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Washington Post Columnist E.J. Dionne to Discuss America's Religious Wars

After three decades during which conflicts over religion played a tremendous role in American politics, the country seems to be approaching a truce and, perhaps, even something akin to peace.

E.J. Dionne, Jr., a columnist with The Washington Post, will address that topic and others when he gives the Martin E. Marty Lecture on Religion in American Life on Tuesday, April 20. The lecture is presented by UC Santa Barbara's Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life.

Titled "Are America's Religious Wars Ending?" the talk begins at 8 p.m. in Victoria Hall, 33 W. Victoria St. in Santa Barbara. It is free and open to the public.

According to Dionne, the effects of the economic crisis have pushed religious and cultural issues aside. While Americans continue to argue over issues such as abortion and gay marriage, Evangelical Christians have broadened the scope of their political engagement, and are speaking more often about Christianity's commitment to the poor and the marginalized. In addition, many liberals who once seemed uncomfortable with the role of religion in public life are now following President Obama's lead in welcoming religious voices to the public square.

The most important transformation has occurred among conservatives, Dionne said. "For now, the loudest and most activist sections of the conservative cause are not its religious voices but the mostly secular, anti-government Tea Party activists," he said. "The Tea Party seems, for now, to have displaced the religious right as the most dynamic force among conservatives."

In his twice-weekly column, Dionne writes on national policy and politics. Before joining The Post in 1990 as a political reporter, he spent 14 years at The New York Times, where he covered local, state, and national politics, and also served as a foreign correspondent in Paris, Rome, and Beirut. A senior fellow at The Brookings Institution, Dionne is a professor in the Public Policy Institute at Georgetown University. He has been a frequent commentator on politics for National Public Radio, the ABC news program "This Week," and NBC's "Meet the Press."

He is the author of "Why Americans Hate Politics," which received the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and was a National Book Award nominee. He is also the author of "Stand Up Fight Back: Republican Toughs, Democratic Wimps, and the Politics of Revenge"; "They Only Look Dead: Why Progressives Will Dominate the Next Political Era"; and "God's Economy: Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State." His most recent book is titled "Souled Out: Reclaiming Faith and Politics After the Religious Right."

The Martin E. Marty Lectureship on Religion in American Life was established in 2005 in honor of Martin E. Marty, the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

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