

# 'Take Moral Majority seriously'

By Robert Di Veroli

1616

Tribune Religion Writer

The Moral Majority is no passing fancy, says the Rev. Dr. Walter Capps, a critic of the conservative political action coalition founded by the Rev. Jerry Falwell.

"I think it's going to be around for a while," Capps, professor of religious studies at UC Santa Barbara, said here in an interview.

"George McGovern said a couple of days ago he thought its power had already peaked, but I don't think so. I don't think it's yet had the impact on the American Christian community, on the life of American Christian congregations, that it will have. I think that's still coming."

This could all change, however, if America's political climate becomes more liberal, according to Capps, who also is a clergyman in the Lutheran Church in America and former director of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara.

Capps says the Moral Majority should be taken seriously because it speaks for many Americans who are distressed by what they regard as a wave of moral permissiveness, crumbling family life, the high divorce rate and the decline of patriotism and of American influence as a world power and other signs of weakness.

"I think they speak on behalf of a lot of resentment that's built up over the years, partly because of Watergate and the way the Vietnam war turned out," Capps said. "A lot of Americans don't want to tolerate America being in a weakened position. I think primarily he's speaking for those people."

Capps, here to address Lutheran clergymen at College Lutheran Church, said Moral Majority non-members would empathize with Falwell's "diagnosis of America's ills," but disagree with his approach.

"I think they're very much concerned about the stability of the family, the character of this country and the education of youth, but I think they would disagree with the simple solutions he offers," Capps said.

In particular, they would disagree with Falwell's dogmatic emphasis on "returning to the principles of the founding fathers" and "a kind of biblical morality," Capps added.

"I think the alternative to the Falwell position is to talk about the needs of the global society, about America as a partner in world order and not just of America as the winner over the Soviets in a kind of Armageddon-type competition."

Capps, who interviewed Falwell at his Lynchburg, Va., church recently, said Falwell does not always make a clear distinction between his calling as minister and as leader of Moral Majority.

"The sermons he gives at Thomas Road Baptist Church sound very much like the documents of the Moral Majority," Capps said.

Asked if Falwell and Moral Majority mix religion and politics any more than liberal churchmen and organizations, Capps said:

"I'm not suggesting they're violating church and state, but I think clearly politics and religion go hand in hand in his speeches whether he's speaking from the pulpit in a Baptist church or on behalf of Moral Majority. Religion and politics always go very close together."

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## PROFESSOR SPEAKS OUT

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