RELIGIOUS GROUPS TO QUALIFY IN FEDERAL EFFORT TO COMBAT DRUG ABUSE

In his State of the Union address tonight, President George W. Bush will make the case that religious organizations ought to be allowed to participate in federal efforts aimed at combating drug abuse. Specifically, President Bush will propose 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.

Catholic League president William Donohue explained today why he supports this plan:

"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.

"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. All the more reason why Bush's proposal should be welcomed by those concerned about urban problems. Unless, of course, marginalizing the public role of religion is of paramount importance. Then the addicts can just wing it.

"Unfortunately, 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. What a perverted concept of liberty this is."