

God's Last Hope?

By Jamie Buckingham

James Dobson and Jerry Falwell raised an incredible furor over the Civil Rights Restoration Act in late March. They, along with others, called on Christians to bombard Congress with letters and phone calls, demanding the legislators uphold the President's veto.

Congress had originally passed the bill by an overwhelming 315-98 vote. It was approved in the Senate by an equally whopping majority, 75-14. President Reagan vetoed the bill, saying it posed a threat to religious liberty.

That was all it took to start the phones ringing and the letters pouring in to Congress. Dobson, a respected Christian psychologist, went on the air on his "Focus on the Family" broadcasts—heard on more than 2,000 radio stations—and appeared on the "700 Club." Based on information received from the White House, he called the new law a "smokescreen" for liberal government intrusion into church life. He said the Civil Rights Act would force church-related organizations to employ homosexuals and to submit to other regulations that violate religious beliefs.

The Dobson attack was mild, however, compared with that mounted by Falwell. In a "special memorandum to pastors," Falwell called the civil rights bill "the greatest threat to religious freedom and traditional moral values ever passed."

If the president's veto was not sustained, Falwell wrote: "Our churches and religious leaders could be forced to hire a practicing active homosexual drug addict with AIDS to be a teacher or youth pastor, etc. Your preaching and moral values would be dictated by the government with federal intervention if you didn't obey."

Warnings such as these, from men with such high exposure, fueled a tidal wave reaction. Senators and congressmen were flooded with telephone calls from angry constituents. Using his "700 Club" time to stir panic, Dobson had urged his viewers to vote out any congressman who voted for the bill. Many of the angry



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callers said they were going to do just that.

Their campaign failed, however. Congress and the Senate went ahead to override the veto. The reason: the information given out by Dobson and Falwell was just plain wrong.

All the new law does is restore broad application of the 1964 Civil Rights Act—application which a 1984 Supreme Court ruling severely limited. Contrary to the charges aired by those opposed, the new law affects only those institutions that receive federal aid. It does not include churches. Even if a church participates in a federally funded program, it is not subject to any laws in the hiring of ministerial staff.

Christian schools, including colleges, that receive direct or indirect federal funding—but are "controlled" by a religious organization—are exempt from the law.

The law has nothing to do with homosexual rights.

No institution will be forced to provide abortion-related services simply because it receives federal funding.

The widespread and almost hysterical opposition to the bill, fueled by statements of some who use sensationalism to finance their ministries, raises a more serious issue, however—one that goes far beyond the dissemination of false information.

One of the hidden dreads of Christians is their secret fear that one day, sooner

or later, evil is going to win. Many Christians live in a state of anxiety that wicked people are going to take over our cities, that ultimately satanic governments are going to rule the world, that immorality will eventually wipe out all decency.

It's the Darth Vader syndrome: unless we mount some kind of Herculean effort, the Evil Kingdom will do us in.

Pat Robertson ran his presidential campaign on this issue. Tens of thousands of well-meaning believers voted for him in the primaries believing he was our last chance to stem the tide of evil, humanism, liberalism and immorality that was about to consume this nation.

Question: Now that Pat is out of the race, does it mean we're doomed?

Part of the problem is our cultural approach to Christianity. We equate America with ancient Israel—a theocracy. Many sincerely believe the United States is God's last hope.

More than that, these fear campaigns reveal a twisted theology that says God and Satan are still battling it out—neck and neck. Without our help, many believe, Satan could still win.

I am not promoting a polyana approach. Christians should be involved in civil activities. We should use every means available to fight evil, to pass good legislation, to promote justice and freedom, to put godly people into office and remove those who are working for Satan. But it is not God's intent to establish His kingdom through earthly governments—even the American way. If He had wanted to do that He would have commissioned Jesus as another Judas Maccabeus.

The hymn writer said it well:

*This is my Father's World,
O Let me ne'er forget*

That though the wrong seems oft so strong,

God is the Ruler yet.

Instead of fearing the coming tidal wave of evil, Christians should be standing on the high ground of what Jesus had already done at Calvary.

It's not that God wins out in the end. He has already won. ■