



# VOICE OF REASON

The Newsletter of Americans for Religious Liberty

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## House Chaplaincy Dispute Reawakens Old Tensions

In an extraordinarily stupid modern rendition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's "No Catholics Need Apply" slogan (newspaper ads designed to discourage Catholics from seeking employment), the Republican-dominated House of Representatives set off a firestorm of religious controversy that has raged since December.

The dispute, which exacerbates tensions along religious and partisan lines, centered on an obscure and secretive position, the House Chaplain, an officer of Congress with an annual salary of \$132,100. With the exception of a six-year period preceding the Civil War, the House has selected an official chaplain to pronounce daily prayers and, in modern times, to engage in various counseling services. The trouble is that all 58 chaplains selected since 1789 have been Protestant. It is the last redoubt of religious exclusivity in the United States. (There was one Catholic chaplain in the U.S. Senate in 1832, out of 61 who have served in that post, a record nearly as bad.) All of the chaplains have been white males, and 39 of the 58 have been Methodists or Presbyterians. The outgoing chaplain, James Ford, who has been on the job for 21 years, was the first Lutheran ever selected.

Apparently, most of the previous chaplains were selected by the House Speaker. On March 25, 1999, Speaker Dennis Hastert decided to depart from tradition by appointing an eighteen-member search committee to select a new chaplain. Nine Republicans, including co-chair Tom Bliley of Virginia, were appointed by Hastert, while nine Democrats, including co-chair Earl Pomeroy, North Dakota, were selected by Minority Leader Dick Gephardt. The committee included 14 Protestants, three Catholics and one Jew, which is somewhat less Catholic and more Protestant than the House as a whole. It included such Religious Right zealots as Steve Largent (R-OK), Zach Wamp (R-TN), Dave Weldon (R-FL) and Helen Chenoweth (R-ID). Over the course of many months, thirty-eight applicants were interviewed. Candidates were winnowed down to three finalists by October 20.

After exhaustive interviews, the committee sent three names to the final selection group, Armev, Hastert and Gephardt. Re-

ceiving the highest number of "ranking points," indicating the applicant regarded as the best qualified, was Father Tim O'Brien, a political scientist and pastoral counselor who directs the Marquette University Washington program. The runner-up was the Rev. Robert Dvorak, a leader of the tiny Evangelical Covenant Church. The third-ranking applicant was the Rev. Charles Wright, a Presbyterian minister long associated with the National Prayer Breakfast.

The result, announced at the end of November when Congress was in a two-month recess, was a shocker. Armev and Hastert blocked the Catholic nominee and instead opted for the committee's third choice, Charles Wright. Armev and Wright are both Presbyterians, and Armev is closely associated with the extremist religious and political views of the Rev. D. James

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## The Catholic Vote: Its Decisive Impact on U.S. Elections

It may come as a surprise in these ecumenical times when religious factors in politics are often ignored, but the most crucial and decisive voting bloc in America is the Roman Catholic community. America's diverse and influential Catholic community, roughly one-fourth of the electorate and about 40% of committed churchgoers, represents the largest swing vote in America politics, according to exit polls and precinct analyses. Catholics have supported the victorious presidential candidate in 13 of the 17 presidential elections since 1932. They supported the losing candidates only twice (Stevenson in 1952, Humphrey in 1968) and split their votes evenly in 1956 and 1988.

Furthermore, Catholic voters take political issues and public policy positions seriously. They vote in large numbers and in the past two decades have shifted their allegiance between our two great national parties. While historically Democratic for a variety of cultural and economic reasons, they have supported Republican presidential candidates since Eisenhower more than they did in the earlier decades of the century. And though they have always been a bit more Democratic than the entire electorate, their independent streak has contributed to Republican presidential victories under Nixon (1972) and Reagan (1980 and 1984).

In Congressional elections Catholic voters have favored the Democrats by modest margins, except in 1994 when they actually gave a small majority to the Republican insurgents. But the GOP lost its Catholic edge in 1996 and 1998, and the percentage of Democrats among the Catholic members of Congress has in-

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## Religious Liberty Requires Vigilance to Survive

By Nikolas K. Gvosdev

The struggle for religious liberty, the famed "first freedom" from which all other social and political rights are derived, underwent tremendous change in the twentieth century. In 1900, the main problem facing defenders of religious liberty was that of establishment. In much of the world at that time, a specific form of religious belief was enshrined by state law and citizens were required to conform to the rites and practices of the established faith or face civil and political disabilities, including restrictions on the right to vote or to gain an education. Official discrimination on religious grounds was rampant in many areas of the globe, barring members of minority faiths from government service, restricting their economic opportunity, or denying them equality before the law.

The wars and revolutions of this century which destroyed much of the "old order" in Europe, Asia, and Africa often brought down the "established churches" in their wake (and sometimes led to ferocious anti-religious persecutions), while the growing spread of democratic ideals persuaded many governments to push for substantive changes in their constitutions and policies, de-establishing official faiths and guaranteeing full civic and political equality for all citizens regardless of creed. The 1984 "International Declaration on Human Rights" enshrined religious liberty as a basic human right, and was followed by other international treaties and conventions which called for an end to any and all discriminatory treatment of citizens on the grounds of religious affiliation, as well as making provisions for the absolute freedom for all people to practice their faith without hindrance.

The close of the century, however, has not diminished the need for continued vigilance to protect religious liberty. If, in 1900, most governments were concerned with enforcing "the

right belief" or the "true faith" upon all in its jurisdiction, compelling attendance at worship services, mandating religious education in the schools, and requiring public adherence to a particular creed, the challenges to religious freedom in 2000 tend to be more subtle. Nearly every nation in the world has some sort of constitutional provision providing for freedom of conscience, and very few governments are actually concerned whether or not the population is attending worship services on a regular basis. Today, the emphasis is not whether people are religious or irreligious, but rather that they don't choose a faith which deviates from the societal mainstream. Without infringing constitutional provisions guaranteeing freedom, governments can sidestep these restrictions in order to consciously infringe religious liberty. Laws against cruelty to animals can be invoked to prevent *kosher* or *halal* slaughter of animals (as required by Jewish and Muslim law, respectively). Police can be deliberately slow to respond to incidents where hooligans beat up members of minority or "dissident" faiths, or fail to vigorously investigate attacks on property belonging to "suspect" religious organizations. Appeals to "community standards" or "national security" can be used to justify censorship in the press and over the airwaves.

The struggle to preserve religious freedom cannot be abandoned simply because at the end of the twentieth century most governments pay lip service to the principle. Constant vigilance is required to ensure that the rights to freedom of worship and conscience are honestly and truly respected by all the members of the international community.

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## Chaplaincy Dispute, *continued from page 1*

Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries. Armeý recently addressed the group's "Reclaiming America for Christ" conference. Speaker Hastert is a graduate of Illinois' Wheaton College, where Catholics are excluded from the faculty and board of trustees. Dick Gephardt voted for O'Brien.

