

# Acts of Faith

**In which our man in Washington hears Charlton Heston talk to himself and prays for relief from tax-funded religious charity.**

By Michael W. Lynch

Subj: The Ebullient Right Wing  
 Date: 2/17/01  
 From: mwlynch@reason.com

“Looks like you’re happily married,” said National Right to Work vice president of propaganda Stephan Gleason, as he patted my slowly growing belly. Gleason had just exited the stage at the 28th annual Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC) convention, a three-day staging ground for the grassroots of the vast right-wing conspiracy. He told the packed ballroom at the Crystal Gateway Marriot in Arlington, Virginia, that today’s AFL-CIO is not their father’s union and warned that the group recently reversed its opposition to communism. Wagged Gleason, “No word yet whether CIO stands for Communism Is OK.”

Spirits were definitely high among the 3,500 conservative activists attending this year’s conference. This is the sort of crowd that jumps to its feet at every mention of Jesse Helms’ name. “You have to keep in mind, for eight years no one in this room has had a call returned from anyone in the administration,” a CPAC spokesman informed me. He also told me that he’s often heard the word *ebullient* used to describe the mood. I knew I was being spun, since many in this crowd, including myself, can’t even pronounce that word, let alone spell it or drop it into casual conversation. So

they may not be ebullient per se, but they’ve got plenty to be excited about. They’ve got control (or something very close to it) of Congress, the White House, and the Supreme Court for the first time since Strom Thurmond’s hair was naturally fluorescent orange.

Young America’s Foundation was passing out Ronald Reagan calendars, gratis. Conservative babe Ann Coulter, who two years ago reportedly erupted into tears after she was mistreated onstage here, was cheerily hawking her book *High Crimes and Misdemeanors* for a mere \$5, with a signature and a bit of light conversation thrown in

for free. “I’ve already read it actually,” 31-year-old Kevin Mooney of Titusville, New Jersey, told me while waiting to get Coulter’s autograph. “I’m just buying it to get her signature.”

Everyone present was anticipating three days of conservative peace, love, and understanding. Where else can one take in a lecture by Alan

Keyes and informational booths set up by the likes of the Christian Coalition, the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms, and the Jesse Helms Center Foundation (all of whom were cosponsors of the event)? At one point, I found myself staring at the mug of B-1 Bob Dornan, the former war pilot and Orange County, California, congressman, on a huge poster advertising his speech. Characteristically, Dornan’s talk was titled “No

Compromise” and the Christian Action Network was sponsoring a reception for the great man himself after his remarks. Lee Greenwood’s “God Bless the USA”—a sonic weapon that reportedly reduced Iraq’s fighting forces to tears during the Gulf War—blared while a video loop of an Alan Keyes’ speech played on a TV at the Project Life booth.

The program offered something for everyone. Kevin Mooney was psyched by David Horowitz’s act as well as Coulter’s penmanship. “He’s someone who really knows how to take on the left,” he explained. Dick Cheney delivered his first major address as vice president, telling the audience he and Bush intend to “change the tone in the city of Washington.” Charlton Heston made an inadvertent case for concealed-carry permits by conversing with himself in an after-dinner speech. Chuck pretended to chat with various characters he had played in the movies. “Why there’s Long John Silver,” he said before slipping into a joke with a pirate theme. “Why there’s Andrew Jackson....” Sadly, Heston failed to run into Taylor, the gun-toting, shit-out-of-luck astronaut he portrayed in *Planet of the Apes*.

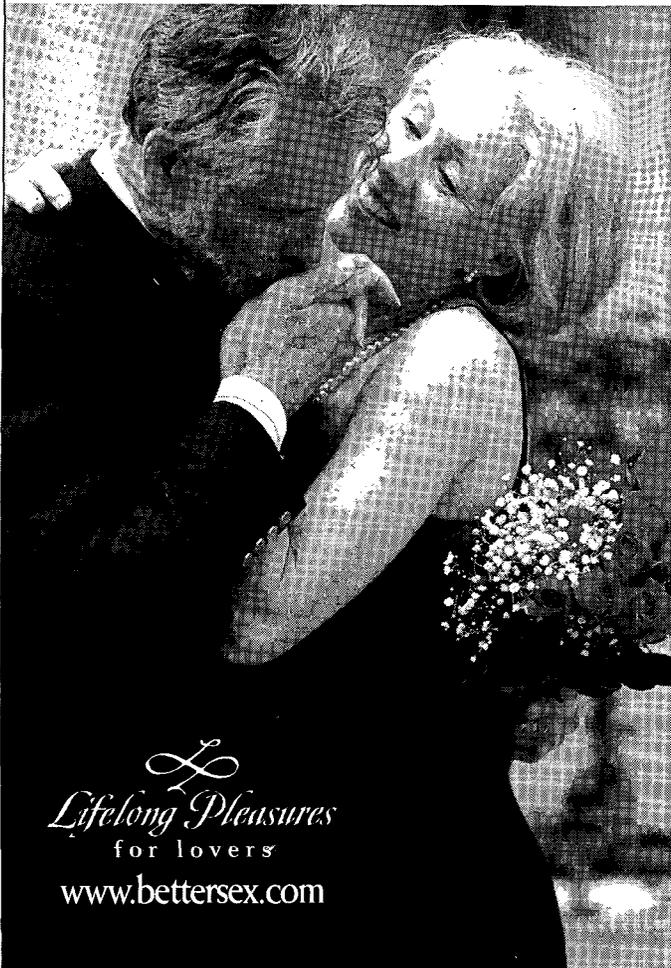
Organizers tapped Rep. Tom “The Hammer” DeLay (R-Texas) to address the topic of bipartisanship. Even DeLay, who caused a stir when he promised to push forward with a robust Republican program even in the wake of the Florida fiasco, thought he was an odd choice for the task. “I’m a little surprised I got the call,” said DeLay, a former bug exterminator whose business ethics came under scrutiny during impeachment. “In these days of bipartisanship, it’s been hard for me to find work.”

