

Houston, Texas have floundered for similar reasons. "When a plan invites competition for control between religious groups, it's a recipe for disaster," said the Reverend Barry W. Lynn, executive director of *Americans United for the Separation of Church and State*.

Then there are concerns about separation of church and state issues. The senior pastor of Austin's First Baptist Church, which hosted Bush's first "faith-based" forum after his election, wrote in a Baptist journal that "if the new commitment to 'faith-based initiatives' threatens the wall of separation, then it will be our responsibility as Baptist Christians to speak a prophetic word of protest."

Even in Canada, back about the turn of the last century, the Catholic, United, and Anglican churches agreed to run a network of about 100 boarding schools for Indian children. The system was finally phased out in 1970 due to rampant corruption, and the Canadian government issued a formal apology to families and victims of abuse at the hands of program administrators. They also created a \$350 million "healing fund". However, lawsuits and other outstanding claims may even yet lead to payments totaling anywhere from one to ten billion dollars!—threatening some churches with bankruptcy. Canadian officials are considering a plan to help bail out the churches by using tax dollars to cover part of their debts.

Further complicating matters in the "faith-based" controversy is the fact that Bush is offering no new money for his initiative. Thus, religious programs that receive federal money will get it at the expense of existing programs, most of which are secular. With federal funding limited, advocates for the poor fear that the administration's bias toward "faith-based" groups may spell the end of effective secular programs. This happened recently when the Bush budget plan defunded a federal program that pays for security officers, alarm systems and after-school activities for young people at public housing projects.

Then, too, there is concern about government oversight of how the money is utilized and the question of "attached strings". The Reverend Jerry Falwell expressed skepticism that government aid would really be given with no strings attached, and even if it were, he said, the rules could easily change in the future. "I would not want to put any of the *Jerry Falwell Ministries* in a position where we might be subservient to a future Bill Clinton, God forbid!" observed Falwell.

Where accountability and oversight are concerned, proponents of Bush's plan have rightly noted that secular government programs also get caught up in controversy, and that there are many instances of fraud and abuse that have hurt the credibility of some public institutions. However, the important difference between the incidents at religious service providers and government agencies is that public facilities are easily and routinely audited and open to official inspections. Publicly funded private institutions are kept separate and are less accessible.

In other words, when an incident occurs at a secular public facility, a legal recourse is readily available, but when a ministry runs a service program, determining what happened and holding the parties responsible leads to a morass of church-state entanglement. *Church & State*, April 2001.

Editor's note: Despite the obvious intractable difficulties surrounding the concept of government involvement in religious social services, there is growing popular sentiment that government should be involved in, if not actually in overt control of, certain religious affairs. The government will follow the popular lead, whether it is good for the populace or not.

"To secure popularity and patronage, legislators will yield to the demand for a Sunday law." Testimonies, volume 5, 451.

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