This decision provoked a furor, especially from fellow committee member who felt that they had been used and had wasted hundreds of hours of valuable time on the selection, only to be ignored by the Republican leadership. Then the entire evaluative process was called into question when highly respected Washington columnist Mark Shields exposed the scandal. In a *Washington Post* article published on December 1, Shields revealed a conversation he had with rejected applicant O'Brien, who said he had been asked questions regarding his unmarried status and his wearing of a collar as a requirement of his priestly ministry. Both questions came from Oklahoma Republican Steve Largent, an ex-football player, and a prominent spokesperson for the Religious Right, who regularly receives a 100% rating from the Christian Coalition. Largent's questions revealed the level of religious ignorance found in the U.S. Congress, since it is common knowledge that Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Eastern Orthodox Christians, among others, regularly wear a distinctive religious garb, as do firemen, policemen and military personnel.

The present Lutheran chaplain, Jim Ford, has worn his collar for the past twenty-one years, suggesting, perhaps, that Largent has never had any dealings with Ford. Largent admitted his "naivete" to the *Tulsa World* newspaper a few weeks later. O'Brien also mentioned that Dick Armeý had made oddly insulting comments about Lutheran-Catholic relations in his home state of North Dakota more than thirty-five years ago, as if they had any relevance to the selection of the first House chaplain of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. O'Brien told the *New York Times* that he was "a bit shocked" by Armeý's "strange comments."

Rumors also surfaced that Armeý had been besieged by calls from unnamed sources, urging the rejection of O'Brien. Armeý spokesperson Michele A. Davis admitted that calls in opposition had been made to Armeý's office.

O'Brien also told the *Times* that in his second interview he ran into "an evangelical Protestant line of questioning" from Republicans, who asked him to quote three Bible passages, and to explain how his "moral character could be judged if he was not married." One of the Republican committee members, Dave Weldon of Florida, is a former Catholic who now attends a Protestant church. It was Weldon who asked O'Brien to share Scripture verses with the committee.

Journalist Mark Shields concluded, "What is clear is that a bipartisan committee working conscientiously under bipartisan leadership reached near-unanimity in selecting the first Catholic House chaplain and the decision was then vetoed for reasons that are, to say the least, difficult to understand."

Rep. Lois Capps of California, a Lutheran Democrat and strong supporter of church-state separation, announced her deep disappointment with the leadership decision. She was a member of the search committee. A fellow California Democrat, Anna Eshoo, a Catholic, commented, "I am very resentful of what they did. These are people who feel they have a corner on morality. They do not."

Anger continued to rise when the nomination of Charles Wright was announced. Many Catholic Republicans expressed sorrow and dismay, though most essentially accepted the Armeý-

Hastert line that Wright was selected because of his "pastoral counseling skills" and because the Republicans were "looking for which one would be the guy members would be most comfortable with, who they could turn to when they needed personal counseling," according to Armeý's press secretary, Michele Davis. Davis also told ARL associate director Al Menendez, "You don't hear any Catholics complaining, do you?"

Armeý issued a snide, narcissistic letter to colleagues on December 2, which did not allay concerns that religious bias had intruded into the selection process. Armeý's letter, which invoked his personal opinions seven times, concluded, "I found Reverend Charles Wright to be the most personable and approachable of the three finalists." Armeý added, "I was looking for the person most able to inspire confidence among the members and provide comfort and spiritual guidance to members during a personal crisis." Armeý also leveled charges that "partisan accusations" had caused the dispute, even though it was a Catholic Republican member from Illinois who initially labeled the decision an example of anti-Catholic prejudice.

Michigan Democrat John Dingell asked for the release of all relevant documents pursuant to the selection process. Armeý and Hastert chose to ignore the request and did not even bother to answer Dingell's letter. Dingell said there is "a strong possibility of anti-Catholic bias or religious bigotry" that could only be addressed if all information is released.

Instead, Hastert and Armeý sent a letter to the *Washington Post*, saying, in part, "We are disappointed and offended by accusations that anti-Catholic bias affected the choice of the next House chaplain." Refusing to answer the specific objections raised by critics, Hastert and Armeý were content to resort to pious platitudes, praising Charles Wright's "warmth and graciousness."

John Dingell rejected this approach, saying, "Many American Catholics believe that the manner in which the candidates were questioned and considered was contaminated with a prejudice which led to the decision not to accept the committee's recommendation of Father O'Brien."

Americans for Religious Liberty announced on January 3, that it was asking every member of Congress to reject the Wright nomination because the process is "deeply flawed" and "suggests the unconstitutional application of a religious test for public office." ARL reminded the members that "religious tests are specifically prohibited for any office or public trust in the United States by Article 6 of the U.S. Constitution."

ARL President John M. Swomley, in his letter to every member, urged Congress to "take a fresh look at the chaplaincy position and question whether it is good and reasonable public policy to continue to fund it." ARL believes that there is no constitutional requirement for either house of Congress to maintain a

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# Religious Right Scores a Win in South Carolina

Texas Governor George W. Bush's solid 53% to 42% victory in a record high turnout in South Carolina on February 19 was due almost entirely to active support from the state's powerful Religious Right. Fueled by an endorsement from the Christian Coalition's Pat Robertson, who said "a McCain victory would destroy the Republican Party," self-styled Religious Right supporters voted 69% to 24% for Bush over Arizona Senator John McCain, with 7% voting for Alan Keyes. These voters, one-third of the Palmetto State electorate, swamped the two-thirds of primary voters who said they were not Religious Right supporters and who supported McCain 52% to 46%.

Religious conservatives are even more numerous in South Carolina than those who identified themselves as Religious Right. Bush won in all age categories, ran stronger among women than men and carried all of the state's congressional districts except the Charleston and Low Country area, where Episcopalians, Catholics and Jews are more numerous, and where many residents have come from other states.

Pat Robertson told CNN viewers that his organization had made hundreds of thousands of phone calls and had concentrated its primary efforts in the most Protestant and evangelical state in the Union. So did national anti-abortion groups, which attacked McCain, despite the senator's overwhelming "pro-life" voting record. South Carolina primary voters, by 58% to 39%, said they wanted "most abortions to be illegal."

Bush's campaign appearance at fundamentalism's flagship college, Bob Jones University (BJU) in

Greenville, has become a national controversy and may hurt the Texan in states with large Catholic and African-American constituencies. BJU forbids admission of Catholics as students or faculty and describes the Catholic Church as "a satanic cult which damns its adherents to Hell." All interracial social contact is banned and very few non-white students attend the university. BJU's publishing house is the primary provider of textbooks to independent Christian private schools and to home schoolers, and its texts are virulently anti-Catholic, anti-Black, anti-Jewish and in general filled with ridicule and invective toward non-Christian religions, humanism, and toward non-white cultures. Bush's lame excuse that he appeared at many South Carolina colleges and that he disagreed with BJU policies may not save him from mounting criticism. Al Gore and Bill Bradley denounced his appearance there, and John McCain pointedly refused to schedule a campaign stop at the BJU campus. (BJU is also closely linked to extremist Protestant organizations in Northern Ireland, whose chief spokesman, Ian Paisley, received an honorary doctorate from the university three decades ago.)

The state was flooded with activists from independent right-wing groups attacking McCain. McCain supporter Lindsey Graham, the congressman from the state's most conservative northwest region, denounced the activities as unfair and misguided. Graham is himself a Religious Right fellow traveler, but he said such campaign tactics might wreck GOP chances in November.



