

Hazy line separates religion and government

Forum on religion and the state touched upon sensitive issues

by Bryan Harkins
Collegian Staff

Last Thursday, the Penn State Behrend Religious Affairs Council held a long awaited forum, "Religion and the State." Dr. Michael Federici, a lecturer in political science, and Withold "Vic" Walczak from the American Civil Liberties Union participated in the heated debate.

Walczak, representing the ACLU's point of view, believes that if there is not a true separation of church and state, some groups will be oppressed.

According to Walczak, if the government gives money to, or shows preferential treatment to, one religious group, some minority group will inevitably be oppressed. In this case, the government is violating the Constitution.

Walczak also argued that the sacredness of religion made a separation necessary. He pointed out that religion has such significance to people that it must be treated differently.

Federici agreed that religion is of great importance. Conversely, he argued that because it is so important, it is impossible to completely separate it from



Religion and the state debate: Vic Walczak, ACLU, and Michael Federici, political science lecturer, hash out the issue of religion and government.

government controlled issues. He quoted T. S. Elliot, "If you completely remove religion from the public square, you will create a void and that void will be filled by something else."

Though it was not directly debated, a major part of the discussion was, "do we obey the letter of the law, or the law's intent?" The point of this topic came mostly into play when attempting to find the purpose of the establishment clause in the Constitution. The establishment clause forbids government from instituting a state religion or prohibiting the free exercise of religion.

Another topic discussed during the forum fell under the question of whether or not we have, or should have, a complete separation of church and state.

The consensus was that the status quo is such that there is no complete separation of church and state. Walczak, who supports a wall of separation, agreed that "there is not an absolute separation of the church and state."

Walczak continued, "the law is somewhat confused but I think we have a basic separation of church and state."

When people in the audience commented on adding to, or

changing, the establishment clause, Federici replied, "It doesn't matter what the Constitution says, the Supreme Court will essentially interpret it to mean whatever they want."

The forum then continued with more specific issues. The first of the issues to be addressed were school vouchers. The proposed school voucher program would provide tuition reimbursement vouchers for parents who choose to send their children to private schools.

Though Federici would not argue whether or not they are good policy, he stood up for their constitutionality.

"It doesn't matter what the Constitution says, the Supreme Court will essentially interpret it to mean whatever they want."

-Dr. Michael Federici
Lecturer in Political Science

Walczak strongly disagreed on this point. "Tuition vouchers are absolutely unconstitutional. If this passes, and Governor Ridge (PA-R) knows this, the ACLU will be there to challenge it."

The other issue that arose, was whether or not parents sending their children to private schools are getting double taxed. The conclusion was that they are technically not getting double taxed. But because they have to pay an area school tax and private school tuition, they are paying double.

Dr. Zachary Irwin, a political science professor at Behrend, commented on the effectiveness of the open discussion. "Of the forty or so people here, a majority, or close to the majority, of them asked questions. I think that attests to the sheer vitality of the issues discussed."

Student Events

EARN MONEY TUTORING:

The Penn State Education partnership Program (PEEP) is looking for college students interested in earning extra money tutoring middle school and high school students.

If you are interested in earning money tutoring, Call 871-6689 for more information NOW!

PARKING NOTICE: There will be no overnight parking permitted in the Jordan Road Lot (behind Police and Safety) to facilitate snow removal.

VOLUNTEER TUTORS:

The Penn State-Behrend/Diehl Elementary School Adopt-a-School tutoring program wants YOU! For just one hour of tutoring a week, students can help students at Diehl. If interested, contact Debbie Burger at 898-6014.

FREE TUTORING AVAILABLE:

Free tutoring is available in the Learning Assistance Center, 203 Library, Monday through Thursday 9am to 6pm. Friday, 9am to 1pm. Evenings and weekends by appointment! For more information call 898-6014

HAVE A PROBLEM? WANT YOUR OPINION HEARD?

Write your student leaders and drop it in on-campus mail addressed to SGA, ATTN: Public Relations.

FUNDED BY SGA

MOST UNIQUE SNOW CREATURE CONTEST

You and your friends are invited to participate in the Health and Wellness Center's first annual most unique snow creature contest held during *Winter Wellness Fest* Tuesday, February 13, 1996.

If you are interested, contact the Health and Wellness Center and we'll see you and your creature there....

Submissions are now being accepted for Tempus literary magazine. Send manuscripts to Box 1020 or the Student Activities mailbox.



LIBRARY HOURS INCREASED

Monday - Thursday
8:00 am - midnight
Friday
8:00 am - 6:00 pm
Saturday
noon-8:00 pm
Sunday
1:00 pm - midnight

1 - Thursday

Study Skills Workshop
Reed Conference Room 3
5:15-6:00pm

Movie
Higher Learning
7:00-9:30pm
Niagara Hall

2 - Friday

Nat'l Fellowships/Scholarships
Juniors and Seniors-3.2+ GPA
12:15-1:00pm
Reed 113

Movie: TBA
Noon-2:00pm
ResourceCenter

The Glass Shield
Reed 117 @ 10:00 pm

3 - Saturday

African American
Drama Co.
8:00-9:00pm
Reed Lecture Hall

The Glass Shield
Reed 117 @ 10:00 pm

4 - Sunday

Protestant Campus Ministry Worship
Service(Interdenominational)
8:00pm Room 114 - Reed

The Glass Shield
Reed 117 @ 10:00 pm

5 - Monday

Study Skills Workshop
Reed Conference Room 3
5:15-6:00pm

Nat'l Fellowships/Scholarships
Freshmen and Sophomores
3.2+ GPA
4:15-5:00pm
Reed 113

Movie: TBA
Noon-2:00pm
Resource Center

6 - Tuesday

SGA Forum
12:00noon
Outside the Gorge

Human Relations
Programming Council
12:00 noon

7 - Wednesday

Career Development Center
Job interviewing
5:30-6:00pm

Human Relations
Programming Council
6:00pm