

On Faith



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On Faith panelist **Anthony Stevens-Arroyo** writes that President Obama appears liberal but also is "strikingly pragmatic." That idiosyncrasy just might benefit Catholic schools. newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith

Hymn's Power As Black Anthem Endures

By ADELLE M. BANKS
Religion News Service

When the Rev. Joseph Lowery was chosen to offer the closing prayer at President Obama's swearing-in ceremony, he knew which hymn he would borrow to start his prayer.

"God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, Thou who has brought us thus far along the way," he prayed, invoking the third verse from "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the hymn that's long been considered the unofficial black national anthem.

"Thou who has by Thy might, Led us into the light, Keep us forever in the path, we pray."

The words rang out across the Mall that day, and again the next day at the Washington National Cathedral in the sermon preached to the new president. For more than a century, they have been used to mark special occasions, including the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and have become a staple for Black History Month each February.

Lowery, a retired United Methodist minister who co-founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with King, said he thought the song was entirely appropriate for the inaugural of the nation's first African American president.

"It had historicity; it had the religious context," said Lowery, who has used the third stanza as a regular hymn of praise in his worship services for 25 years. "The black experience is sort of wrapped up in that hymn."

Although Lowery has always called it a "national hymn" because he didn't think the nation should have two separate anthems, many African Americans give it the same honor as the traditional national anthem: They stand when it is sung.

"It is our 'Star-Spangled Banner,'" said Jackie Dupont-Walker, social action director of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which is why many African Americans respectfully stand when the hymn is



The Montgomery County Law Enforcement Gospel Choir has used "Lift Every Voice and Sing" to commemorate Juneteenth, the day in 1865 when the last slaves were informed that they were free.

FROM THE PANEL

Excerpts of Our Weekly Discussion on the Web

Should Faith-Based Programs Getting Federal Money Discriminate?

Below is an excerpt from "On Faith," an Internet feature sponsored by The Washington Post and Newsweek. Each week, more than 50 figures from the world of faith engage in a conversation about an aspect of religion. This week's question: Should the Obama administration let faith-based programs receiving government grants discriminate against those they hire or serve?

Faith-based programs should not be able to discriminate on the basis of religion against those served in federally funded programs. Period! The propriety of discrimination based on religion in hiring is a little more complicated. Let me explain.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of, among other things, religion, but it grants an exemption to religious organizations, allowing them to favor adherents of their particular faith in hiring. While this exemption clearly applies when the religious organization is using the funds of the faithful, the administration should not allow religious organizations to use taxpayer funds to discriminate in hiring against a qualified person based on nothing more than religious beliefs.

— J. Brent Walker, executive director, Baptist Joint Committee

For decades, many religious organizations have sought federal funding for social ministry programs. The logic is understandable, and there is no doubt that religious institutions and organizations are often far more effective and efficient in delivering these services. The refusal to fund these programs would, in essence, represent a discrimination against these religious organizations. The Bush administration was right to see this as both wrong and costly.

Nevertheless, I would never advise a Christian organization to participate in these federal programs or to receive tax monies. The brutal reality is that when government money flows, government regulation inevitably follows. Furthermore, taking government money sets a bad precedent and can easily become a seductive snare. When government policies violate the organization's convictions, or when regulations would require a compromise of those convictions, government funding is a trap.

— R. Albert Mohler Jr., president, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

My sense is that if there had been an issue when my religious beliefs came into conflict with something or someone, it would have been handled through dialogue. While it's important for religious groups to recognize that they live, and indeed must live, in a society where people believe and behave differently, it is also important to recognize that religious groups do have some positions that are truly nonnegotiable. Religious liberty is the rubric we have in American civil society that appreciates this reality. But religious liberty, both in practice and in theory, is never absolute and it often has to be weighed in relation to the common good.

Some media reports have indicated that the Obama administration is contemplating having cases of discrimination by religious groups in hiring considered on a case-by-case basis. While this approach is more adversarial than dialogical, it does respect the complex role of religion and religious groups in American civil society. It is imperfect to be sure, but in most cases the Obama administration should probably let faith-based programs that receive government grants discriminate against those they hire or serve: Apparent discrimination might be understandable discernment that could eventually lead to dialogue.

— Mathew N. Schmalz, professor of religious studies, College of the Holy Cross

Faith-based programs receiving government money should not limit those being served to those of the faith-based institution's own particular faith. . . .

