

Religious rights for Native Americans

Officials from 16 Protestant and Roman Catholic agencies are writing senators urging support for amendments to the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. The amendments would reverse some elements of Native religion that have been weakened by Supreme Court rulings. The amendment would allow use of peyote in worship service, change the process for gaining possession of eagle parts and feathers, give better protection of sacred sites, and guarantee rights of Native American prisoners to practice their religions. Native Americans would also have legal recourse if their rights were violated.

RELIGION

Colorado boycotted by churches

The executive committee of the Association of Diocesan Liturgy and Music Commissions of the Episcopal Church voted unanimously at its recent meeting to decline an offer to hold its 1995 meeting in Colorado, due to the passage of Amendment 2. The Rev. James Newman, ADLMC president, noted that passage of the amendment was in conflict with the organization's theme of "hospitality, welcome, inclusion, and inculturation in the Body of Christ." Because the Episcopal Church's General Convention has stated its opposition to legal discrimination against gays and lesbians, and because ADLMC is a Christian organization, "We feel that we cannot in good conscience meet in Colorado at this time,"

Newman said.

Colorado United Methodists Against Discrimination is circulating petitions asking the United Methodist Church to move its 1996 national gathering from Denver to an alternate location, in response to the passage of Amendment 2. "We need to bring national pressure on the state of Colorado to overturn this legalized discrimination," the organizations said in a press release. United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns also passed a resolution at its winter national council, calling on the United Methodist Church to move the site of the national meeting, saying that the group "opposes the patronage of any locale that has discrimination ordinances against homosexuals." The board of directors of the Reconciling Congregation Program of the United Methodist Church added its voice opposing the national meeting in Denver saying, "[the national meeting] is the most visible and most official gathering of the United Methodist Church. We dare not meet in a place in which the policy is in such blatant opposition to the protection of basic human rights, a widely-supported United Methodist position."

Operation Rescue embarrassed

Operation Rescue, the notorious anti-abortion group, planned protests around the country on January 8 against gays in the military. The protests, originally scheduled for "100 cities," according to Operation Rescue's chief, Randall Terry, fizzled out, as only a handful of protesters appeared in three or four locations. Robert Bray, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force director of public information said, "If there are any homosexuals out there, gay men in particular, who still believe abortion is not a gay issue, let this be a wake-up call. Operation Rescue has allied itself with other far-right religious extremist groups to

attack gay and lesbian freedom. Their objective is to mandate control over our privacy. Their agenda is not to 'save babies,' but to repress people, especially women and gays."

UFMCC pushing the military

Encouraged by President Clinton's actions to open the military to gays and lesbians, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches again asked the Pentagon to allow its ministers to serve as military chaplains. The Defense Department deferred an earlier request by the UFMCC to be recognized as a religious body able to endorse chaplains, saying that the UFMCC must first present a candidate who is heterosexual. With the new request, the UFMCC reaffirmed as its candidate Rev. Dusty Pruitt, a lesbian who successfully sued the Army after she was discharged, because of her sexual orientation, in 1986.

P-FLAG booklet: *Is Homosexuality a Sin?*

God approves of homosexuality, as well as gay and lesbian marriages and parenting. This is the prevailing belief of 19 distinguished theologians and religious leaders of 10 different faiths surveyed nationwide. Their responses, published in a booklet *Is Homosexuality a Sin?*, were given to a survey conducted by the Federation of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. "This booklet comes as a relief to many parents who were taught that homosexuality is wrong," says Mitz Henderson, P-FLAG President. "The enlightened answers from prominent Christian and Jewish leaders will now help families reconcile their love of God, and of their gay or lesbian loved one. It will help reunite families who had become alienated by the gay issue," Henderson says. Some of the respondents, who believed that the

Bible denounces homosexuality, emphasized that the passages frequently cited by religious fundamentalists are anachronistic, or have been invalidated by modern science. "The survey shows that many leaders in the religious community challenge traditional understanding of this issue," says Henderson.

Quakers support end of military ban

The American Friends Service Committee said it supports President Clinton's pledge to end discrimination against gays and lesbians in the military. "We are a pacifist organization," Kara Newell, of the Quaker relief group wrote to Clinton, "hence our support for your position does not have to do with any desire to make the military more attractive to young women and men." Instead, she said, the issue "is a matter of simple justice—that discrimination based on sexual orientation, like other forms of discrimination, should be ended everywhere in our society."

Washington's Catholic Conference opposes anti-discrimination bill

The Washington State Catholic Conference recently announced its opposition to proposed anti-discrimination legislation addressing sexual orientation and familial status. The WSCC was not opposed to civil rights protections for homosexuals in employment, housing, and public accommodations, but did oppose this bill because of the possibility that it might harm society's preference for the heterosexual family.

compiled by Mathew Nelson, an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ

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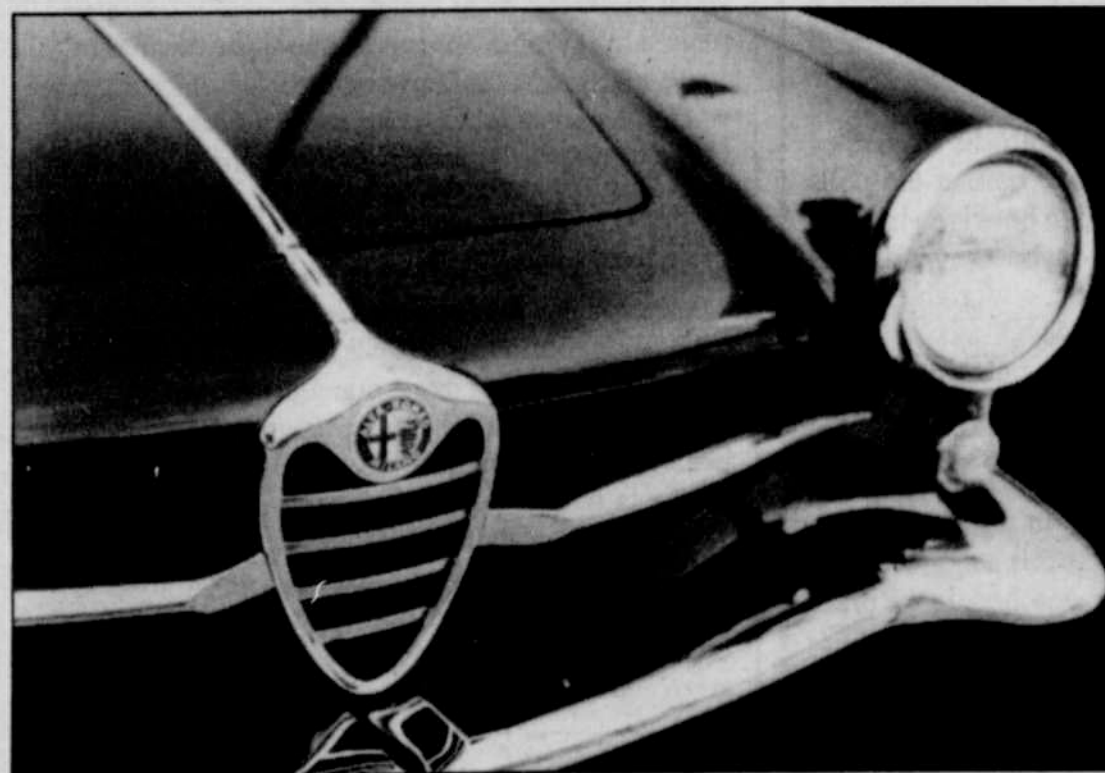
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