## Religious War in the Old Dominion

The bitterly-contested Republican primary in Virginia, which George W. Bush won 53% to 44% over John McCain, revealed the sharp religious, racial and cultural divisions that have riven the GOP in this primary season.

Senator McCain's forthright attack on TV evangelist Pat Robertson in Robertson's home base of Virginia Beach won him plaudits but produced a backlash from Religious Right activists, who supported Bush by a whopping 79% to 13% (with 8% for Alan Keyes, who won 3% statewide). This was the most lopsided margin for Bush among supporters of the Religious Right. In Michigan, Delaware and South Carolina, Bush's margin was 2-1 or 3-1 among these voters. McCain actually won 52% to 46% among the other primary voters.

McCain won 56% in vote-rich Northern Virginia, the suburbs of Washington, DC, where 30% of voters are Catholic and 10% are Episcopalian. Independents and Democrats voted heavily for McCain. The "outer suburbs," however, narrowly favored Bush. Bush also won 64% in the conservative, heavily Baptist Richmond area, while McCain edged out Bush in the Hampton Roads area around Norfolk, where many voters are military retirees.

McCain won normally Democratic counties, like Arlington, Alexandria and Norfolk but he also carried "moderate" Republican areas which supported Bush and Dole. They include high-income Fairfax County and Virginia Beach, both of which have large Catholic communities. McCain easily defeated Bush in the college towns of Williamsburg, Charlottesville and Lexing-

ton, which generally go Democratic in general elections. McCain also carried the well-educated, high-income Williamsburg suburbs of James City and York Counties, where 21% of voters are Catholic and 11% Episcopalian.

While metropolitan Virginia split 50-50, Bush piled up a 62% victory in the rural areas, where traditionalism and religious and racial conservatism are dominant values. Bush won nearly 2-1 margins in the Shenandoah Valley, a region settled by German and Scotch-Irish immigrants, and in the Mountains, where politics resembles a blood sport. Evangelicals, fundamentalists and the gun lobby are strong in the Valley and in the Mountains. Finally, Bush won decisively in "Southside Virginia," an area carried by segregationist George Wallace in 1968. Bush piled up 3-1 margins in one-time segregationist strongholds, which are also "Tobacco Country" counties, where Democratic support has declined in recent years. (The area's congressman, Virgil Goode, recently broke with the Democratic Party, becoming an Independent, promising to vote with the Republicans and endorsing Bush.) McCain's only strong support in rural areas came in counties where Perot received his highest level of support.

Traditional Republican loyalists went heavily for the Establishment's candidate. Bush won 65% of the vote in the 10 counties which gave the largest support to Bob Dole in the 1996 general election. The party's elders - Governor Jim Gilmore and former Governor George Allen - still have considerable clout. These counties are 45% Baptist, 18% Methodist, and only 1% Catholic.

# Abortion Issue Surfaces in Campaigns

The ever-controversial issue of abortion rights has become a prominent feature of the early presidential primaries. George W. Bush, pressured on his right by adversaries Steve Forbes and Alan Keyes, has taken an increasingly strident position. First, in Iowa, he said the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision had "stepped across its bounds and usurped the right of legislatures." That was not enough for hardliners, however. So Bush indicated that he would support his party's call for a total ban on all, or almost all, abortions. He told ABC's George Will that the Texas legislature was ready to pass a ban even on first trimester abortions, an assertion denied by most observers of Texas politics.

In New Hampshire only 7% of GOP primary voters cited abortion as an important issue, and most of them split their votes between Forbes, Keyes and Gary Bauer, who withdrew after his abysmal showing.

Arizona Senator John McCain waffled on the issue when he told a reporter that any decision regarding an abortion would be a family consultation. Pressed to retract it, he repeated his emphatic endorsement of abortion bans and cited his "seventeen-year pro-life voting record."

With the withdrawal of Steve Forbes after his third-place showing in Delaware, only gadfly Alan Keyes remains to articulate the hard-line position, though front runners Bush and McCain essentially agree with Keyes.

In the Democratic race challenger Bill Bradley emphasized that he had always been pro-choice, while Vice President Al Gore had cast numerous anti-choice votes as a congressman and Senator from Tennessee between 1977 and 1987. Gore retorted that he was now unequivocally pro-choice. Gore erred in a New Hampshire primary debate by denying that he had changed his position but later admitted that his views had "evolved."

Meanwhile, President Bill Clinton told Democratic donors in a Los Angeles address on January 22 that the future of legal, safe abortion in the United States depends on the outcome of the November elections. Said the president, "There is absolutely

no question in my mind; whether *Roe v. Wade* is preserved or scrapped depends on what happens in the presidential election, and to pretend otherwise is naïve."

## Preachers Flocking to Bush

Texas Governor George W. Bush's wooing of American evangelicals and fundamentalists is paying off, at least at the upper echelons of the clergy. The Reverend Jerry Falwell told a *New York Times* reporter, "George W. would make an awesome president." Southern Baptist leader Richard Land said, "When people hear George W. Bush talk about his faith he talks about it in ways that evangelicals resonate with."

These encomia are echoed by others. Charles Colson, who heads Prison Fellowship Ministries, which runs a separate Christian prison program in Texas, called Bush "one of us" and adds, "He is somebody who understands us, who thinks the same things that we do." Evangelist Billy Graham, a Bush family friend, said he wasn't concerned about George W's lack of specificity or intellectual grasp of complex issues. "There's a depth to him and he is a man of tremendous moral character." Graham, a friend of several Republican presidents, dismissed concerns about Bush's allegedly irresponsible youth by observing, "What they have written about his earlier years could be true of nearly all of us."

Bush has continued his push for religious-based solutions to national problems, citing his prison programs, which allow prayer and Bible study under fundamentalist auspices, as a model for the nation. His increasing emphasis on restricting abortion also appeals to many evangelical pastors. The Reverend John C. Hagie said that Bush's position "will stop 99 percent of the abortions in America, and I would be thrilled to see a 99 percent improvement over what we have right now."

The Reverend Pat Robertson has praised Bush at public events, and his former employee, Ralph Reed, is a consultant to the Bush campaign. Robertson made recorded telephone messages for Bush in the South Carolina and Michigan primaries and attacked Senator John McCain's campaign co-chairman, former New Hampshire senator Warren Rudman, as "an anti-Christian bigot." Voter disgust with Robertson's tactics in Michigan has caused grave concern in the Bush campaign command.



## Abortion Politics in the State o' Maine

By a margin of nearly 56% to 44%, Maine's electorate last November rejected a proposal to ban certain late-term abortions called "partial birth" procedures by opponents. The victory on the highly emotional and controversial issue was broad. Thirteen of the state's sixteen counties voted no. Even the classic urban/rural split on social issues vanished in this individualistic northeastern state. Both metropolitan (urban and suburban) and nonmetropolitan (rural and small town) areas returned nearly identical 56% margins against the proposed ban.

But there were wide differences based on income, education and religion. In common with other states which have voted on this issue, support for abortion rights in Maine increased as the educational and income levels of voters increased. Maine's highest-income towns voted 69% to 31% pro-choice (or anti-Amendment 1, as it was called), while low-income towns split fifty-fifty. Some of the highest pro-choice margins appeared in the Portland suburbs and in coastal resort areas like Kennebunkport, the sum-

mer home of former President George Bush.

