

# Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner  
Associate Editor: Bob Allen  
Phone: (904) 262-6626  
Fax: (904) 262-7745

October 9, 1997

(97-90)

## In this issue:

- **Southwestern Seminary avoids faculty trial with settlement**
- **Baptist World Alliance head welcomes SBC study committee**
- **Partial birth abortion ban clears House, sent to president**
- **Enrollment drop not as bad as feared at troubled school**
- **Baptist Joint Committee board opposes amendment, vouchers**
- **Supreme Court in 'profound disarray' on First Amendment, reporter says**
- **Constitutional amendment will fail, Canady predicts**
- **Religious persecution bill would do more harm than good, U.S. official says**
- **Correction**

## **Southwestern Seminary avoids faculty trial with settlement**

By Marv Knox

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary apparently has avoided a faculty trial by coming to terms with a professor removed from his classroom for criticizing seminary administrators.

Jeff Pool, 45, an assistant professor of systematic theology, will not return to the classroom. But he will receive salary and benefits through the current academic year, which ends next July 31.

Administrators at the seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, pulled Pool from his teaching duties just before the seminary's fall term started in late August. That move closely followed Pool's public charges of "academic censorship" against the seminary.

"I really was removed from teaching not because of my teaching, but because I voiced dissent about actions of the administrators of this institution," Pool said.

On the advice of the seminary's attorney, the dean of the seminary's School of Theology, Tommy Lea, limited his response to a prepared statement.

"The seminary guidelines require that personnel matters be handled confidentially," Lea said. "The administration has acted in the best interests of the seminary and Dr. Pool in accordance with the seminary's policies and procedures.

"Dr. Pool has shown himself to be a capable scholar in his discipline of systematic theology. He has demonstrated commendable interest in his students."

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Nashville, Tennessee

"However, the parties have agreed that Dr. Pool should exercise his teaching ministry in another institutional setting," Lea said. "The seminary has attempted to provide Dr. Pool and his family financial security to allow him to find another position without interruption of income or loss of benefits important to his family."

The controversy began last year, when Pool edited an issue of the seminary's "Southwestern Journal of Theology." The disputed issue of the journal examined the Southern Baptist Convention's "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement.

Seminary administrators objected to Pool's use of authors identified as SBC "moderates," fearing it would alienate trustees and other conservative convention leaders. The seminary suspended publication of the journal.

Pool offered the articles to Smyth & Helwys Publishing of Macon, Ga., which published them in a book called "Sacred Mandates of Conscience: Interpretations of the Baptist Faith and Message."

In a preface to the book and in subsequent interviews, Pool called Southwestern's refusal to publish the journal "academic censorship."

Seminary officials have denied the censorship charge on two counts. First, they noted they waived the rights to the rejected articles, freeing their authors to publish them. Second, they said the decision not to publish the journal was made by an editorial board comprised of faculty.

Pool acknowledged not all Southwestern faculty agree with him, but he contended the journal's editorial board was coerced by pressure from Southwestern President Ken Hemphill and academic administrators.

And that pressure is pushing the seminary into an increasingly narrow spectrum from which it can operate, Pool charged.

"Academic freedom here certainly is under significant threat," he said. "It's always been tenuous; this is a very, very conservative place. ... But Southwestern is being rapidly aligned with the 'new SBC' and the SBC structure."

President Hemphill was selected by trustees elected during the theological/political campaign to turn the SBC sharply to the right, shortly after those trustees fired former President Russell Dilday, Pool noted.

"There is an agenda for the seminary to follow," which includes hushing all forms of disagreement or dissent, he claimed.

His ouster from the classroom sends a signal to faculty and potential faculty that "self criticism" within the institution will not be tolerated, Pool said.

"Southwestern is going to have trouble putting anyone here that will be anything other than 'yes men,'" he predicted. "They won't be able to exercise a self-critical principle of the institution."

Rather than negative and damaging, self-criticism -- the ability to analyze and discuss strengths and weaknesses -- is positive and helpful for an institution such as a seminary, Pool insisted.

"An individual is not necessarily disloyal because he criticizes an institution or a denomination," he said. "But those thoughts and comments may grow out of his very loyalty. ... It is vital that Baptists do not lose the principle of internal criticism. If there is no self-criticism, how do we call ourselves to account for our actions?"

Self-criticism and dissent are nothing new among Baptists, Pool added. For centuries, "Baptists have been willing and able to admit that dissent is part of what it means to be Baptist," he said, noting the Baptist principle of the priesthood of every individual before God undergirds such thinking and interaction.

"All Baptists ought to know that," he said. They ought never allow themselves to be placed in a position where their disagreement is used against them. They ought never allow themselves to be placed in a situation where they are not free to disagree."

Pool feels his comments in the preface to his book are not harsh against the seminary, he said.

"I felt it was my responsibility to set the record straight" regarding the decision not to publish the issue of the Southwestern Journal of Theology, he said. "That's defined as criticism or dissent if it's information the administration or trustees don't like. ... I never criticized the seminary; I criticized administrators who were responsible for a certain action."

Pool received conflicting messages from seminary administrators shortly after the book was published in July, he said.

