



Steven Tipton, guest lecturer Monday night at the Knight Law Center.

Religion and U.S. politics intersect at law school lecture

Emory University professor Steven Tipton will speak on how religion and society shape our self-image

By: Mike O'Brien

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During every election, the separation of church and state comes up with candidates taking religious stances on issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage and capital punishment.

Steven Tipton, a sociology of religion professor at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, is a longtime scholar regarding religion's role in society. This evening, he will give a talk at the University titled "Public Pulpits: Religion in the Moral Argument of Public Life."

In his lecture, Tipton, whose book of the same name will be published early next year, will explore the ability of religious and political institutions to shape the way we think about ourselves, our society and our government. His talk will focus specifically on non-denominational religious entities, or parachurch groups, which are hired by churches to lobby for various social issues in Washington.

At a glance

Emory University professor Steven Tipton's lecture, "Public Pulpits: Religion in the Moral Argument of Public Life," will take place Monday at 7 p.m. in Room 175 at the Knight Law Center.

Following the free event, there will be a reception and book signing in the Wayne Morse Commons.

"If you look at parachurch groups, compared to major religious church organizations... they possess much narrower, more homogenous profiles," said Tipton in a phone interview from Atlanta. "That's a problem we need to address and I'll talk about it."

"Public Pulpits" is sponsored by the Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics, a research group within the University's School of Law.

When Founding Director Margaret Hallock surveyed the Wayne Morse Center advisory board regarding recommended scholars, Sam Porter, an advisory board member, suggested Tipton, his former dissertation adviser. Porter graduated from the University in 1977 with a degree in religious studies and later earned his doctorate at Emory.

"(Tipton has) been very immersed in the area of religion and politics, looking at how mainline churches are behaving in our society in respect for politics," Porter said.

Porter said Tipton, a Stanford- and Harvard-educated San Francisco native, is a brilliant man and he is excited to hear him speak.

"He was a great teacher for me and I'm looking forward to seeing him," Porter said. "I'm interested in how he's going to present his stuff to this audience at a law school, I think it's going to be fascinating.

"Anyone who wants to know about the nature of religion and politics in American society, this is a good talk to listen to," he continued. "It'll be well worth anyone's time."

The Wayne Morse Center acknowledges that students may be too busy to attend, but Communications Coordinator Mary Hanrahan said Tipton's talk will be available on the Internet after the Thanksgiving holiday.

"Maybe a week after, we'll have the webcast up on our Web site for people who missed the event and want to catch it online," she said.

Immediately following "Public Pulpits," there will be a reception and book signing in the Knight Law Center's Morse Commons.

"Religion, nationally, has been through our history, a divisive problem," Tipton said. "If we can see how this ambiguity works, we can begin to grasp, if not resolve, this paradox in religious life."

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