



NEWS RELEASE

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SERIES OF NATIONAL DEBATES ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ISSUES

FRAMING THE DEBATE: RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Waco, Texas (September 18, 2006) - The chapters of The American Constitution Society for Law and Policy and The Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies at Baylor University, in partnership with The Council for America's First Freedom and John M. Templeton, Jr., M.D., will host a debate addressing religion in the public square on Monday, September 25, 2006 at 4:00 p.m. at the Sheila and Walter Umphrey Law Center, in room 127 at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

These law school chapters are hosting the first in a series of ten debates the Council will present over the next 18 months that will take place at different law schools around the country. "No issue was more central to our Nation's founding than freedom of religion and no part of the Constitution continues to capture the imaginations and passions of Americans more than the religion clauses of the First Amendment. We are excited to be sponsoring this series of debates at law schools, which will delve into questions about the role of religion in this country -- including the appropriate relationship between religion and government in contemporary society and the role of religion and religious belief in American politics and public life," said Lisa Brown, Executive Director of the American Constitution Society. "The Federalist Society, as the foremost organization fostering debate on law school campuses, is

pleased to be involved in this series which will explore questions of religious freedom and interpretations of the First Amendment” added Federalist Society President Eugene B. Meyer.

The Council for America’s First Freedom asserts that every American deserves to learn about the issues regarding religious freedom and to hear all sides of a controversy. The debates will examine key religious freedom issues in depth and with mutual respect, encouraging open dialogue and educating the public about the importance of religious freedom.

Two nationally-renowned experts with opposing viewpoints—**T. Jeremy Gunn, JD, Ph.D.**, Director of the ACLU’s Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, and **Kevin J. “Seamus” Hasson, JD**, President of The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty—will debate the constitutional issues and public-policy implications of their positions. Ultimately, each will strive to suggest legal policy that best protects the rights of all as each interprets those rights.

“We hope to identify and inspire an audience that seeks information about the content of disagreement, wants to know more, and respects the diverse positions held,” said Ambassador Robert A. Seiple, President, Council for America’s First Freedom. “We are delighted to be partnering with the American Constitution Society and the Federalist Society at Baylor and other prominent law schools nationwide to address religious issues that most people are leery of discussing in the public arena.”

Dr. Isabelle Kinnard, Council Education Director, added, “Rather than knee-jerk reactions that have dominated America’s discourse to date, the debates will create an environment for thoughtful reflection and mutual respect. We anticipate that the debates will reduce tension over legal and culture-war religion issues by helping audiences gain a greater understanding of them.”

This debate on religion in the public square is free and open to the public. For more information, please call Clay Schramm at (254) 709-7837 or email clay_schramm@baylor.edu.

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[About the Council for America's First Freedom](#)

The mission of the Council for America's First Freedom is to build on a historic legacy of religious freedom that began in Richmond, Virginia in 1786, developed into an American constitutional guarantee and is now recognized as an international human right. Through educational programs in diverse communities here and abroad, the Council promotes understanding and respect for this core value: *the freedom of thought, conscience and belief*. The Council is a politically and religiously neutral 501(c)(3) organization that provides educational outreach programs that encourage audiences worldwide to examine their own consciences, to understand the beliefs of others, and to respect the right of religious freedom for all. For more information, please visit: www.firstfreedom.org.

[About the American Constitution Society for Law and Policy \(ACS\)](#)

The American Constitution Society for Law and Policy (ACS) is one of the nation's leading progressive legal organizations. Founded in 2001, ACS is a rapidly growing network of lawyers, law students, scholars, judges, policymakers and other concerned individuals. Our mission is to ensure that fundamental principles of human dignity, individual rights and liberties, genuine equality, and access to justice enjoy their rightful, central place in American law. ACS aims to revitalize and transform the legal and policy debates occurring in law-school classrooms, federal and state courtrooms, legislative hearing rooms and the media. For more information, please visit: www.acslaw.org.

[About the Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies](#)

Founded in 1982, The Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies is a group of conservatives and libertarians interested in the current state of the legal order. It is founded on the principles that the state exists to preserve freedom, that the separation of governmental powers is central to our Constitution, and that it is emphatically the province and duty of the judiciary to say what the law is, not what it should be. The Society seeks both to promote an awareness of these principles and to further their application through its activities. This entails reordering priorities within the legal system to place a premium on individual liberty, traditional values, and the rule of law. It also requires restoring the recognition of the importance of these norms among lawyers, judges, and law professors. In working to achieve these goals, the Society sponsors programs at law schools and in cities across the country. For more information, please visit: www.fed-soc.org.