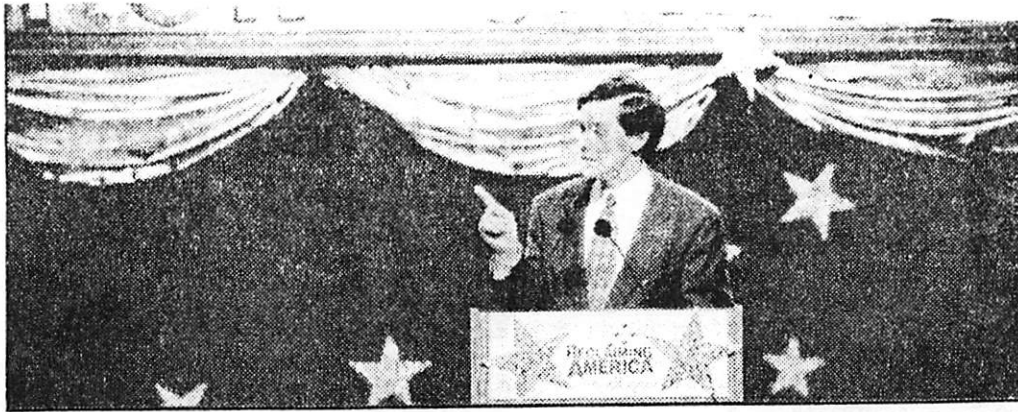


AL RT

KEYNOTE ADDRESS:
Ralph Reed, president of the 1.5 million-member Christian Coalition, urges attendees not to be lulled by the Republican Party's victories last Nov. 8.



BOB EIGHMIE / Herald Staff

Evangelist, gay hold a tense talk

By **TOM FIEDLER**
Herald Political Editor

NOT A CONFRONTATION
ENCOUNTER

Fort Lauderdale evangelist D. James Kennedy, whose Coral Ridge Ministries has thrived nationally with a mixed message of Christian hope and homophobia, met privately Friday with gay clergyman Mel White — a former colleague who has long appealed to Kennedy to abandon his slashing rhetoric.

The surprise meeting came on the second day of Kennedy's "Reclaiming America for Christ" conference, which has drawn nearly 700 Christian activists and leaders to the Broward County Convention Center.

It presaged a more symbolic confrontation scheduled today when an estimated 1,000 gays and lesbians plan to demonstrate outside the convention center against what they see as the anti-gay bigotry being preached inside.

Until Friday, Kennedy had refused to meet with White, who was formerly a leading figure in the evangelical Christian movement. White, 54, worked directly with Kennedy, senior minister at the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, in producing a popular religious film, *Like a Mighty Army* in 1969. The film helped propel Kennedy to prominence.

White also ghost-wrote the official biographies of televangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. But when he admitted his homosexuality in a book in 1993 — "I finally accepted this as a gift from God and realized I had to live with it," he said Friday — his former colleagues cut their ties to him.

White has since become pastor of a gay and lesbian church in Houston.

Prior to the conference, White asked Kennedy's

permission to attend and to set up a display with information explaining the gay and lesbian view of religion. He also asked to meet with Kennedy.

Kennedy agreed to let White attend, but nixed the display and said there could be no meeting until after the conference. But when the two encountered one another Friday morning follow-

ing the day's opening session, Kennedy invited White into a side room where they remained for 30 minutes.

White told reporters the evangelist, though polite, was adamant in his condemnation of homosexuality. He ended the conversation by saying that White should "repent his sin."

White said he sought the meeting because Kennedy's frequent attacks on homosexuals con-

tained such "outrageous and false" allegations as gays preying on children and raping heterosexuals.

The charges almost always accompanied pleas for money to support the Coral Ridge ministries, White said.

During their meeting, White said Kennedy reiterated his belief that homosexuality is a "lifestyle choice," not a physical orientation that cannot be

changed.

Kennedy, in his statement, countered that he has been the target of homosexual hatred.

"I have been threatened by homosexuals who have said that they would come and blow me up with dynamite," the minister said. "They have said they would throw AIDS-infected blood in my face. It could be said that [White's] rhetoric has stirred up homosexuals to such hatred."

* ONE OF THE GUEST SPEAKERS TOLD ME HE SAW ABOUT 10 PROTESTERS. R/K

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Evangelist, gay pastor talk but find little common ground