The level of formal education was the most significant factor in shaping voter attitudes on this contentious issue. The six towns with the highest percentage of college-educated adults voted 70% to 30% pro-choice. In Orono, where the University of Maine is located, the vote was 74% to 26%. In towns where voters had the lowest levels of formal education, only 39% voted pro-choice. Religious affiliation indirectly played a role, though in often complex ways, since religion interacts considerably with ethnic ancestry in Maine, and it is difficult at times to separate the two.

Religiously, Maine differs from most other states in three factors. While the Catholic population is about 25%, or similar to the national average, it is predominantly French in ancestry, and Franco-American voters tend to be socially conservative though loyally Democratic. Throughout New England, Catholics of French ancestry have not achieved the economic and educational

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## Abortion Politics in Maine, *cont'd from page 5*

breakthrough associated with Catholics of most other ethnic groups in other regions. French Catholics are still predominantly working-class. Those Catholics in Maine who have become governors and U.S. Senators, for example, are more likely to be of Polish origin (Ed Muskie) or Irish (George Mitchell, who is Irish-Lebanese).

Protestants in Maine also differ in many respects from their co-religionists elsewhere. They have not been as affected by the evangelical revival of recent decades. Most are "mainline" or liberal Protestants, belonging to the United Church of Christ, the Methodists or the Northern Baptists. There are pockets of fundamentalists, who are strongly anti-abortion, but they are not the norm. There are also substantial Episcopalian and Unitarian communities, especially in the coastal counties.

Finally, Maine contains a large secular population. A significant portion of Maine residents do not participate in organized religious activities. They tend to be liberal on social issues.

Consequently, Maine's most secular counties voted 58% pro-choice, with margins reaching 70% in Hancock County. Hancock includes Bar Harbor and other upscale resort communities and also has a large Episcopalian population. Historically Republican, Hancock voted for Bill Clinton twice and gave Ross Perot and Ralph Nader unusually large percentages of their votes. The most heavily Protestant counties voted 64% pro-choice, reflecting the non-evangelical orientation.

The five most Catholic counties voted narrowly 51% to 49% anti-choice, but given the amount of time and money spent on the referendum by the state's Catholic leadership, this near even result must be considered a major disappointment to the anti-abortion lobby. The Catholic vote also divided along ethnic ancestry, income and education lines.

Political orientation played a much less central role in the Maine vote, perhaps reflecting the different religious communities and bases of the parties. In the larger towns and suburbs, Republican strongholds voted 61% pro-choice, while Democratic towns were 55% pro-choice, and Perot strongholds voted 51% pro-choice. The differences here may be explained more by differential income levels than by party preference.

In rural areas this pattern was somewhat different from the cities and suburbs. Areas that supported Ross Perot in 1992 were the most pro-choice, by 56% to 44%. Republican areas were the most anti-choice by 52% to 48%. Democratic rural areas were split evenly. Some of the strongest pro-choice voting (76% to 24%) came from small towns along the coast where Ralph Nader received 7% to 15% of the 1996 presidential vote. These towns have many young professionals, scientists, antique dealers, and arts, crafts and literary types — liberal strongholds much like their counterparts across the continent in the coastal areas of the Pacific Northwest.

Two other factors aided the pro-choice victory. In three dozen towns where a majority of voters are registered Independents (called "unenrolled" in Maine), 59% voted pro-choice. Turnout also helped swell the victory margin. In the strongest pro-choice towns, 53% of registered voters cast ballots. In the strongest anti-choice towns, only 43% of registered voters came to the polls.

French ancestry voters were the most anti-choice, but their turnout was light. And in the French-oriented cities and towns, more than twice as many voters cast pro-choice ballots as did those in isolated rural areas. Aroostock County, a poor, isolated potato-growing agricultural county bordering the Canadian prov-

ince of New Brunswick, was the only anti-abortion success story. In this farm area, 83% of French Catholic Democrats and 75% of Protestant Republicans voted for the ban. But only 44% of registered voters cast ballots, well below the 60% who voted in pro-choice precincts in the Portland suburbs. It is worth noting that the pro-choice side won comfortably in towns with a large Irish ancestry population. The pro-choice position also won in towns with large percentages of English, Scottish, Scots-Irish and German ancestry voters while losing in towns with large French, Native American and Swedish ancestry populations.

There was also little or no connection between the abortion vote and the 1996 presidential vote, suggesting that the abortion issue did not significantly affect presidential voting in Maine. In the rural French villages where 83% were anti-abortion, just 13% voted for Republican Bob Dole for president.

Only at the outer limits of opinion did abortion relate to presidential choice, and then more in 1992 than in 1996. In 1992 then-President Bush carried 41% of the strongest anti-choice towns compared to 14% of the most committed pro-choice towns. Ross Perot carried 7% of the anti-choice towns and 22% of the strongest pro-choice towns. But Democrat Bill Clinton carried 52% of the anti-choice towns and 64% of the pro-choice towns. In Maine, at least, the votes for Bush and Perot, more than for Clinton, were more influenced, perhaps, by social issues. Perot voters were clearly secular and libertarian. In 1996 Clinton gained among all types of voters in Maine, regardless of social issue orientation.

The results from Maine's end of the century abortion referendum indicate that preference for personal choice and individual freedom is still widely respected among American voters, no matter how emotional the issue.

### Maine's 1999 Abortion Referendum

	<i>% Pro-Choice</i>
<b>Statewide</b>	55.6
<b>By Size of Community</b>	
Metropolitan	55.7
Non-Metropolitan	55.4
<b>Education</b>	
High % College Graduate	69.6
Low % College Graduate	39.3
<b>Income</b>	
High Income	68.7
Low Income	50.4
<b>Religion</b>	
Protestant Counties	64.1
Secular Counties	57.9
Catholic Counties	49.2
<b>Political Orientation</b>	
Republican urban	60.7
Republican rural	47.9
Democratic urban	55.0
Democratic rural	49.9
Perot urban	51.0
Perot rural	56.0
Registered Independent	59.2

## Chaplaincy Dispute, *continued from page 3*

publicly funded chaplaincy position.

Even if Congress chooses to retain the position, said Swomley, the constitutional ban on religious tests must be observed. Swomley wrote, "A reasonable person could conclude that Mr. Arney and Mr. Hastert made their decision with reference to religious bias and chose to engage in religious discrimination in the selection of this candidate. It is unconscionable that taxpayers should finance a public office, which pays \$132,100 per year, from which representatives of their religious tradition are excluded. The only way to rectify this grievous mistake and to inaugurate a genuine discussion of the chaplaincy issue is to reject Mr. Wright's nomination."

Frantic Republicans resorted to absurd examples of damage control. Resembling the Keystone Cops or the Three Stooges, Republican leaders called press conferences denying that they are anti-Catholic or given to occasional lapses of judgement in religious matters. Hastert even paid a call on Cardinal Francis George, the Catholic archbishop of Chicago. He also asked GOP members to talk privately with Catholic leaders in their districts to assuage fears of anti-Catholic bias, according to the Capitol Hill newspaper, *Roll Call*. *Roll Call* also reported that "Republicans are considering commissioning a poll to determine just how much damage this furor has done to them in areas with large Catholic populations."