Should faith-based programs receiving government money be free to limit their hiring to those of their own particular faith? My answer is yes. The esprit de corps of any faith-based institution and its programs is dependent, not only for vigor but for existence itself, on shared worship and fellowship. The presence of otherwise-minded employees would put a damper on *communio sanctorum*, the particular faith's common speech and camaraderie, the peace and joy of labor among the like-minded.

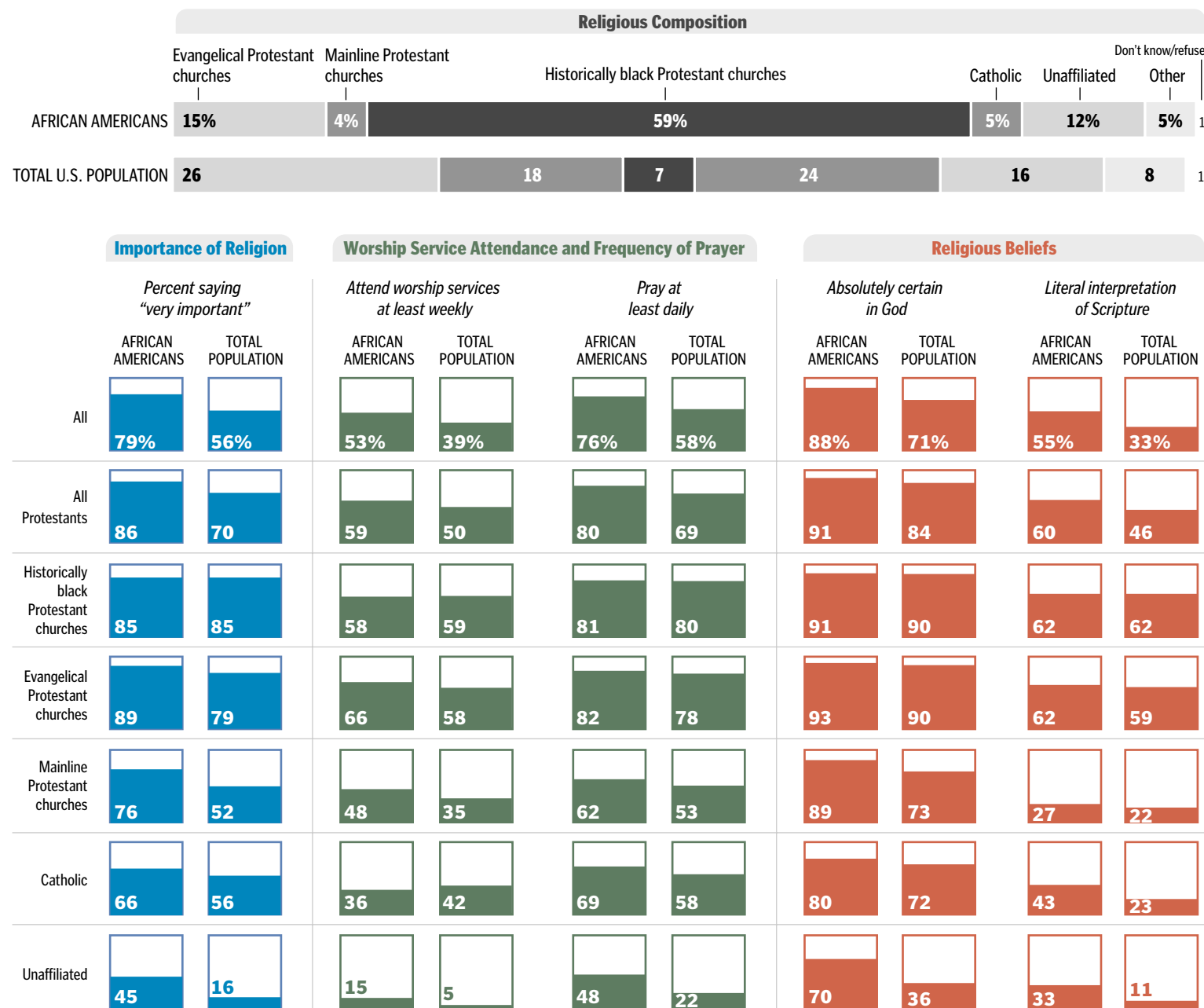
— Willis E. Elliott, minister and author

To read the complete essays and see more "On Faith" commentary, hosted by Jon Meacham and Sally Quinn, go to newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith.

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A Religious Portrait of African Americans

A report by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life finds that African Americans are demonstrably more religious on a variety of issues than the U.S. population as a whole. The forum looked at the level of affiliation, church attendance, frequency of prayer and the importance of religion to someone's life. Here is a snapshot of the major findings:



SOURCE: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

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