

The Culture of Disbelief

Newsweek's religion editor recently reviewed *The Culture of Disbelief*, an insightful new book written by Yale law professor Stephen Carter, who takes a critical look at the way America's culture treats religion and religious people.

The former law clerk for the late Justice Thurgood Marshall, Carter argues persuasively for a return to the days when ideas driven by religious convictions were welcomed as valuable contributions to public debate.

Describing religion as "a way of denying the authority of the rest of the world," Carter sees an essential role for religion as "an independent moral voice" which should mediate through institutions "between the citizen and the government."

Carter points to the legalization of abortion as the event which triggered the flight of liberals from religion. Liberal elites "belittle religious devotion" and "discourage religion as serious activity."

Carter contends that the "wall of separation" so often cited in church/state conflicts was originally invoked more to protect religion from government than government from religion. In Carter's view, religion is greatly threatened and he espouses a much greater accommodation of religious practices. For example, he would allow the ritual use of peyote by Native Americans and the inclusion of parochial schools in voucher plans.

Although we do not agree with all of Professor Carter's convictions, his book deserves a thoughtful audience.