Republicans are also considering releasing private letters to all members from some members of the selection committee. And, finally, documents relevant to the process were released on January 10.

These clumsy attempts to convince critics without really addressing the underlying issues have only added to the controversy. The seventy-five pages of documents released by the selection committee consist mostly of resumes by the candidates, "weighted votes" from early in the process, suggested questions for the chaplains, and other marginally significant data.

Congressman Bob Wexler of Florida, who is Jewish and a

Democrat, asked Speaker Hastert "to reconsider your selection." Wexler, who said that "many constituents" from his South Florida congressional district "have expressed their outrage with respect to this decision," told Hastert that the selection "sends the wrong message to the American people - that religious discrimination is alive and well in the House of Representatives." Wexler added that he was "shocked and disheartened" by the decision.

Even the document released belatedly by the Republicans did not dampen the concerns, nor did their decision to postpone the January 27 confirmation vote. In the list of "chaplain's qualifications" is this odd statement: "While not a qualification, it is extremely beneficial that the chaplain have a strong family life, and is a dedicated spouse and parent." If this is not a qualification, why is it included in the list? Would this exclude all Catholic clergy?

Among the other qualifications is "an age that would allow an extended period of service." The eventual nominee, Charles Wright, is 65, the age at which most Americans retire and are eligible for Medicare and Social Security. Did Arney and Hastert conveniently overlook this point?

Wright is not without his supporters, however. The powerful National Association of Evangelicals, which represents millions of conservative Protestants and is close to Republican officialdom, called on its members to ignore issues of bias and to pray for fellow Protestant Charles Wright.

"America's Chaplain," Billy Graham, has also weighed in, seemingly supporting Wright, largely because Graham's wife and Wright's wife are close friends. Hastert and Graham later issued "corrections" about their versions of the event. A second vote was postponed in February because the bitterness has escalated, causing several national magazines to label the dispute "a religious war."

Republicans continued their clumsy attempts to make nice with Catholics, passing resolutions praising Catholic schools and voting a \$30,000 congressional gold medal to New York's ailing Cardinal John O'Connor.

## The Catholic Vote, *continued from page 1*

creased by several percentage points.

The Democrats should have been heartened, and the Republicans should have been forewarned of impending Catholic defections, when Bill Clinton swept the Catholic vote by around 54% to 37% over Bob Dole in 1996. Clinton carried all 12 of the most heavily Catholic states, and he increased his margin in all of them except Pennsylvania, where the 1996 and 1992 votes were almost identical. In every state for which data are available, Catholic support for Clinton was greater in 1996 than in 1992.

This was especially true among Hispanic Catholics, who supported Clinton in margins ranging from 3 to 1 in some exit polls to nearly 8 to 1 in others. Clinton's greatest statewide gains in New Jersey, for example, were in Hispanic West New York and Union City, where his vote increased 25 percentage points. In New England his most significant increases were recorded in Hispanic areas of Charlestown, Rhode Island and in Holyoke, Massachusetts. His greatest Texas gains were in Hispanic South Texas, where the Republican presidential vote declined by more than half. Similar connections between Clinton statewide gains and Hispanic Catholic identity were noticeable in California, Florida, Arizona, Pennsylvania and Illinois.

But the old-line Irish and Italian Catholic voters also rallied to Clinton. In New Jersey and Connecticut the largest Clinton gains

came from Italian ancestry towns. In Upper New England, Clinton's largest margins were recorded in French Catholic areas. Even in the Protestant South, the most heavily Catholic areas of Louisiana and Florida trended pro-Clinton. It is surely significant that the most loyally Democratic Southern state, in 1992 and 1996, outside of the home-state loyalty factor in Arkansas and Tennessee, was Louisiana.

As the Republican Party has increasingly come under the control of the Religious Right, it has narrowed its base. Clinton received overwhelming margins among all the non-white Protestant communities, even running even with Bob Dole among the high-income, Republican-leading Asian Americans. In contrast, Dole gained only among white Protestant voters, both evangelical and nonevangelical. (Though even in this large constituency there were accelerating defections to Clinton among Lutheran voters in the Midwest and among mainline and moderate Protestants in the Northeast and Great Lakes states.)

The importance of the Catholic voter is underscored when returns from the 254 largest metropolitan counties is examined. These counties, where three-fourths of the electorate lives, are generally decisive in national elections. President Clinton carried 24 of the 25 most heavily Catholic metro areas. This 96% sweep — all but Louisiana's Jefferson Parish, a New Orleans suburb — is amazing, especially when it is compared to the 25

*continued on page 8*

## The Catholic Vote, *continued from page 7*

least Catholic metro areas. Clinton carried only 8 of them, or 32%. (Six of the eight counties have a large African-American population, and the other two are in the home states of the president and vice president). This is where national elections are won or lost, and the Clinton-Gore ticket's strong appeal to Catholic voters on such issues as social justice, fairness, economic well-being and international peace was essential to the Democratic victory. Furthermore, Clinton increased his share of the major party vote in all 25 of the most Catholic metros, but in only half of ones in which Catholic are few and far between.

There were some warning signals to Republicans buried in the metropolitan area results. Many Catholic suburbanites have been frequent Republican voters since supporting Eisenhower in 1952. Seven of these heavily Catholic metro counties supported Bush in 1992 but switched to Clinton in 1996. They include Richmond County (Staten Island), New York, heavily Italian Catholic; the classic blue-collar bastion of Macomb County, Michigan, a cultural battleground since the early 1970s; the increasingly Catholic resort area of Ocean County, New Jersey; culturally conservative Hillsborough County (Manchester), New Hampshire; German and Belgian Catholic Brown County (Green Bay), Wisconsin; Eastern Long Island's Suffolk County, New York; and the high-income Chicago suburb of Lake County, Illinois.

Many of these counties last supported a Democrat when Lyndon Johnson carried them in 1964. It is therefore certain that many Catholic Republicans voted for Clinton in 1996.

### Most Catholic Metro Areas

<i>% Catholic</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>State</i>
84.3	Hudson	NJ
83.9	Providence	RI
83.6	Bristol	MA
80.8	El Paso	TX
80.6	Plymouth	MA
80.4	Richmond	NY
77.3	Norfolk	MA
77.3	Albany	NY
77.0	Macomb	MI
76.0	Middlesex	MA
75.9	Ocean	NJ
75.5	Worcester	MA
75.3	Hillsborough	NH
74.5	Erie	NY
74.3	Barnstable	MA
73.8	Essex	MA
73.6	Luzerne	PA
73.1	Suffolk	NY
72.5	Lake	IL
72.1	Middlesex	NJ
71.8	Jefferson	LA
71.0	New Haven	CT
70.7	Bronx	NY
70.3	Hampden	MA
70.0	Brown	WI

## Update

### Voucher Bills Proliferate in the States

More than half of American state legislatures are now considering bills that would create some type of system in which public funds would support private or parochial schools, according to a front-page article by Michael Janofsky in the January 31 issue of *The New York Times*.

