

Preserve church-state separation

By WILLIAM A. MANSFIELD

James N. Womack in his guest opinion (Aug. 24 1994) characterizes the threat posed by conservative Christians as a myth. His thrust appears to be that many leaders of this nation have been religious.

He is correct in that many of our leaders have expressed strong religious beliefs. He fails to mention that many of us carry out our daily lives with the benefit of strong religious beliefs.

What is not mentioned is that not all religious people are in complete agreement on all aspects of our culture or on all aspects of religious belief. Conservative Christian leaders talk and write as if they speak for all Christians; in fact, they do not speak for all of us. There is a broad array of differing beliefs, both theological and cultural, among religious people and, indeed, among Christian people.

Almost all of us believe in basic values of honesty and decency, in the importance of the family, and in the importance of good schools. We differ among ourselves on many details, both cultural and theological.

THESE DIFFERENCES are healthy and all of the differing views are entitled to be heard in the marketplace of ideas. This is what a democracy is about, and we are indebted to our federal and state constitutions, which assure our right to differ on religious doctrine by way of the freedom-of-religion provisions.

We do not believe that the rank and-file Christian, conservative or otherwise, wishes to curb the glorious right we have to differ on matters of conscience. Some of us are, however, disquieted when we read statements from some of the conservative Christian leaders such as the following:

What Christians have got to do is take back this country one precinct at a time ...one hood at a time. ... I honestly believe that in my lifetime we will see a country once again governed by Christians ... and Christian values." .

___ Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition, Religious News Service, May 1990.

"I hope if live to see the day, when, as in the early days of our country, we won't have any public schools. The churches will have taken them over again and Christians will be running them."

— Jerry Falwell "America Can Be Saved," 1979.

"Democracy is the great love of failures and cowards of life."

— Rousas John Rushdoony, founder of Chalcedon, "Thy Kingdom Come," 1978.

@ 'I just want you to let a wave of intolerance wash over you. I want you to let a wave of hatred wave over you, Yes, hate is good. ... Our goal is a Christian nation. We have a biblical duty, we are called by God to conquer this country. We don't. want equal time. We don't want pluralism."

— Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, The News Sentinel, Fort Wayne, Ind., Aug. 16, 1993.

"There will never be world peace until God's house and God's people are given their rightful place of leadership at the top of the world."

— Pat Robertson, "The New World Order," 1991.

Are these people advocates for a pluralistic, democratic society? Do we have reason to be concerned about these statements? Are these leaders creating divisiveness among our peoples? Do these leaders threaten separation of church and state?

OUR RELIGIOUS beliefs are much too precious to be mandated by government. These leaders have every right to be heard, but their religious views do not have any more right than my religious views to endorsement by government.

We should all continue to advocate our various religious views, but none of us are entitled to have our religious views imprinted in the law.

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