

# Religious Equality Amendment Badly Needed

At a press conference on July 10 at New York's Hunter College, the Catholic League joined with various Christian and Jewish organizations in support of the Religious Equality Amendment. The amendment seeks to secure for all Americans their right to religious liberty and freedom of speech, both of which have been jeopardized in recent years by an overly aggressive interpretation of the so-called Establishment Clause.

Hunter College was also host to Congressional hearings on the Religious Equality Amendment. At the hearings, Cardinal John O'Connor made an impressive statement to the Congressmen explaining in detail why religious liberty is presently jeopardized in the U.S. Father Neuhaus also made a powerful statement, focusing mostly on how current interpretations of the First Amendment radically depart from the meanings given to it by the Founders.

Cardinal O'Connor and Father Neuhaus spoke only to issues involved and did not take a formal position on the amendment itself. But it was clear from their comments that some remedy is needed. The Catholic League endorsed the amendment, offering the following reasons for doing so:

"The Religious Equality Amendment is long overdue. An expansionist and wholly unprincipled interpretation of the so-called Establishment Clause of the First Amendment has relegated religious speech to a second-class status, the effect of which has been to intimidate Americans from fully exercising their right to religious liberty. When students are told that their voluntary statements of worship are impermissible at a school function, and when their football coaches are told that they cannot have a short, non-sectarian prayer in a huddle, there is something terribly wrong with the

way the First Amendment is being interpreted.

“It is ironic that the very people who are sounding the alarms over the Religious Equality Amendment are the same ones who made it necessary for such a law to be written in the first place. The Religious Equality Amendment seeks to restore the status quo ante, a condition that was found acceptable by the courts for nearly 200 years, and was embraced with enthusiasm by most Americans. It is high time that those who entertain a phobia about religion not have their prejudices sustained by the courts.”