This startling development represents a confluence of pressures that will likely affect legislative races, state budgets, and the presidential election. It will undoubtedly lead to litigation and to protracted political division. The states of Michigan and California are expected to have voucher measures on the ballots by the November balloting.

The most ambitious voucher scheme has been introduced in New Mexico, where the state's Republican Governor Gary Johnson has vowed to make it the critical campaign issue in the November elections, when all 112 state lawmakers face the electorate.

Governor Johnson has proposed a voucher worth \$3,500 per child that could be used to pay tuition at any private or parochial school. Last year he called a special session of the legislature to consider vouchers but legislators rejected his proposal. Republican allies have introduced his new plan, which he showcased during his state of the state address in January. The Johnson plan would cost \$16.8 million for fiscal year 2001. New Mexico is one of America's poorest states, and only 5% of students attend private schools.

The fate of state vouchers may ultimately be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court, which has sidestepped the issue for years. Lee Metcalf, a professor of education at Indiana University and a prominent voucher researcher specialist, warned, "If the Supreme Court rules that the Ohio program is constitutional, that could change everything. It would certainly open the door for virtually all of the 25 states considering legislation to push this through more quickly."

### Improvement in Public Education Cited

The Center on Education Policy and the American Youth Policy Forum published "The Good News about American Education" in January. The report cites a number of positive trends in American public education, trends often ignored by the media. Among the highlights:

- The high-school dropout rate is falling. From 1972 to 1997, the drop-out rate declined from 12% to 8% among white students, from 21% to 13% among black students, and from 34% to 25% among Latino students.
- School crime has dropped from 155 crimes per 1,000 students in 1993 to 102 crimes in 1997, a one-third decline. Violent incidents dropped from 12 per thousand to 8 per thousand over the same time period. The tragic incidents at Columbine High and elsewhere are actually rare, though the media have feasted on them.
- The percentage of students who complete a "core curriculum" that includes four years of English and three years of social sciences, science and math is up from 14% in 1982 to 50% in 1994.
- The percentage of students who enroll in college after finishing high school has risen from 53% in 1983 to 67% in 1997.
- The percentage of high school graduates who complete a bachelor's degree in college by age 29 rose from 26% in 1983 to 31% in 1998.
- Public school teachers were more likely to hold a college



degree than private school teachers – 99.3% of public school instructors compared to 93.4% of private school educators. Nearly 45% of all public school teachers hold master's degrees.

The "Good News About American Education" is free of charge and available online at [www.ctredpol.org](http://www.ctredpol.org).

## Workplace Religious Disputes

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reported a 29% increase since 1992 in the number of religion-related discrimination charges, making those the third-fastest growing class of disputes, just behind sexual harassment and disability. Some of the more contentious cases even go to state and federal courts for adjudication.

Much of this increase in workplace hostility stems, authorities say, from the rampant increase in office-based "spirituality." A Gallup survey found that 48% of those polled "had occasion to talk about their religious faith in the workplace in the last 24 hours." Many companies are stressing spiritual enrichment programs for employers and employees. Prayer breakfasts and spiritual seminars are commonplace. Nearly 10,000 Bible and prayer groups meet regularly in office settings across the U.S. Companies such as Taco Bell, Pizza Hut and Wal-Mart are hiring chaplains, mainly from a nationwide firm called Marketplace Ministries.

In a recent issue of *Business Week* (published on All Saints Day, November 1), a cover story by Michelle Conlin entitled "Religion in the Workplace" noted, "If America's chief executives had tried any of this ten years ago, they probably would have inspired ridicule and maybe even ostracism. But today, a spiritual revival is sweeping across Corporate America." The magazine noted that the movement was designed to "not only soothe workers' psyches but also deliver improved productivity." Another theory is that the "New Economy is causing a deep-seated curiosity about the nature of knowledge and life, providing a fertile environment for this new swirl of nonmaterialist ideas."

Conflicts between religious groups are inevitable, according to those who monitor workplace trends. This is why, says *Business Week's* Conlin, "Most companies and executives are careful to stick to a cross-denominational, hybrid message that's often referred to as secular spirituality. It focuses on the pluralistic, moral messages common to all the great religions but it also puts a premium on free expression and eschews cramming beliefs down other people's throats." Still, many evangelical and fundamentalist Christians have seized the momentum and have actually advised followers to act like "stealth bombers" to bring about "religious takeovers" of their organizations, according to *Business Week*.

A warning comes from San Francisco employment lawyer Howard A. Simon, who says, "More and more conflicts are going to continue to erupt" as religious strife spreads from board rooms to court houses.

## The Supreme Court and Abortion

Two abortion rulings are anticipated from the U.S. Supreme Court by June of this election year. One, a Colorado case called *Hill v. Colorado*, concerns a state law which regulates how close protesters may get to a health clinic that performs abortions. Anti-abortion protesters claim the statute violates First Amendment freedom of speech provisions.

The more potentially far-reaching case involves nationwide attempts to ban a type of late-term abortion procedure opponents have dubbed "partial birth" abortions. The Supreme Court decided on January 20 to examine a Nebraska law that bans this

procedure, providing criminal penalties for doctors that perform it.

What prompted the Court's action was a series of mixed signals from appellate courts. The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals struck down the Nebraska law, saying that it was too broad and could impose an undue burden on a woman's freedom to choose an abortion. The Nebraska law was so broadly written that it could have been construed to ban even first-trimester abortions that are legal everywhere in the U.S. under *Roe v. Wade*. The Eighth Circuit also struck down similar laws passed in Iowa and Arkansas.

But the Seventh Circuit upheld constitutional bans on late-term abortions imposed by Illinois and Wisconsin. In that case, Justice John Paul Stevens granted a stay until the entire U.S. Supreme Court could review all of the relevant case law.

Nearly 30 states have passed bans on late-term abortions, though a majority have been declared unconstitutional. The High Court's return to the contentious issue of abortion rights, for the first time since 1992, clearly has the nation's reproductive choice groups worried. Writes *Washington Post* columnist Judy Mann, "What's at stake is whether women will continue to be able to make private medical decisions without interference from legislatures, religious groups and busybodies, or whether states can outlaw abortion by banning the more common procedures."

## Good Friday Remains School Holiday

The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear a constitutional challenge to a Maryland law requiring public schools to close on Good Friday. The January 18 decision to let stand a Fourth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling upholding the law leaves a rather cloudy and uncertain picture nationally. A federal appeals court in Illinois declared a similar law unconstitutional.

This lack of a national precedent can be seen in the pattern of state laws regarding Good Friday. Maryland and North Dakota are the only states that require public schools to close on that day. Indiana makes Good Friday a holiday for state workers, and the U.S. Supreme Court has not yet decided whether to review that law. California and Kentucky establish part of Good Friday (generally three hours) as a holiday for government employees, while Texas considers the day of Christ's death an "optional holiday" for state employees. Delaware, Florida,

### *ARL in Action*

ARL executive director Edd Doerr addressed student, conference and church audiences in Washington, DC, Virginia, New York, New Jersey, and Florida, and was a guest on radio talk shows in Michigan and Indiana. On January 19 he spoke on abortion rights on WBAL-TV in Baltimore and on March 9 debated televangelist Jerry Falwell on Fox TV News.

