

“A NATION DEDICATED TO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY”

By Arlin M. Adams and Charles J. Emmerich

Warren E. Berger’s opening introduction to the book *A Nation Dedicated to Religious Liberty* was masterfully written, giving the primary direction of Arlin M. Adams and Charles J. Emmerich’s text, which was to consider the intention of the religion clauses.

Many of the Framers believed that religion was a central cornerstone for morality, civic virtue, and democratic government. George Washington said that, “Morality cannot be contained without religion” (p. 21), and John Witherspoon believed, “True religion was the best and most effectual way of making a virtuous and regular people” (p. 30). A. De Tocqueville also stated that, “The spirits of religion and freedom are intimately linked together in joint reign over the same land” (p. 73).

The initial constitutions of the states, “Contained provisions prohibiting governmental preference among religions” (p. 67). The founding fathers also believed that, “A national church posed the greatest danger to liberty” (p. 72). Clearly the central idea was to prevent states from forcing religion. The Establishment Clause stated that one religious denomination cannot be officially preferred over another.

The founders, however, never intended a secular society, a society devoid of religion. Today the government is dangerously misguided in their “Prevailing paternalistic belief that government must meet the primary needs of its citizens” (p. 48). The text raised tremendous questions regarding religion in our society, such as whether a belief system constitutes a religion under the first amendment. A growing legislative trap is trying to define what religion includes or excludes. Trying to define modern-day

religion in our culture leads to great difficulty and some unbelievable results.

The text offered relevant information regarding equal-access issues at hand. In particular whether student led religious groups have freedom to assemble in public schools and also the use of public building by the Boy Scouts. Religious symbols in public areas continue to be an intense debate, and the author correctly stated that, “To eradicate religious symbols from public life would tear at the fabric of our cultural tapestry” (p. 83). Justice Goldberg correctly warned in 1963 that the decisions being made regarding religion could end up being hostile to Christianity, and his prophecy has come true.

Another key point in this text concerning the ongoing secular formation of our society was the portrayal of the public school system which “Holds the rudder that steers children morally and socially” (p. 76). Since children spend an enormous amount of time in school during their developmental years, the ideas and principals impressed upon them greatly influence their moral and spiritual compasses. The public school system has been one of the major weapons in strengthening humanism, consequently eliminating morality.

The author made a good point regarding the place of religion in our contemporary society. He said although, “Secularization has occurred, religion remains a vital force in the nation and in the lives of citizens” (p. 95). The mantra of our culture is tolerance, but that same tolerance is not applicable when the issues involve expressing Christian values and liberty.

Our nation’s history is full of religious people who were in the political arena and influenced our society for good. Today’s modern political men have forgotten the early Framers’ view on the depravity of man. We must remember that, “Religious liberty is an

essential cornerstone of a free society,” and it is our, “cohesive moral force” (p. 72).

Overall this book demands that the legal profession revisit and reenact the principles of religious liberty as outlined by the founding fathers, and that they exhibit extreme caution in delineating current briefings, opinions, and decisions.