The first letter he received from the administration said they would begin discussion regarding termination, and a second letter said the next step was to consider tenure, not termination, he reported. But that discussion soon turned to the possibility of termination proceedings with the seminary trustees, he added.

Pool declined to sign two termination agreements because they stipulated he could not comment publicly on the situation, he said. Along the way, administrators held out the possibility of termination proceedings when the trustees meet this fall, he added.

Ultimately, the agreement did not bind Pool from commenting on his cause, he said.

Some people have asked him why, if he feels the seminary did not follow due process in his removal, he does not file a lawsuit, Pool said, noting he does not have the time nor the money to battle a large institution in court.

"There's more to it," he added. "I would hate to do it spiritually."

-30-

## **Baptist World Alliance head welcomes SBC study committee**

McLEAN, Va. (ABP) -- Baptist World Alliance head Denton Lotz said Oct. 9 he plans to cooperate with a special committee named to study the Southern Baptist Convention's relationship to the organization of worldwide Baptists.

Lotz, general secretary of the McLean, Va.,-based BWA, said he learned of the study committee, appointed by the SBC Executive Committee Sept. 23, in a news report while he was attending a European Baptist Federation meeting in Croatia.

"We always welcome every opportunity to discuss and share with our member bodies the great things the Lord is doing through our Baptist people worldwide," Lotz said in a statement written in response to "overwhelming inquiries" about the study.

"We welcome this opportunity to listen to the concerns of this SBC special study committee and to share with them the constant and unchanging commitment of the BWA to uniting Baptists worldwide in our evangelistic task, social responsibilities, and defense of human rights and religious freedom," Lotz said.

SBC president Tom Elliff said the study committee was named because of questions about "perceived changes in the mission, focus and doctrinal positions of the BWA."

In an Oct. 2 editorial, Alabama Baptist Editor Bob Terry reported the committee was appointed after a "flurry of letters" over the course of a few weeks urged Southern Baptist leaders to defund the BWA.

This year, the SBC has allocated \$417,000 to the BWA, about 35 percent of the BWA's total budget. The SBC is one of 191 Baptist conventions and unions with membership in the BWA, which was founded in 1905.

Terry reported several recent incidents prompting the probe:

-- At a conference on theological education in July, a German theologian reportedly challenged conclusions in a paper on evangelism presented by Ken Hemphill, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The challenge "led to other Southern Baptists questioning the German's theology," Terry said.

-- Southern Baptists also were angered when no one representing the SBC was invited to lead a major conference on worship scheduled for 1998 in Berlin, Terry said. "When apprised of SBC feelings, BWA staff quickly added SBC participation, but the damage was done," Terry continued.

-- Southern Baptist leaders were also upset when leaders from several African conventions at a meeting in 1996 joined to criticize strategies used by some Southern Baptist missionaries, Terry reported.

Terry quoted a BWA spokesperson as responding that the organization does not have a doctrinal position and cannot be held responsible for everything said at a conference. The organization's purpose, according to its

constitution, is to "assist member bodies in the divine task of bringing all people to God through Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord," the spokesperson said.

SBC president Elliff said the study committee will examine "objectives, doctrinal positions and operational procedures" of the BWA to see that they are "in accord" with those of Southern Baptists.

Members of the study committee, named by Executive Committee chairman James Merritt, are: Morris Chapman, president and chief executive of the Executive Committee; Jimmy Draper, president of the Baptist Sunday School Board; Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary; Jerry Rankin, president of the International Mission Board; Tom Elliff, SBC president; and Joe Reynolds, Gary Smith and Bob Sorrell, all members of the Executive Committee.

Lotz said he and BWA president Nilson Fanini "look forward to meeting the special commission."

-30-

-- By Bob Allen

## **Partial birth abortion ban clears House, sent to president**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. House of Representatives has approved Senate changes to a bill that would impose fines and up to two years in prison for doctors who perform a controversial late-term abortion procedure

The procedure, termed "partial-birth abortion" by its foes, involves partially delivering an intact fetus through the birth canal before killing it.

The House voted 296-132 to send the bill to President Clinton, who has pledged to veto the measure because it lacks an exception for "rare cases when a woman faces death or serious injury" as a result of pregnancy.

Clinton sent a letter to Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md., a day before the Oct. 8 vote, saying that if the House agreed to the Senate changes, "I will veto the legislation."

Rep. Charles Canady, R-Fla., said the president is "supporting an indefensible procedure that should not be allowed in a civilized society." He said the exception sought by the president would include a "broad health exception that would give the abortionist unfettered discretion to decide when an abortion would be performed."

The Supreme Court ruled in 1973 that the health of the mother represents a medical judgment that "may be exercised in light of all factors -- physical, emotional, psychological, familial, and the woman's age -- relevant to the well-being of the patient."

Rep. Ken Bentsen, D-Texas, opposed the bill. "This bill substitutes a politician's judgment for that of a physician," he said.

But Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., said supporters of the ban "happen to think the health of the mother does not equal the life of the unborn."

The House approved the bill in March, 295-136. The Senate approved minor changes in May on a 64-36 vote. Having passed both houses in the same form, the bill now awaits Clinton's anticipated veto.

