

Commentary on Pat Robertson and the Supreme Court

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In response to the Supreme court's ruling that anti-sodomy laws are unconstitutional, evangelist Pat Robertson urged his followers to engage in what he called a 21-day "prayer offensive." He wants his viewers to pray that three Supreme Court justices step down. Robertson pointed out that one of the judges is eighty-three, another has a heart condition, and a third has cancer. Thus, he asks, "Would it not be possible for God to put it in the minds of these three judges that the time has come to retire?" Robertson wants them replaced so that conservative judges can reverse their ruling.

Robertson is wrong to condemn the court. The ruling strengthens America's moral core and it should be celebrated, not criticized. The court has enacted the next positive step in the pursuit of freedom, equality, and justice for all people.

The court ruled that the government has no right to regulate the sexual activities of consenting adults. Sexual and romantic morality is a personal, religious matter, not a public, political one. In affirming this, the court weakens the power that particular religions have over America as a whole. This is, of course, why Robertson is getting involved. He wants his own personal moral standards to bind all people, even those who do not share his religious beliefs. He is using both political and spiritual pressure to create a society that is made in his own image.

Some say that the court's decision will lead to same sex marriages. If personal relationships are private matters, then it will be that much harder to justify defining marriage as solely between a man and a woman. Let's hope this is true. If the Court were to declare that same sex couples could legally marry, this would be one of the most important moral advances our society has ever seen.

There was a time in human history when laws prohibited blacks from marrying whites, when laws forbade people of one religion from marrying people of another. There was a time when laws allowed husbands to beat, rape, and control their wives' every move, and when these same women could not leave their husbands because all of their assets, including their own lives, were legally the property of the men who abused them. In each of those cases, complex, sophisticated, and long-standing religious commitments justified oppression and prejudice. And when each of these situations began to change, when everyone's universal

equality was beginning to be recognized, people like Pat Robertson pointed to the advancements and called them evil. Twenty years from now, we will look back at the attempt to prohibit same sex marriage with shame, and wonder how is it that we, otherwise moral people, could not have seen the injustice that forbade two people from loving each other.

And it is love that is at the core of this debate. As a self-proclaimed Christian, Robertson claims to promote love: to pass on the forgiveness, kindness, and respect that Christians associate with the life and meaning of Jesus. Yet Robertson is asking the government to prevent two people, two adults, from loving one another, from engaging in a committed, caring, monogamous, life-long relationship, simply because he personally believes that there is something "unnatural" about homosexuality. By denying love, Robertson is promoting hate, and, like the crusaders who came before him, he is promoting war.

Robertson's call for a "prayer offensive" is military rhetoric. One engages in an offensive to destroy an enemy, to attack them before they attack you, to overwhelm. Furthermore, I believe, Robertson's prayer for retirement is really a hidden call for death. His focus on the age and health status of the justices is a thinly veiled request for God to kill people who are weak with age and illness. Robertson wants God to smite his enemies, and he wants his followers to pray for it.

Since President Bush condemns his enemies as fanatics while ignoring his own religious extremism, it is no surprise that Robertson feels comfortable in publicly calling for religious violence. Bush himself originally called the war in the Middle East a crusade, and Robertson has jumped on this bandwagon. Religious war is once again in vogue.

So, when faced with the choice of supporting same sex marriage or Robertson's prayer offensive, we must ask ourselves, would we rather encourage people to love one another and to cultivate a life-long commitment that supports the concept of monogamy and marriage, or would we rather ask that people use violence, hatred, and prayer to kill those who have dedicated their lives to public service and the promise of America? Given those choices, I would like to think that most people would choose love. Robertson, on the other hand, hopes otherwise.