President John Swomley testified in favor of abortion rights before a legislative committee of the Kansas legislature in Topeka. He also addressed audiences at All Souls Unitarian Church in Kansas City and at the Kansas City Chapter of NARAL.

Associate director Albert J. Menendez was interviewed by the Odyssey Cable TV network in Los Angeles for a program probing the US House chaplaincy controversy. It aired in February nationwide. He was also interviewed by NBC television's political and polling unit in reference to the religious issues in the 2000 election campaign.

Hawaii, Louisiana, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Wisconsin also declare the day an official holiday, though without mandating school closings or paid holidays.

The original Maryland suit was filed by retired teacher Judith Koenick, who argued that the state law "sends a message of inclusion to Christian school children and a message of exclusion to their Jewish, Muslim and non-believing classmates." The very conservative Fourth Circuit, however, saw the long Easter weekend holiday as essentially secular in purpose and an administration decision to avoid absenteeism.

Maryland's law, enacted in 1865, requires school closures on both Good Friday and the Monday after Easter - perhaps reflecting the state's English heritage, since Easter Monday was a long-popular holiday in the British Isles. Maryland law also does not mention religion or imply state encouragement of religion, as did the Illinois statute, which was designed to promote church attendance.

In rejecting the appeal to *Koenick v. Felton*, the High Court issued no recorded votes nor did it issue any comments, or dicta, that might suggest future rulings on similar matters. ARL's Edd Doerr was instrumental in setting up the case.

## Utah Legislature Ignores Polygamy

The 90% Mormon-dominated Utah House of Representatives refused in January to investigate charges of sexual abuse, spousal mistreatment, tax and welfare fraud and related crimes occurring in the state's officially illegal but widespread polygamous societies. A proposed bill, defeated on a 43-28 vote, would have created an investigation department within the state attorney general's office to target alleged abuses among an estimated 25,000 people living in polygamous communities. These communities are mostly in southern Utah's Washington County, which abuts Arizona. Mainstream Mormonism, the state's dominant religion, has disavowed the practice, but the state has rarely prosecuted it since statehood was granted on the condition that polygamy be outlawed.

## More Church-School Partnerships Planned

The Clinton administration has issued yet another set of guidelines regulating the interactions between religion and public education. Invoking the mantra "faith-based organizations," the four-page document is entitled "Guidelines for School Officials, Volunteers and Mentors Participating in Public School Community Partnerships." Plans are afoot to mail the guide-

lines, along with other relevant materials, to all of the nation's public schools. The distribution will be jointly handled by the Department of Education and the Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center, an advocacy group.

Church-state separationists are divided on this new effort, though most had supported a 1995 guideline. The new guidelines say that any school/church programs must be secular, must include participants of different religious affiliations and must be held in areas that are free of religious symbols. Schools should not encourage or discourage participation, and volunteers are encouraged not to proselytize or pray with students. Critics say that guidelines are impractical and will be difficult to monitor.

## U.S. Catholic Colleges Face New Restrictions

Most of America's 230 Catholic colleges and universities prize their independence, maintain diverse faculties and student bodies and are committed to academic freedom. But the nation's bishops, under pressure from the Vatican, voted in their annual November meeting to enact new guidelines stressing Catholic identity.

By a 223 to 31 vote, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops recommended that a majority of faculty members and trustees be Catholic, that college presidents publicly express their commitment to the faith, and that Catholic theologians must seek a "mandatum" from the local bishop, acknowledging that the professor "teaches within the full communion of the Catholic Church."

The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities expressed "disappointment" in the hierarchy's action, which was also opposed by the American Association of University Professors and the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTS). Sister Margaret Farley, president of CTS and professor at Yale Divinity School, said the action "represents on the part of bishops a lack of trust in Catholic higher education."

Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert Weakland tried unsuccessfully to delay the vote. He commented, "I believe passage will create a tremendous pastoral disaster for the church. The tension between the hierarchy and theologians now is the highest I have seen in my 36 years as a superior in the Catholic Church."

Church-state observers foresee potential problems related to public funding and state support, which are forbidden to "pervasively sectarian" institutions.

## Silence in Virginia

Virginia's Senate approved on February 1 a requirement that all public schools observe "a minute of silence for meditation, prayer or reflection" at the beginning of every school day. The 28-11 vote is expected to be ratified by the state House and signed by Governor Jim Gilmore, a supporter. All 21 Republicans supported the measure but 11 of 18 Democrats opposed it.

Religious conservatives and Republicans claim it will instill values in young people and will reduce school violence. Opponents argue that it crosses the line separating church and state, as the U.S. Supreme Court suggested in a 1985 ruling striking down a similar Alabama law.

The new measure requires teachers to "announce" a period of silence. The bill requires the state to defend the law against potential lawsuits. Virginia's legislative history on the subject could be grounds for future legal action, according to People for the American Way and the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia.

### Safeguarding the Future

Religious liberty and church-state separation will never be completely secure. But you can help provide the means for their defense in the future in two ways.

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## Chastity Education No Answer

Conservatives in Congress and state legislatures have been demanding chastity or abstinence programs in public school sex education programs. Republicans in Congress appropriated \$50 million for a five-year program to encourage states to institute abstinence education programs. Since the measure took effect in 1997, about 700 schools and community groups in 48 states have implemented the program, and five states have mandated "abstinence-only" programs in all sex education classes.

Federal funds require that children be taught the "harmful psychological and physical effects of premarital sex." Contraception, if mentioned at all, must be presented as unreliable. Both Planned Parenthood and the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. have denounced the bias of the programs and questioned their scientific reliability. Conservative ideologues helped draft the federal legislation. One of them, Robert Rector, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, told *Time* magazine, "The programs simply tell them (students) the more sex they have outside of marriage, the less will be their prospects for human happiness."

National assessment programs are not complete, but several suggest that other factors, such as increased use of contraception, have contributed to the 17% national decline in teenage pregnancies from 1990 to 1996 - all before the "abstinence only" legislation became law.

Texas Governor George W. Bush is not interested in the survey evidence, since he has spent \$6 million funding statewide programs in the Lone Star State and has promised to increase spending nationally to \$135 million if he becomes president. Bush said his administration would "elevate abstinence education from an afterthought to an urgent priority."

The experience of a high school near Waco, McLennan County's La Vega High School, is not encouraging. Despite a controversial abstinence only program, which critics labeled scientifically inaccurate and unnecessarily negative, a survey of students who had spent two years in the program found that 60% are sexually active and that 10% of the girls are pregnant.

## Scouts Get a Pass

A federal court challenge to Boy Scouts of America use of a public school building in St. Paul, MN, was dismissed on January 27 for the plaintiff's lack of "standing" (*Perry v. St. Paul School District*). Plaintiff Perry, a teacher, had sought to halt Scout use of the school because of its religiously discriminatory admissions policy.

