



REPORT from the CAPITAL

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NEWSMAKERS

George Stephanopoulos, senior adviser to President Clinton, said May 21 on "Meet the Press" that the administration likely would oppose a religious equality amendment — one plank of the Christian Coalition's Contract with the American Family. "We've become one of the most religious countries in the world with great diversity and great religious faith because the First Amendment devised by Thomas Jefferson protected religion and protected the state. It kept the spheres separate. We're not trying to keep religion out of public life." He said that while Clinton supports "having religious prayers at certain graduation ceremonies. The problem with a constitutional amendment is that it would probably strike the wrong balance, and there would be no way to prevent a broader reach."

Vitaly Savitsky, chairman of Russia's parliamentary subcommittee on religious groups, reportedly has named Baptists among those who should work to help the country achieve spiritual rebirth. His statement, quoted in the *Moscow Tribune*, sounded a different note from published remarks by communists and nationalists in parliament who have backed Russian Orthodoxy as the only legitimate Russian religion.

Pollster George Gallup recently said that the religious right comprises 18 percent of the U.S. population and that its makeup defies common stereotypes. Most likely to claim the religious right label are Southerners, Republicans, non-college graduates, people over 65 and those who claim to be "born again." But contrary to common stereotyping, the religious right label was claimed by a larger percentage of blacks than whites (30 percent vs. 17 percent) and more often by females than males (21 percent vs. 15 percent). Δ

Progressive evangelicals want voice in square

Progressive evangelical Christians want an equal voice in the public square and are organizing as an alternative to the religious right.

Members of the new progressive evangelical caucus said May 23 they want to offer a different kind of politics that emphasizes spirituality, rather than ideology. Approximately 100 religious leaders, representing Baptists, Catholics, Episcopalians, Quakers, Methodists and others, released a joint statement that challenged the religious right's politics of "polarization."

Tony Campolo, an American Baptist evangelist, said the group was not "here to declare war on the Christian Coalition." He said leaders of the Christian Coalition declined the group's invitation to meet and pray with them.

"We are actually applauding the religious right in one respect," said Campolo, a professor of sociology at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pa., an American Baptist school. "They have made America conscious that political issues are at the heart of the Christian faith. For too long evangelicals have disengaged themselves from the political arena, acting as though this does not concern us."

"What happens politically does concern us, because we believe Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and we want his will done in every sector of human existence. We thank them for making America aware that politics is religious."

Campolo admires the religious

right's "ability to seize the microphone."

"We have been so busy doing community work that we haven't spent any time or money doing media work. And so they get all of the attention, because that is where they have put their efforts."

"The time has come for us to speak up and be heard in the media as well."

The group does not oppose the religious right's engagement in public discourse but its tactics, Campolo said.

Roberta Hestenes, president and professor of

"As an evangelical Christian, I do not believe in salvation by politics."

— ROBERTA HESTENES
PRESIDENT
EASTERN COLLEGE



Christian spirituality at Eastern College, said, "It is deeply important to reconsider the way in which we engage in the public square."

In years past, some Christians withdrew from the public forum because they believed their faith was highly personal and private. But their silence left a vacuum, she said. Others chose an even more dangerous and seductive path toward power, she continued.

That path says that "the way in which we should engage in the public square is by gaining power in such a way that we can control the conversation and dominate the realities that are there."

"As an evangelical Christian, I do not believe in salvation by politics."

James M. Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, said he is both amazed and irritated that the religious right purports to speak for the entire evangelical community.

NEWS & COMMENT

VOICE

Continued from Page 1

"We violate that holistic essence of Christianity when in self-righteousness we try to come and speak for all conservative Christians."

James Forbes Jr., senior minister of The Riverside Church in New York City, said that he regrets the division in the Christian faith between those who would urge "personal morality and those who would promote justice, societal and structural change."

"A faithful review of the foundations of Christianity," Forbes continued, "will reveal that holistic response to the souls of people and the systems that shape their attitudes and values is the authentic expression of our faith."