He was a big hit with at least one of the approximately 1,500 college students in attendance (the single most notable demographic block at CPAC). “I really liked Tom DeLay,” said Nicole Silva, a Mount Holyoke freshman who was waiting in line to have Coulter sign two books, one for her and one for her father. Silva, who registered Republican



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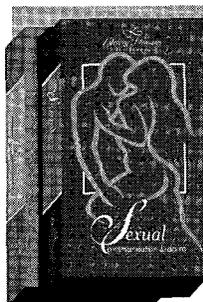
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shortly after she turned 18, found the Hammer convincing: "DeLay said the Republican Party supports honesty and they won't lie to get what they want."

I suspect Silva's experience with the larger world is still limited, at least when it comes to politicians and boys. Otherwise she'd know everyone lies to get what they want. But she's got her whole life ahead of her to learn that lesson.

**Subj: God's Floating Crap Game**

**Date: 2/27/01**

**From: mwlynch@reason.com**

Get ready to hear talk of "FBOs" coming out of Washington. When I first heard the term this afternoon at the National Press Club, I assumed it was an ancient acronym. It's always a special moment when one first gets clued in on a bit of D.C. polycyspeak. FBO doesn't stand for Fondled Bill's Organ; it stands for Faith Based Organization, the latest cure-all-our-social-ills fad that promises to be funded with your tax money.

I was on hand for the release of "In Good Faith: A Dialogue on Government Funding of Faith Based Social Services," a 16-page report that stems from a three-year bull session on the role of religion in public life. The topic originally arose with the "charitable choice" provision of the 1996 welfare reform law. That provision made it easier for religious organizations to get a piece of the government pie, and hence your paycheck. Yet it remained obscure even to those who think about religion, politics, and public life for a living.

How obscure? Consider this tale told by one of the presenters, Murray Friedman. He's head of the Feinstein Center for American Jewish History at Temple University. A few years back, he asked the Pew Charitable Trusts for some dough to do a conference on religion and public life. A fellow there suggested he use the conference to explore charitable choice. "I said, 'What's charitable choice?'" recalled Friedman, who says his ignorance of the issue reflected society's. (I wish Pew would hand me some cash to explore all the stuff I don't know, like the proper use of knives and forks in D.C.'s finest restaurants.)

Well, Friedman now knows all about charitable choice, having spent the last three years discussing it with his ideological friends and foes. And it's three years well spent, considering that President Bush is an FBO enthusiast. Friedman acknowledged the one celeb in the Press Club audience: "John is the 'Godfather' of the movement," said Friedman, pointing out John J. DiIulio Jr., who was sitting in the front row. DiIulio is the pugnacious academic who Bush appointed FBO czar and whose personal history reflects the role generous acts of charity can play in society.

According to a recent profile in the *Washington Post's* Style section, DiIulio's big break came when a tony Philadelphia prep school needed football players and decided to go fishing in ethnic waters. DiIulio, whose father was a cop in the City of Brotherly Love, was one of the few people from his 'hood who could pass the school's entrance exam, and he got in with a fat scholarship.

*Post* columnist E.J. Dionne Jr. is, among other things, a professional moderator of BBI panels (another D.C. term: "Boring But Important"). He was performing that role today. "Murray gave us our title for the day," said Dionne, referring to a throwaway line by Friedman: "God's floating crap game." Dionne then sucked up to DiIulio with a passion not seen since Bill Clinton left town (well, the White House). Dionne mentioned the *Post* profile and praised the "In Good Faith" report. "I think of this document as clearing the underbrush in this debate," said Dionne.

DiIulio, too, lavished praise on the report, calling it the most important document since the Hatfields and McCoys signed a truce. "I marvel at the fact that it only took three years," he said, having taken to the podium for a cameo after the formal presentation.

