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January 8, 2010: The 2010 Annual Conference on Christian Legal Thought

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Title: The 2010 Annual Conference on Christian Legal Thought

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1/8/2010—While in New Orleans for the Association of American Law Schools convention, I attended the 2010 Annual Conference on Christian Legal Thought that was going on across the street. I've attended these meetings before. As always, I was amazed. Secularists would imagine that this is a right-wing organization. In some senses, this is true. Everyone in the room opposes abortion and, from what I could tell, gay marriage as well. Some of the people there are global warming skeptics, although not all. And there is a pervasive distrust of government power and President Barack Obama's cult of personality. On the other hand, I saw no cheerleading for capitalism. I also saw a pervasive concern for social justice in general and the poor in particular. One example: Kevin Outterson of B.U. Law School spoke on Christian Fellowship at school. In his bio, it turns out his work is about disparity in health care. Everyone there is concerned for the rights of the oppressed. That is actually kind of rare among law professors. Another striking point among a number of speakers was a concern for democratic citizenship and a law school education model that goes beyond skills to teaching a concern for justice. This was refreshing after hearing the panicked reaction to the recession among deans and law professors at the AALS. There are a lot of people here ready to abandon justice in order to turn out law-firm-ready lawyers. But that is not true of the Christian professors. The final speaker was, Lynne Marie Kohm of Regent Law School, who, noting recent stories about the decline in happiness among American women, argued that Christianity needs to recommit itself to gender equality but also that secular feminism has shown itself unable to provide the wherewithal for lives of genuine fulfillment among women. I have to add a personal reaction. The group is thoughtful, friendly and open. A secularist is welcome. They really are a good advertisement for Jesus.