"The public ethic and personal morality are two sides of the same coin," Dunn added. "If either one is genuine, the other is implied. And if either tries to exist without the other,

"What happens politically does concern us, because we believe Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and we want his will done in every sector of human existence."



— TONY CAMPOLO
AMERICAN BAPTIST EVANGELIST



prophetic justice and compassion for the poor, the elderly and our children."

— JAMES FORBES JR.
PASTOR, RIVERSIDE CHURCH

it's not going to last very long."

Forbes added that "what concerns me most deeply is the use of the Christian label for a brand of religion which has abandoned prophetic justice and compassion for the poor, the elderly and our children."

Campolo said that the loose-knit group planned to do three things:

- organize a caucus that will appear at gatherings of evangelical Christians to ask for an equal voice with the religious right;

- solidify a grassroots movement in which college students work with their local churches to combat community problems;

- initiate a broad-based program of community politics that sheds the traditional labels of conservative and liberal, Republican and Democrat to address teen pregnancy, gay bashing, poverty and racism.

The leaders said they do not expect to become a highly financed political machine like the Christian Coalition. Instead, the network will employ the methods of Martin Luther King Jr. in which local communities worked for change.

The group discussed its concerns about the religious right's political agenda with congressional leaders, including House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, D-Mo. Δ

Beware of contract's unwritten fine print, religious groups say

The rub in most contracts is in the fine print, and when that portion has yet to be written, the buyer should beware.

That was the admonition of religious groups regarding the Christian Coalition's Contract with the American Family. The Christian Coalition unveiled May 17 its legislative agenda that offers 10 broad, innocuous-sounding proposals that contain no statutory language, the religious leaders said.

The groups, representing Baptists, Jews, Methodists, Episcopalians and others, took particular exception to the contract's call for a "religious equality amendment" to the U.S. Constitution. Religious leaders said that since public school prayer proposals have repeatedly been rejected by the U.S. Congress, the Christian Coalition has repackaged the concept under a new name.

"The initiative's innocuous-sounding language about religious equality and free expression thinly disguises its aim: undermining one of the two pillars of religious liberty,

the First Amendment's Establishment Clause," said Melissa Rogers, associate general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee.

Robert W. Tiller, director of the Office of Governmental Relations, American Baptist Churches, USA, said the religious equality amendment is cloaked under the guise of religious liberty but in fact would endanger it.

"We declare our explicit opposition to any attempt through legislation or other means to require or permit mandated prayers or mandated participation in religious practices in public institutions," Tiller said, quoting an ABC position statement.

Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition, said that the amendment does not seek to restore compulsory, sectarian prayer or Bible-reading in public schools. Instead, he said, the proposal seeks to allow student- or citizen-initiated, non-denominational prayer in public forums beyond the classroom setting, such as at graduation ceremonies, sporting events and on courthouse lawns. Δ



We oppose attempts to require mandated prayers and religious practices.

— ROBERT W. TILLER
ABC OFFICE
OF GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Liberty in History

"The men and women who gave liberty to America were devout souls. ... Most of them dissented from the doctrines and usages of the churches established by laws in the lands of their origins. They were denied the right to worship God in their own ways. ... Our ancestors staked the very existence of America as a free nation upon the principle that all men have a natural and unalienable right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences, and the corollary that this natural and unalienable right can be secured only by keeping the hands of the state out of religion and the hands of religion off the state."

Sam Ervin
The Wisdom of Sam Ervin
Ballantine Books
1973

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VIEW OF THE WALL

Equality vs. neutrality



MELISSA ROGERS
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Equality. An appealing concept, no doubt. It embodies an ideal dear to Americans and essential to our form of government. So it is not surprising that recent calls for a constitutional "religious equality" amendment sound good.

But what does the term "religious equality" mean? Supporters of religious equality have not yet offered specific language for the amendment, even though they broadly champion equal treatment for religion and non-religion. Just how much equality do they want?

