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Our Contemporary Moral Crisis

In the United States today, at least 1.5 million unborn babies now are being aborted each year. Nearly 600,000 babies are born every year to girls between 10 and 18 years old.

Less than 50 percent of children in the U.S. grow up in homes with two biological parents. Thirty percent of all births in this nation are to single mothers. Households composed of married families with children constitute just 25 percent of all American homes.

The divorce rate in the U.S. has skyrocketed during the past three decades, and so has the teen suicide rate. Drug and alcohol abuse have reached epidemic proportions, and so have the rates for sexually transmitted diseases for both youngsters and adults.

Despite this nation's pervasive moral and spiritual disorder, though, groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State seem more concerned about extirpating the wholesome influence of religion on public morality and public institutions and functions. M.

Stanton Evans, director of the National Journalism Center in Washington, D.C., tells us in his new book *The Theme is Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing Co.) that "We have come to a day when a child's mention of God in a graduation address or the presence of a Nativity scene in a public place triggers threats of legal action. This is a gross distortion of our Constitutional history and a dishonor to our Founders." Mr. Evans adds: "The Founding Fathers wanted to protect religion from federal government interference, not diminish its influence in our public life."

Organizations like the ACLU and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State insist they are merely trying to preserve religious freedom by raising legal questions about prayers at graduation exercises or at the beginning of a school day; however, as University of Notre Dame law professor Douglas Kmiec points out in his contribution to *Catholics in the Public Square* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor Press), "a commitment to religious freedom in no way entails the denial of the affirmation of a Creator God in the Declaration of Independence. The words of the First Amendment were not intended to exclude God from our lives, but to ensure that reason could be guid-

ed by faith—the only kind of faith worth having, premised upon free will, not force."

Concerning the much-used argument that the Founding Fathers intended the First Amendment to erect an impenetrable wall of separation between Church and State, Prof. Kmiec replies: "How can a Constitution framed by individuals who prayed at every turn for God's guidance and inspiration be read to exclude God from the classroom and public discussion? How can an American Republic founded on 'the law of Nature and Nature's God' survive if it denies God and insists on destroying its own nature?"

Prof. Kmiec declares: "If the First Amendment is to be properly understood, it must be given its original understanding.... The free exercise clause was intended to promote religious freedom by making sure that the government did not prohibit religious practice or belief.... Just as the government cannot prohibit religious belief and practice under the free exercise clause, on the establishment side, it may not prescribe or dictate religious belief or practice under coercion of law or threat of penalty."

The words of this nation's Founding Fathers demonstrate that they possessed a tenderness toward, and respect for, religion and religious free-

dom, and that they never intended to eradicate the positive influence of religion on public life. John Adams, for example, said: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other."

Benjamin Franklin observed that "whoever will introduce into public affairs the principles of Christianity will change the face of the world."

George Washington stated: "Take away religion, and the country will fail."

Patrick Henry declared: "It cannot be emphasized too strongly...that this great nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Clearly, then, the Founding Fathers wanted government to champion and defend religion and religious freedom. Unhappily, though, in all too many Church and State cases, our modern U.S. Supreme Court has strayed far from the intentions and philosophy of the Founding Fathers.

Mara Cawein, a public school teacher in Morrilton, Ark., says it well: "As a public school teacher, I wish that I was free to give my students time for prayer at the start of each day. But until the Supreme Court reverses its decision, I will not have that freedom of religion." ♦

JULY 1995 UNIFICATION NEWS, NEW YORK, N.Y.

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