

CELEBRATE ONE NATION OF MANY FAITHS

by John Bryson Chane, Episcopal Bishop of Washington

Be clear about what historically was at the core of our founding fathers' understanding of the separation of church and state: that there should be a wall separating church from state, but not separating religion from politics. Understand that the United States was never founded on an understanding that it was to be a Christian Nation. This is important! Jon Meacham in his book "American Gospel" points to the intention of the founding fathers by writing that although God was at the center of the formation and life of the new nation, this God was a public God, not defined by a denomination's or faith tradition's self-interest such as could be espoused by say Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Jews, Puritans or other protestant Christian denominations.

Be careful in courting religious denominations and faith traditions support and their member's votes. They can represent an understanding of a civil God and not a public God that was antithetical to the intentions of our nation's founding fathers. Civil religion and its understanding of a civil God often dangerously capture denominational agendas where God's credibility can only be defined and discerned by a particular denomination or faith tradition. Be very clear in understanding that we are not nor were we ever intended by our founding fathers to be a Christian nation, but one nation under one God. To work a political campaign and try to corner the Christian vote as an example, with all of its complexities can be a dangerous thing. And if you are elected as president, this strategy can and will come back to bite you as you attempt to develop compassionate and comprehensive legislation impacting hugely important domestic and global issues effecting our country.

Understand that all theology is political. By that I mean in looking at the Holy texts of at least the 3 Abrahamic religions they all focus on care of the sick, the alien, the widows and orphans, the poor, the dispossessed, caring for the least among us, and always focusing on radical hospitality for all including strangers. Much of what is done from a contemporary perspective in the legislative process at the state and federal level is aimed at addressing these very same issues. And these issues cannot be addressed well unless through the political process.

Dr. Stephen Carter, professor at Yale University wrote; "When faith is removed from public life, when we divorce religion from politics, we marginalize religion to the point that the values that ultimately guide and help society behave in a reasonable and compassionate fashion are lost to the current and prevailing values of the culture.

Posted by John Bryson Chane on August 28, 2008 5:34 AM

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