## Charter Schools Up 40%

The federal Department of Education revealed that charter schools grew by 40% nationwide in 1999, with 1,500 of these semi-independent public schools enrolling 250,000 students. Nearly 5% of Arizona's public school population attend charter schools, and 4% attend charter schools in the District of Columbia. Other states with above average attendance are Colorado, Texas, Michigan and Florida. The charter school population increased by 90,000 last year as 421 new schools opened. New York, Oklahoma, and Oregon passed enabling legislation, bringing to 37 the number of states which allow these schools to operate. Supporters, including President Clinton, say these schools are spurring reform efforts in education, but critics cite studies showing little or no academic improvement in existing charter schools. Racial imbalances are also noticeable. Charter schools enroll a disproportionately large black student population in several states.

## Nonpublic Schools

Even such traditionally anti-parochial states as Maryland and Virginia are toying with programs that aid nonpublic schools. Maryland's Democratic governor Parris Glendening included \$6 million in his state budget, designed to provide textbook loans to nonpublic schools. ARL has joined with ACLU of Maryland, the League of Women Voters, and the Maryland State Teachers Association in opposition to the expenditure. A similar textbook loan program was rejected by Maryland voters in 1974.

In Virginia the first Republican-controlled legislature in more than a century is repaying Religious Right supporters by pushing forward a measure to grant tax credits of up to \$2,500 per child for private or parochial schooling expenses. Every home-schooled child would receive \$550 in tax credits. People for the American Way (PFAW) is spearheading opposition, charging that the bill - a misnamed clunker called the Virginia Children's Educational Opportunity Act - will transfer \$144 million from poor public school families to more affluent private school and home-schooled families. PFAW president Ralph Neas called the bill "Robin Hood in reverse." Furthermore, said Neas, 70% of the tax credits would go to families with annual incomes exceeding \$75,000, while 3% would go to those earning less than \$40,000. Those with incomes under \$10,000 would receive no benefit at all.

## NCC and Public Schools

Meeting in Cleveland in November, the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches approved a strong statement of support for public education. The policy statement declares that "the public schools are the primary route for most children - especially the children of poverty - into full participation in our economic, political, and community life. As a consequence, all of us, Christians and non-Christians alike, have a moral responsibility to support, strengthen and reform the public schools."

The statement notes that use of public funds for denominational schools "raises constitutional problems, and could undermine the schools' independence and/or compromise their religious message."

As for existing public school problems, the NCC policy statement insists that "The long-range solution is to improve all schools so that families will not be forced to seek other educational alternatives." The statement scores the inequitable distribution of funding for public schools and provides a list of suggestions for religious bodies to help "strengthen and improve the American system of public education."

(The entire statement is available on the internet at [www.nccusa.org](http://www.nccusa.org).)

## No Bible Stories in Class

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit upheld a lower federal court ruling in New Jersey which ratified an elementary school teacher's decision to disallow a student Bible story in class. The parents, backed by two Religious Right legal lobbies, charged that their first grade child's First Amendment rights were violated when the teacher instructed the youngster

### Moving?

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to read a story to her and not to the entire class. The Third Circuit ruling held that the teacher did not show hostility toward religion or preference for a particular faith.

## Charter Schools Challenged

The New Jersey Supreme Court has decided to hear arguments by four school districts that the state's charter school program is unconstitutional. School officials in Englewood, Clifton, Highland Park and Franklin Township charge that charter schools violate state law because they have no elected school boards even though they receive substantial public funding. This amounts to "taxation without representation." About 10,000 New Jersey students are enrolled in charter schools.

## Swedish Church-State Union is History

After 469 years as an established church, the Lutheran Church of Sweden ended its official ties with the government on New Year's Day. The church will no longer receive tax money, and the government will no longer name bishops. Local boards will now select the upper echelons of the clergy. The church will no longer be a branch of government for record-keeping purposes, and children of church members will no longer be automatically enrolled in the state church. About 90% of Swedes are nominal members of the church, but church attendance figures may be the lowest on earth - 1% in a recent survey attend Church of Sweden services every Sunday.

## Vatican and PLO Sign Agreement

The Vatican and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed an agreement on February 15 that secures the right of the Roman Catholic Church in a future Palestinian state. The accord recognizes the PLO, and supports a special international status for Jerusalem that guarantees Christians, Jews and Muslims the right to practice their religions and to have access to holy places. The agreement has been two years in the making. In 1998 the Vatican and Israel agreed to place Catholic institutions in Israel and in east Jerusalem under Israeli jurisdiction.

Israel is miffed, since it considers Jerusalem its capital since annexing the eastern sector after the 1967 war. "Israel flatly rejects the references to Jerusalem in the aforementioned document. Jerusalem was, is and shall remain the capital of the state of Israel and no agreement or declaration by these or any other parties will change this fact," thundered the Israeli Foreign Minister.

Pope John Paul II is planning a pilgrimage to the holy sites in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority territories in late March. Vatican-Israeli relations have ebbed in recent years. Christians are a declining percentage of the population throughout the Middle East.

## Books

*The Catholic Voter in American Politics*, by William B. Prendergast, Georgetown University Press, 260 pp., \$35.00.

Bill Prendergast, an academic and one-time GOP official, surveys the history of the Catholic vote in American presidential elections since 1844. This volume is a skillfully written, endlessly interesting, and historically accurate assessment of the voting behavior of America's largest religious community.

The author concludes that Catholic voters today are less loyal to the Democratic Party but have not embraced the Re-

publicans, preferring to opt for a more independent posture. He says, "The presidential elections of the 1990s were severe setbacks for the Republican Party in the erosion of the beachhead in Catholic territory that it appeared to have established in the eighties."

He concludes, "The voting behavior of American Catholics . . . suggests that independence and volatility will be its characteristics in the future. A large and crucial portion of Catholic voters will not be firmly tied to either major party and probably not to a third party, should one develop."

Prendergast died shortly after this book was published. It would have been interesting to see his reaction to the apparent return of anti-Catholicism to Republican ranks, symbolized by the veto of what could have been the first Catholic House chaplain by Republican leaders, the appearance of George W. Bush at Catholic-hating Bob Jones University, and the blatant blocking of a well qualified Hispanic appeals court judge by Trent Lott. The Republicans have seemingly chosen to return to a pattern of religious divisiveness.

*Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President*, by Allen C. Guelzo, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 516 pp., \$29.00.

More than a dozen books have been written attempting to analyze the religious beliefs of Abraham Lincoln. While considered a religious skeptic during his early years as a lawyer, Lincoln's religious thought clearly evolved, especially during the turmoil of his presidency. Conservatives and evangelicals have put forth the claim that Lincoln was one of them, that he had planned to be baptized and that he was converted after the death of his young son, Willie.

Allen C. Guelzo dismisses these crude attempts "to Christianize Lincoln in death" and "to baptize him posthumously." "None of the preachers and devout layfolk . . . ever penetrated to the real heart of Lincoln's personal religious anguish," writes the author, a professor of American history and dean at Eastern College.

It is doubtful, concludes Guelzo, that Lincoln's religious profile can ever be known with certainty, but his conclusion, based on an exhaustive study of our melancholy redeemer-president, is convincing. He says, "Lincoln was a typical Victorian doubter, born in the Enlightenment, shaped by classical liberalism, and nurtured in angst when the Enlightenment's confidence in its own optimistic solutions proved illusory."

-- Albert J. Menendez

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