

BUSH CHAMPIONS RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

In his State of the Union address, President George W. Bush made the case that religious organizations ought to be allowed to participate in federal efforts aimed at combating drug abuse. Specifically, President Bush proposed that Congress provide vouchers to addicts that could be used to pay for services in any drug treatment center they choose, including those with a religious orientation.

Our immediate comment was one of praise: "President Bush has shown once again that he does not suffer from the kind of religiophobia that afflicts so many of his colleagues in Washington. Those who have a phobia against the public presence of religion should themselves be awarded vouchers to rid themselves of this terrible affliction. It would be money well spent."

What Bush seeks to do is supported by excellent social science data. We know from the work of Harvard economist Richard Freeman that there is an inverse relationship between churchgoing and deviancy. When his study was replicated many years later by Byron Johnson and David B. Larson, they found that urban black youth were less likely to commit to drugs and delinquency if they were churchgoers. And according to Princeton University professor John DiIulio (who first ran the faith-based programs in the Bush administration), there are more than a dozen studies that confirm this relationship.

In a rational world, Bush's proposal would be welcomed by those concerned about urban problems. Regrettably, many of these same people are more concerned about marginalizing the public role of religion than they are in helping the downtrodden.

“Unfortunately,” we said in a news release, “when it comes to giving people choices that include religious as well as secular approaches, the religiophobes line up single file against school vouchers, faith-based initiatives and the like. Indeed, the only choice they seem to like is the one where the mere exercise of a given choice inexorably results in the loss of someone else’s life.”

The enemies of religious freedom wasted no time blasting President Bush for his State of the Union address. And we wasted no time answering them.

William Donohue put the issue in perspective: “Religious liberty is meaningless unless it can be publicly expressed. It is not persuasive to say that religion can be expressed in houses of worship, but no place else, and still maintain fidelity to religious liberty. To take another example, if we banned all displays of artistic expression in public—from paintings to music—and relegated them to museums and concert halls, everyone would declare that such a decision bristled with hostility to the arts. That is why it makes sense to see the enemies of the public expression of religion as the enemies of religious liberty, per se.”

It is amazing that the enemies of religious liberty do not want to give drug addicts a voucher that could be used for treatment in either a secular or religious organization. Thus do they show their fear of change and animus to inclusion. It is sad to note that they would deny addicts a right to choose by excluding them from programs available to the rich.

Who are these groups? Donohue spelled them out: “The National Organization for Women, People for the American Way, the ACLU, Americans United for Separation of Church and State—all of them rang their constitutional bells over a proposal that would permit an addict the right to choose a priest, minister, rabbi or imam for help (God forbid that an atheist with an M.S.W. might be passed up!). It should also be mentioned that the Interfaith Alliance, a motley crew of left-wingers, was

critical of the plan. But at least they had guts: the National Council of Churches had nothing to say about Bush's initiative, though it did find time to blast him on Iraq."

It is so plainly bogus for this crowd to say that one of the reasons why they are opposed to Bush's plan is because religious social programs "lack accountability." What they mean is that big brother (their real deity) can't police them the way he can a government monopoly.