

Christians Urged to Continue Activism

Founder of the Center for Moral Clarity, Rod Parsley says believers must influence public policy

Popular charismatic minister Rod Parsley has been touring the nation, telling Christians that they must continue to make their voices heard in the political arena.

“Although the Christian block represents the largest special-interest group in America, our values are being trampled under foot,” said Parsley, pastor of 12,000-member World Harvest Church in Columbus, Ohio.

“Only 2 percent of the population of America claim to be homosexual and yet their issues are being moved forward at a much more rapid pace than ours are on the floor of the Congress. So we believe we need a lot more players on the field.”

To that end, Parsley in July launched the Center for Moral Clarity (CMC), a grass-roots, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization aimed at mobilizing Christians around public policy issues that have spiritual roots, namely gay marriage, abortion and genocide in Sudan. Parsley said he expects the CMC () to have broader appeal among charismatics than other Christian political groups.

“Of course, there’s room for everybody. The problem has been, historically, that the church has been too silent on these issues,” Parsley said. “Our stance is that we’re going to be silent no more. Our history compels it, our times demand it,

our future requires it, and we believe God is watching.”

He said the CMC will champion just issues that challenge leaders on both sides of the political line. “It is certainly wrong that homosexuals are lobbying to change the definition of marriage in America. But it’s equally wrong that one of out six of our children are going to bed every night hungry,” Parsley said.

“It’s equally as wrong that racism is still rampant in our society,” he continued. “It’s equally as wrong that a woman only makes 78 percent of the wage that a man in her position makes. So we need to speak out on all of these issues for righteousness’ sake.”

Beyond pushing for passage of a constitutional amendment limiting marriage to heterosexual couples only, Parsley said the CMC is working to raise awareness about the Houses of Worship Free Speech Restoration Act, which would enable pastors to speak out about political issues without their churches’ tax-exempt status being threatened.

Sponsored by North Carolina Republican Rep. Walter Jones, HR 235 passed in the House in July but must still be considered by the Senate. Parsley said the bill is critical in light of hate-crimes legislation that is being used in Canada and Sweden to prosecute pastors who speak out against homosexuality.

In June pastor Ake Green, who leads a 40-member Pentecostal church in Sweden, was sentenced to one month in jail for saying “abnormal sexual practices are like a cancerous growth in the body of society” during a 2003 sermon. Fellow Swedish

minister Ulf Ekman was sued for alleged hate speech against homosexuals, though authorities decided not to prosecute the megachurch pastor.

Parsley said Canadian broadcasts of his Breakthrough TV program can include his reading Scriptures about homosexuality, but not his explanation of the moral implications of those verses. He said a similar trend is emerging in the United States.

In September, the California legislature passed a hate-crimes bill that is much like Canada's laws protecting homosexuals from offensive speech. Similar legislation was being considered in Congress, though it failed to pass in the House.

U.S. ministers say attempts to silence religious speech have intensified. Bishop C. Anthony Muse, pastor of Ark of Safety Christian Church in Washington, D.C., was accused of endorsing himself two years ago when he solicited votes during a campaign for public office.

A former Democratic Maryland legislator and president of Clergy United in the D.C. metro area, Muse said he paid \$100,000 in legal fees to combat threats to his church's nonprofit status before being found faultless.

In Philadelphia, Michael Marcavage, an activist and director of Repent America, was arrested with 10 others for passing out Christian literature at the city's OutFest gay pride event Oct. 10. They were charged on eight counts, including criminal conspiracy, which is a felony, and ethnic intimidation, which Marcavage and his attorney believe to be part of the state's hate-crimes law.

Previously, Marcavage had been escorted from a council meeting in Lansdowne, first community in Delaware County to have an openly gay man on the council—after attempting to read a passage from Romans 1, which condemns homosexuality. He was scheduled to stand trial before the end of the year and faced up to 15 months in jail and a \$2,800 fine.

Joseph Murray, Marcavage's lawyer and a staff attorney for the American Family Association Center for Law and Policy, said that even if a minister is overzealous, the First Amendment protects his or her freedom to speak.

Days after the Philadelphia incident, Murray filed a suit against the City of Philadelphia for habitually violating Marcavage's First Amendment rights. Murray said he has seen an increase in cases of Christians who were arrested for engaging in religious free speech.

"The political climate today is not particularly friendly toward Christians," Murray said. "Right now, we are not living in the country that most of us grew up in."

Parsley said prayer, information and activism are the three tools the CMC will use to mobilize Christians at the grass roots. Before the November election, Parsley urged congregations to start by simply voting, citing statistics that there had been a 40 percent drop in voter turnout among evangelicals.

In October, he spoke to the 3,000-member Grand Rapids First Assembly of God in Michigan. "I deeply feel our country is at a crossroads," said pastor Scott Hagan. "I try to be very careful when it comes to mixing the kingdom and politics."

[Parsley's sermon] is definitely not a candidate-driven message. When public policy begins to speak to issues directly spoken to in Scripture, it has nothing to do with a candidate."

He said he hoped the message motivated his congregation to prayer and "godly citizenship, not political activism ... not toward politics, but toward righteousness."

For his part, Parsley said he hopes more Christians will run for local-government seats, serving on school boards and city councils. He said he's not worried about having complaints against his ministry filed with the IRS. "I believe that the church that claims to uphold the cause of Christ yet condemns confrontation is little more than a social club that wants rain without thunder and lightning," he told Charisma.

"Our armor prophesies that we are headed for a conflict, and I believe we're built for the battle; we're created for the conflict. The church is nothing unless it is salt and light in the society into which the Lord has infused us. And we're looking for revival—a true, genuine, culture-shaking move of God where the moral climate of our cities is changed, and the effect is felt like shock waves throughout the entire nation."

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