

Clergy for Gay Rights

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As Congress considers legislation to enshrine “sexual orientation” in law, homosexual rights leaders are touting their support from an unlikely quarter: religious leaders.

Shortly before bills targeting employment discrimination “on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity” and “hate crimes” against homosexuals, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) held a rally of religious leaders outside the U.S. Capitol in support of the legislation.

The HRC, America’s largest homosexual rights group, established its “religion and faith program” two years ago to publicize its support from religiously affiliated allies and to promote homosexual causes within major religious bodies. In his 2005 Annual Report, HRC President Joe Solomonese called this new project “the cornerstone of our efforts to change hearts and minds.” At the recent rally, HRC promoted its new “Out in Scripture” resource, giving guidance from radical theologians on how to preach gay-friendly sermons.

Meanwhile, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, which calls itself “the nation’s oldest gay and lesbian civil rights organization,” boasts of having worked for years to “amplify[y] the voice of faith leaders” who are gay-friendly. Last year, it took control of the “Institute for Welcoming Resources,” a coalition of unofficial caucuses within eight major Protestant denominations opposed to their church’s historic teachings on marriage and sex.

So what’s with all the gay rights leaders caring about God?

With so much of the popular culture having already succumbed to the demands of homosexual groups, America’s faith communities are the primary remaining obstacle to the gay agenda.

Gay activists have long targeted America’s mainline churches. Progress has varied, with the 2 million-member Episcopal Church and the 1 million-member United Church of Christ largely having succumbed. The 8 million-member United Methodist is slowly trending in a more traditionalist direction.

Wavering somewhere in between are the 5 million-member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the 3 million-member Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Last year, the Gill Foundation, which calls itself “the nation’s largest private foundation focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender civil rights,” convened a coalition of major “LGBT” (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) organizations to plot pro-gay strategy within various North American denominations as part of its new “Movement Advancement Project.”

In the meantime, the Washington rally demonstrated that religious gay rights activism has yet to become a mature political movement. With hundreds of thousands of clergy in this country, HRC was able to gather only a couple hundred to stand behind their “Faith Leaders Support GLBT [gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender] Equality” signs. The clergy activists’ need for a more

accurate (or perhaps honest) grasp of basic political realities was evident when Reformed Rabbi Denise Eger of West Hollywood, California asserted that the “hate crimes” law was “not a penalty enhancement statute.”

That interpretation would likely come as a surprise to the bill’s lead Senate sponsor, Senator Ted Kennedy (D-Massachusetts).

When introducing the bill, Kennedy made clear its intent for harsher penalties in crimes determined to involve federally classified categories of hate.

The rally speakers also have yet to master the art of persuasively addressing those not already committed to their political perspective. This was painfully obvious when Peggy Campolo, wife of evangelical left activist Tony Campolo, announced that “[t]hat there is a verse in the Old Testament ... that speaks directly” to the U.S. Congress’s consideration of the two specific bills in question, and then quoted Micah 6:8 (“God has showed thee, oh man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”).

That this Scripture passage’s vague language could just as easily support any other political agenda, liberal or conservative, appeared to be lost on Campolo’s cheering listeners. The response of Miguel De La Torre, an ethics professor at the radical Iliff School of Theology in Denver, to concerns that these bills would be stepping stones for more problematic measures and questions of “where will it all end” was just to un reassuringly declare: “It ends, in the words of the prophet Amos, when justice rolls down like water, and righteousness like a never ending stream.”

For decades, the Left has countered politically engaged religious conservatives with demands that religious values have no place in the public square. But now the Left is faced with the uncomfortable challenge of justifying such shallow Bible-thumping by its political allies to its secularist base. And the Left has to also explain to why religious arguments from conservatives deserve a priori exclusion from national politics but not the at least equally sectarian perspective of religious liberals.

Such foibles aside, gay advocacy within America’s churches will not be going away any time soon, thanks partly to funding from the secular homosexual activist community.