They don't want equal treatment for religion and non-religion in free exercise matters. For example, they would properly object to a requirement that churches refrain from religious discrimination in hiring, even though such a requirement is appropriate for secular employers. Clearly, houses of worship must be exempted from such requirements in the hiring of clergy. This kind of special treatment for religion is the wise command of the Free Exercise Clause and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

What proponents of religious equality want is not equal treatment under the Free Exercise Clause, but equal treatment under the Establishment Clause. For example, they generally favor requiring government to treat religious expression the same as secular expression even though this can result in religious coercion. Thus, if a public school invites a representative of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers to speak at graduation, then it also could invite a rabbi to lead a prayer at this school-sponsored event. Additionally, religious equality could force the government to use tax money to fund religious speech in the same way that it

funds secular speech, despite the fact that this would destroy prudent barriers separating church from state.

Supporters of religious equality, therefore, want both equal and special treatment of religion — equal treatment under the Establishment Clause and special treatment under the Free Exercise Clause. Unfortunately, this approach is bad for religious liberty. We do not need religious equality but governmental neutrality.

Neutrality properly requires religion to accept both the limits of the Establishment Clause and the benefits of the Free Exercise Clause rather than picking and choosing between the two. The First Amendment requires this not to harm religion but to protect it from government interference.

Neutrality ensures that government keeps an arm's length from religion, neither advancing nor inhibiting it. Thus, government must sometimes remove burdens on religion (i.e., exempting religious entities from taxation and some civil rights laws) and sometimes it must deny religion benefits available to others (i.e., denying government funds to religious missions). Even though religion seems to be advantaged when free exercise exemptions are granted and disadvantaged when benefits are denied under the Establishment Clause, by treating religion in this manner, government maintains a consistently neutral position toward religion.

Although neutrality sometimes requires government to treat religion differently, it does not always require it. For example, under the Equal Access Act, student religious clubs enjoy the same access to public school facilities that secular clubs have because such use does not promote religion and is not coercive. Neutrality merely requires case-by-case judgments to ensure that government will not interfere with religious practice or coerce citizens in religious matters.

Admittedly, the concept of neutrality is not as simple as that of equality. But it is neutrality, not equality, that is the true preservative of religious freedom. Δ

BOOK REVIEW

Religion and American Education: Rethinking a National Dilemma

Warren A. Nord, *The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, N.C. 1995, 388 pp.*



Warren Nord, professor of philosophy, asks the question: What is the proper role of religious ideas and values in the curriculum of American

schools and universities? He spends the next nearly 400 pages answering the question in a thorough, yet, readable way. The author calls "striking" the fact that most students finish school without encountering live religious ideas.

The place of religion in public education has been hotly debated in our culture. We are a pluralistic and religious people living under the governance of a secular Constitution. On one side of this perceived dilemma are religiously conservative Americans. Some think the United States is a Christian nation and education has been captured by secular humanism, and they

desire to restore religious purposes, practices and teaching to public education. On the other side of the perceived dilemma, the author states, are liberals for whom religion is a private matter and irrelevant to the purposes and content of a sound education. They desire to remove any vestiges of religious instruction or practice. Nord believes this to be a false dilemma and suggests ways to include religion in secondary and undergraduate education.

Before arguing for a greater inclusion of religion in a traditional liberal education, Nord guides the reader through several historical tours. The first three chapters answer the question: "How did we get to where we are today?" The threads of religion and its role in America and American education are appropriately traced back to the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. Nord then outlines the process and contributors to the "secularization of America." He concludes there was no "evil conspiracy" to remove religion from the daily life and understanding of Americans but rather

a slow, inexorable replacement of the presuppositions of religion with a "modern world view." The tour is completed with the discussion of recent Supreme Court decisions removing the *practice* of religion from the classroom and a review of textbooks and their current treatment of religion.

In the last half of the book, the author persuasively argues that religion must be included in a true liberal education. Religion should be studied in obvious subjects, such as history and literature, but also in science, psychology and economics. Nord presents a convincing argument that most educators unwittingly contribute to an apparent "hostility" toward religion because they know so little about it and are not well-trained to teach it.

The book is not a quick read but is worthwhile. Educators, ministers and social scientists would profit from this important work. Δ

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