

Funding Diversity

I greet the impending funding showdown by Wide Awake students with great interest and a belief that it is a harbinger of things to come.

Wide Awake describes itself as a publication of commentary from *the* (i.e., presumably the "one and only," "correct," "unified") Christian perspective. Actually there are numerous Christian perspectives, and — why stop there? — numerous *religious* perspectives. According to one Clemons bibliographic reference (au-

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thored by J. Gordon Melton), there were about 1,200 different religious sects in the United States in the 1970's (and probably more than that by now, twenty years later).

Thus, Wide Awake's search for student funding opens the door to an instructive religious dialogue on campus: I am certain that, in this University of more than 10,000 students, at least 120 (10% of 1200) separate religious viewpoints are represented. Arise, all of you! Go out, form a student group and publish *your* perspective on domestic issues, foreign affairs, and even U.Va. happenings. At worst, it will be something to put on your resume — reporter, managing editor, etc. At best, the campus will be awash in the rich diversity of religious viewpoints and maybe (weirder things have happened, after all) respect and understanding of the religious viewpoints of others will have been fostered.

Theosophists, Unitarians, Christian Scientists, Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, New Thought-ers, New Age-ers, Gay Christians and Quakers, all have religious viewpoints which need expression. And the Southern Baptists—well they would actually need two publications, one for conservatives and one for the moderates (unless one of you would be willing to join the Wide Awake-ers). Also, Catholics who lean more toward the Berrigans, Mathew Fox and Charles Curran would need a separate publication from those who favor Cardinal O'Connor.

There are undoubtedly some practicing pagans, wiccans and/or goddess-worshippers out there. You, however, may need to publish your commentary under aliases, out of fear of reprisals (the Christians keep getting you confused with Satan worshippers).

Take the lead offered by Wide Awake, and make *your* viewpoints on current affairs known. If people knew more about you, there would be less likelihood of future witch hunts as the millennium approaches.

But, the prospect I find most exciting is that out there in U.Va.-land there are actually some bona fide Satanists — the le-

gitimate Satanists, as opposed to what Gordon Melton refers to as the "sickies." Too much unfounded fear, superstition and hatred of Satanists has been displayed by Christians, and a publication espousing the Satanist viewpoint and commentary on current events (also probably necessarily anonymous) would promote understanding of your complex theology and perhaps even a "live and let live" attitude. Now is your chance to show the legitimate non-sickie Satanism does not consist of baby sacrificing.

Of course, other religious groups should also have a chance to espouse their viewpoint/version of current affairs: Jews (again, probably more than one publication would be needed to take account of the diversity), Taoists, Hindus, Buddhists. Islam might need as many as four groups (Sunni, Sufi, Shiite, Black Muslim, etc.)

Obtaining funding for your groups should be very simple and automatic, assuming that Wide Awake succeeds. For the old tried and true neutrality principle under the Establishment Clause, wherein no government funds would be used to support religion (praised as "voluntarism" by 19th century Protestants and held up to European Protestants as an example to follow), has alas become passe.

I am not licensed in Virginia to give legal advice, but I will venture an educated lay opinion that a few of the conservative justices new-fangled "non-preferentialist" approach — if adopted — will prove simply ideal for smaller religious groups: the government is allowed to give direct aid to religion, as long as it treats them all equally and does not prefer one religion over another. Thus, whatever funding Wide Awake receives should also be doled out equally to any of you. (Indeed, I would think that even if there happened to be no students of a particular sect on campus, equal funding could be required for outsiders' religious views, in order to give all groups non-preferential treatment.) Write to the Virginia Legislature and complain if your funding is withheld!

All this funding of religious viewpoint publications will leave only a trickle for the funding of other student activities, but hey — this is the age of empowerment. Why should the rest of you look to government hand-outs for support? Fund yourselves! After all, that's what the 100 points of light and the good old American spirit of volunteering are all about.

In summary, don't miss this new opportunity to promote diverse religious commentary and viewpoint. Organize now, and make sure *your* group is represented.

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