

BUSH'S FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS TRIGGER STRONG REACTION

One week into his presidency, President George W. Bush spoke in favor of using faith-based social service programs to tackle many of the nation's social problems. His idea of creating a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives triggered a strong reaction from pundits and activists alike.

The critics, led by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the ACLU and People for the American Way, sounded constitutional alarms over alleged violations of church and state. Supporters denied these accusations and went on the offensive against the detractors. Prominent among the supporters was the Catholic League.

The same day that President Bush announced his initiative, January 29, the Catholic League stepped forward with a news release stating, "faith-based social service programs work." Indeed, we said, "The empirical evidence is so overwhelming that there really isn't anything to debate." That night, William Donohue debated Ron Barrier of American Atheists on the Fox News Channel show, "The Edge," hosted by Paula Zahn. He debated several other activists during the week.

The Catholic League drew attention to many faith-based programs, including a New York church-sponsored rehabilitation program called Teen Challenge. No one doubts that it has worked wonders with troubled youth. The same can be said of Prison Fellowship Ministries, a program for hardened criminals that has a success record that no government program has ever matched.

The record also shows that the extensive church network that marks Michigan's Project Zero program has resulted in moving

legions of people from welfare to work; the Putting Families First Foundation in South Carolina and the Faith and Families Project in Mississippi have also garnered an impressive record in dealing with this issue. Moreover, True Love Waits and Sex Respect are two abstinence-based programs that have delivered remarkable success rates in dealing with the problem of teenage illegitimacy. And the charitable services that Catholic, Protestant and Jewish agencies have long provided are acknowledged by nearly everyone for their effectiveness.

“Faith-based initiatives not only work better than their secular counterparts,” we told the press, “they do so at a fraction of the cost.” It is the spiritual dimension of these programs, we emphasized, that makes for success. But we stressed that in order for them to work, a new partnership between church and state must be instituted.