



Attorney General William Barr speaks at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020, in Nashville, Tenn. (AP/Mark Humphrey)

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U.S. Attorney General William Barr warned a group of Christian broadcasters on Feb. 26 that the decline of religion in America is undermining liberal democracy. In a speech at the National Religious Broadcasters convention in Tennessee, Barr said religion is necessary to provide citizens with a moral compass. Without religious morality, tyranny is necessary to control people, he said.

Barr told an audience of a few hundred that the courts' misinterpretation of the Constitution's Establishment Clause is helping drive the erosion of religion "and its benevolent influence on our communal life."

"While most everyone agrees that we must have separation of church and state, this does not require that we drive religion from the public square and affirmatively use government power to promote a culture of disbelief," he said to applause.

Barr also asserted that progressives want to use public benefits to create a permanent and dependent political constituency.

"The tacit goal of this project is to convert all of us into 25-year-olds living in the government's basement, focusing our energies on obtaining a larger allowance rather than getting a job, and moving out and taking responsibility for ourselves," Barr said to enthusiastic applause.

Barr said he's an optimist who believes that "the nation's greatest days lie ahead." He told the broadcasters that their role is vitally important in providing a diversity of voices in an ever-consolidating media environment.

"In this secular age it is especially vital that our religious perspective is voiced," he said.

Barr's speech was sponsored by a nonprofit group called Save the Persecuted Christians, whose president Frank Gaffney has claimed that the Muslim Brotherhood — an Islamist political party now banned in its native Egypt — is infiltrating the

federal government in an attempt to overthrow it and install Islamic law in the U.S.

Speaking before Barr, Gaffney said his group was happy to sponsor the attorney general's remarks but was not sponsoring the following panel, which included Asma Uddin, a lawyer and scholar specializing in international and U.S. religious freedom. Gaffney called Uddin a "Sharia supremacist," and said, "I had hoped she would not be given a platform."

Barr did not address Gaffney's remarks.

Speaking to the convention earlier in the day, U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said religious schools and colleges should be able to receive government support on an equal footing with public and other non-religious institutions. To that end, she recently proposed a federal tax credit that would help fund scholarships for private K-12 schools. Many public school advocates oppose the plan.

The audience cheered her assertion that too many children are not being allowed to express their religious faith in school.

Asked how her religious faith influences her work, DeVos said, "It basically is foundational to everything that I do. It does inform all my days, all of my decisions."

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