard a cultural figure of that popularity talking that overtly about his faith. He sounded like Billy Graham.”

But to fellow conservative Southern Baptist Moore, Beck's faith has little in common with that of Billy Graham.

“It's sad to see so many Christians confusing Mormon politics or American nationalism with the gospel of Jesus Christ. But, don't get me wrong, I'm not pessimistic. Jesus will build his church, and he will build it on the gospel. He doesn't need American Christianity to do it. Vibrant, loving, orthodox Christianity will flourish, perhaps among the poor of Haiti or the persecuted of Sudan or the outlawed of China, but it will flourish,” Moore wrote.

He concluded: “And there will be a new generation, in America and elsewhere, who will be ready for a gospel that is more than just Fox News at prayer.”

*-Rob Marus is managing editor and Washington bureau chief for Associated Baptist Press.*