

CHURCH LIKES STATE

– SOON –

STATE NEEDS CHURCH

The Pew Charitable Trust reported on January 10, 2001, to the Brookings Institute their nationwide finding that the majority of Americans are concerned about moral decay in society. They equally feel that this moral dearth can only be resolved with a greater emphasis on religion in American life.[1]

The study found that the heart of America is religious and the vast majority feel problems could be mitigated if people were more spiritual and value oriented.

In a surprising find, a recent Catholic study found that nearly three fourths of Americans want to hear politicians talk about their faith.[2] There appears to be little opposition to the government promoting religious values and funding church-based social programs.

President Bush has taken these core concerns and set up the Office of Faith-based Action. Seeking input from religious leaders, he met with 24 leaders of many faiths from around the country just prior to his inauguration. Out of this a momentum in favor of developing close working ties between churches and Washington is gaining.[3] As this “new” focus moves forward some would remind us that “George Washington spoke about the necessity of God and religion in the lives of individuals and in the laws of nations. So did James Madison, Thomas Jefferson (though he was a deist), John Adams, Abraham Lincoln and many other presidents and lesser leaders.”[4]



Michael Horowitz, director of the Hudson Institute’s Project for International Religious Liberty, is skeptical (though fiercely sympathetic to religious values) that the trend is healthy: “Charitable choices give too much discretion to federal agencies to neuter the religious content of the programs they fund. Over the long haul, the independence of churches will become increasingly eroded.”[5]

President Bush has expressed to religious leaders that he not only has concern for “... poverty of the wallet but also for poverty of the soul.”[6]

With a swirl of activity in “his first week in office, a momentum no one expected, the president attended a January 25 dinner with Cardinal-designate Theodore McCarrick, archbishop of Washington to “get acquainted.” Other Catholic dignitaries were present and Bush was presented with two gifts, a small icon and a medallion of the pope.[7]

This meeting led to another first for a U.S. president. On January 31, 2001, Bush called a meeting of 25 Catholic leaders to a “session” in the old executive office building adjacent to the White House. Deal Hudson, who has served as liaison for the Catholic vote for Bush, said Bush’s commitment to work with the Catholic leadership comes from his interest to “draw on Catholic wisdom and experience.” He went on to say, “I think you are seeing a historic and ground-breaking moment in the participation of Catholics in public life ... everyone who was at the meeting had the sense that they were witnessing something unprecedented.”

Archbishop Chaput, one of those present for the dialogue, said Catholic social teaching is based on two pillars; *dignity of the individual* and *commitment to common good*. During Bush’s campaigning, he repeatedly talked of the compassionate need to help Americans and repeatedly used the phrase “common good.” Mr. Bush, in the January 31 meeting, made it clear that “My first concern is that we stop apologizing for being a nation of believers, whether that be Catholic or Muslim or Jewish.”^[8]

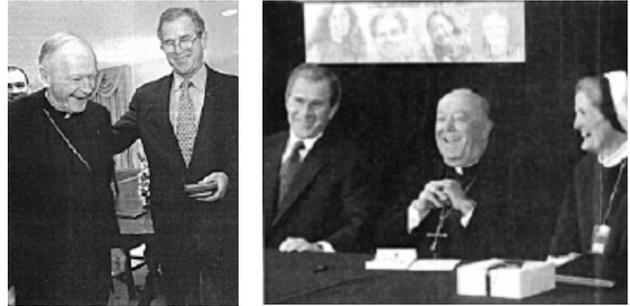
Intriguingly, John Dilulio is the new director for the new White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives. He is Catholic. Joseph Laconte, of the Heritage Foundation said, “This is a cultural moment right now, a tremendous opportunity for the church to rise to the occasion, ... The evangelical church is used to engaging in a confrontational way – on abortion, homosexuality, school prayer – challenging the status quo on social questions. But the public witness of the gospel, one could argue, is to focus not just on a prophetic role, but on the servant role. Now is a tremendous opportunity for the church to bear witness to the gospel through service.”^[9]

Cardinal Edward M. Egan said, “I hope the nation gets behind this and sees if this isn’t something to make our nation evermore loving and compassionate and, I dare say, more holy.”^[10]

One must presume that three fourths of Americans have been longing for moral restraints within our social fabric. Now they feel freer to express those feelings. Though the flow of money and coordination will flow from the government to religious charitable services, the very fact that religious leaders are part of the advisory network, we will see another flow: religious leaders influencing the government. In a very focused prophetic view of end times comes these thoughts: “The teachings of religious leaders have ... put forth the claim that the fast-spreading corruption is largely attributable to the desecration of the so-called ‘Christian sabbath,’ and that the enforcement of Sunday observance would greatly improve the morals of society.”^[11]



A circumstantial avenue to Washington's leadership has changed to a permanent conduit between religious interest and the highest office in government. A foundation is being laid that will become a stage for the final drama of earth's history. For now the state is being attracted to the churches. Soon churches will like and want more of the power of the state.



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References: (emphases added unless otherwise noted):

- [1] publicagenda.org
- [2] NCR, January 21-27, 2001.
- [3] "Team Bush," *World*, January 13, 2001, p. 16.
- [4] "The Left's Religious Test for Office-holders." *World*, 1/27/2001, p. 22.
- [5] *Human Events*, 1/19/01.
- [6] "Bush Promises Creation of Office of Faith-based Programs," NCR, 1/7-13/2001.
- [7] "Historic First: Dinner with Washington Bishops," NCR, 2/4-10/2001.
- [8] "Bush meets with Catholics on Faith-based Initiatives," NCR, 2/11-17/2001.
- [9] *Christianity Today*, March 5, 2001.
- [10] *Our Sunday Visitor*, February 18, 2001.
- [11] White Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 587.