I have to agree with both guys. Any Washington debate that can be compressed into only 16 pages is something to be thankful for. And the three years of talk did produce some important points of agreement. "The government should not require a St. Vincent de Paul Center to be renamed Mr. Vincent de Paul," the report boldly declares. (The

report still skirts the difficult issues, such as whether the Catholic Church can require Georgetown University to hang crucifixes on classroom walls.)

"We did a lot of suffering when writing this document," said Heidi Rolland Unruh, an FBO enthusiast. Still, even after three years, much disagreement remains over such things as whether there should be a charitable choice law in the first place.

This area is certainly fraught with perils inside conundrums, all expressed in parables. Unruh, who's a policy analyst at Evangelicals for Social Action, said that faith-based groups have to have the right to do things their way. They have to be able, she offered, to fire witches, even if they are doing a good job, and even if they are only answering the phones. "I think the receptionist is one of the most important jobs in an organization," said Unruh.

"We were not engaged in a mutual conversion enterprise," said the American Jewish Congress' Richard T. Foltin. Foltin pointed out that there is an inherent conflict between the government's need to ensure that witches are employed and leaving an anti-witch church free to serve the community with money from the federal treasury, which, to be fair, is probably partly theirs anyway. Foltin also worries about religious symbols in social service settings and erosion of the separation of church and state.

In such moments, I couldn't help thinking: To hell with this FBO junk. Why not just double the tax cut to \$3.2 trillion, cut government, and let people use their own money to help whomever they want?

Such unholy sentiments only grew as two religious social service providers said they were all for getting government money, especially if the pie is growing. Unlike Foltin, I started to fret less about the separation of church and state and more about the separation of me from my paycheck. The FBO initiative smells like just one more political scheme designed to get yet one more group—pastors and congregations of small and mid-sized churches—hooked on the government dole. Some things you can just take on faith. ♦

## False Diagnosis

When it comes to gender, doctors don't play favorites.

**A**mong the feminist causes of the 1990s, few had a broader or more powerful appeal than women's health. Who could fail to be outraged by the charge that a male-dominated, gender-biased medical establishment had endangered women by giving the lion's share of attention to men? But maybe the outrage should have been directed at the accusers, not the accused. Today, a little over a decade after this crusade moved into the spotlight, the feminist indictment of medical sexism has been largely discredited—but not before infecting the discussion of health care with rancorous gender politics and provoking equally misguided claims of victimhood from some men.

Not long ago, groups such as the National Women's Health Network (which declared in a 1994 fundraising letter that "Medical research has mainly been done on men, for the benefit of men only") found an eager audience among journalists and politicians. Former Rep. Pat

Schroeder (D-Colo.) noted that mostly male researchers "are more worried about prostate cancer than breast cancer"; Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala lamented that health care had been addressed from "the white male point of view." Bill Clinton vowed that women would never again be "second-class citizens" in medical research and care.

The evidence that women had been "shortchanged" seemed powerful. Major studies of coronary heart disease had been limited to men. The most notorious example was a study published in 1989 concluding that aspirin helps prevent heart attacks; it had used a sample of 22,000 male physicians and not one woman. More outrage was fueled by reports that the National Institutes of Health spent just 14 percent of its budget on women's health and failed to ensure women's adequate inclusion in clinical trials.

Under pressure from the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, an Office for Research on Women's Health was estab-

lished at the NIH in 1990. Three years later, to the dismay of many medical professionals who warned against letting politicians dictate research priorities, Congress passed legislation requiring all federally funded clinical studies to include enough women and minorities to analyze the findings by sex and race. One could argue that heavy reliance on government funds inevitably invites such intervention, but that doesn't excuse the pols who wield the blunt instruments, especially when their intervention is based on myth.

In fact, as Yale Medical School lecturer Sally Satel convincingly demonstrates in her recent book, *PC, M.D.: How Political Correctness Is Corrupting Medicine*, the notion that until recently women were left out of medical research is sheer nonsense. (See "Shrink Control" on page 55 for a review of Satel's book.) As far back as 1979, more than 80 percent of NIH-funded trials included both sexes, while three-quarters of the rest were all-female. If female-specific health problems received only 14 percent of the NIH's research budget, then male-specific ones got only half as much.

Satel's conclusions are supported by an article in the October 2000 issue of the medical journal *Controlled Clinical Trials*, based on an extensive analysis of medical literature since 1966. The authors, Johns Hopkins public health professors Curtis Meinert and Adele Gilpin and their colleagues, found that 17 percent of clinical trials reported in American medical journals before 1975 were male-only and 9 percent were female-only (a disparity possibly due to the use of Veterans' Administration hospitals as convenient study sites). In the next two decades, single-sex trials were more or less evenly split between men and women. In cancer research, all-female trials outnumbered all-male ones more than two to one from 1966 to 1985.

And those all-male heart disease trials? Actually, even some women's health advocates, such as Vivian Pinn, director of the Office of Research on Women's Health at the NIH, have conceded that there were compelling reasons to limit them to men. When studying heart attack prevention, it