Last year, Clinton vetoed the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act after both houses of Congress approved the measure. The House voted to override the veto, but the Senate fell short of the two-third majority required by the Constitution to nullify a presidential veto.

-30-

## **Enrollment drop not as bad as feared at troubled school**

MOBILE, Ala. (ABP) -- Enrollment at the University of Mobile dropped 5.4 percent this year, costing the financially strapped Baptist school an estimated \$821,000 in tuition but bringing a sigh of relief from leaders who had been braced for worse.

The university's chancellor called the drop "amazing." After months of negative publicity detailing a firing of the school's president and stormy negotiations with the Alabama Baptist State Convention, some observers had predicted enrollment might fall by as much as 20 percent, chancellor and former president William Weaver told the school's board of regents Sept. 26.

A net decline of 151 full-time students means the university must trim \$400,000 from an earlier budget which projected a surplus, said Walter Hovell, interim president. Those cuts will come from the university's controversial Latin American branch campus in San Marcos, Nicaragua, he said.

In September, Alabama Baptists' state mission board approved a plan to help the Mobile university work out of the financial crunch that has threatened the school's accreditation. The state convention will continue to provide more than \$2 million in annual funding to the school as long as the university sends no money to the Nicaragua branch.

The arrangement must be ratified by the state convention, scheduled Nov. 18-19 in Huntsville.

Trustee leaders have admitted the university violated a 1994 agreement that it would abide by those terms by continuing to pour money into the Latin American campus, which has been losing about \$200,000 a year. Overall, officials blame the Nicaragua campus for mounting \$3.2 million of the university's \$3.6 million total short-term debt.

Hovell said the Nicaragua campus is on track to generate a \$200,000 surplus this year, which would be repaid to the main campus.

University of Mobile trustees fired President Michael Magnoli in May, giving him a severance package reportedly valued at \$400,000. In September, they suspended Nicaraguan native Roger Gonzalez, the university administrator who directed the Latin American branch.

Trustee Gary Enfinger said the university granted severance benefits to Magnoli to avert a possible lawsuit. He said the value of the package was lower than the widely reported \$400,000 figure by at least \$50,000.

-30-

-- By Bob Terry and Bob Allen

## **Baptist Joint Committee board opposes amendment, vouchers**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Board members of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs spoke out Oct. 7 against the proposed Religious Freedom Amendment and public-school tuition vouchers, called for changes in a proposed bill targeting religious persecution abroad, and asked Congress to enact new legislation to guarantee religious liberty as a "fundamental right" in the United States.

Those actions came in resolutions adopted during the Baptist Joint Committee's annual meeting Oct. 6-7 in Washington, D.C. The board also adopted a budget and new officers for 1998. The BJC is a religious-liberty agency representing nine Baptist bodies in the United States and Canada.

One resolution opposed the "Religious Freedom Amendment" to the U.S. Constitution proposed by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla. The proposal would use tax dollars to fund religious enterprises and would allow for "religious coercion" in public schools, the resolution stated.

"This amendment is dangerous and unfaithful to our Baptist heritage," the resolution said.

"Government-sponsored prayer in the classroom and government-endorsed religious expression in public places are inherently coercive and would relegate religious minorities to the status of outsiders and second-class citizens if they did not participate in worshipping the god of the majority," it continued.

Government funding of religion "violates the conscience of taxpayers who rightfully expect the government to remain neutral in religious matters," the resolution also stated.

Government subsidies for religious institutions diminish the "independence and integrity" of religion, it noted, because the state "always seeks to control what it funds."

James Dunn, BJC executive director, said the idea that a religious majority would impose its faith on minorities "is what really scares me." "The whole idea of the First Amendment is counter-majoritarian," Dunn said during discussion of the resolution.

Several directors expressed concern the resolution could cause a stir, since some BJC directors represent Baptist groups that have endorsed the Istook amendment and others serve as directors of the National Association of Evangelicals, which is a major supporter of the amendment.

"There is going to be a lot of confusion among our constituency," warned Ray Swatkowski of Arlington Heights, Ill., and a representative of the Baptist General Conference.

"We believe the amendment is misnamed," noted BJC chairman Dwight Jessup of Upland, Ind. Although it purports to protect religious liberty, "it could end up denying it," said Jessup, dean of Taylor University and a representative of the Baptist General Conference.

In another resolution, the BJC board opposed government aid to "religious elementary and secondary schools" through tuition vouchers. Citing the agency's historic religious-liberty stance, the resolution said authentic religion should be "unmolested, uncoerced and unassisted" and must base its support on "the persuasive power of the truth it proclaims and not the coercive power of the state."

Another resolution commended recent attention to the problem of worldwide Christian persecution but raised concerns that a particular bill before Congress would be ineffective in its current form.

The BJC board commended Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., and Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., for introducing the "Freedom From Religious Persecution Act" to address the problem. The resolution urged, however, that any final legislation:

- View all forms of religious persecution equally, and "refrain from any hint" that persecution against one religious group is more or less important than another.
- Define persecution broadly enough to protect both "overt and subtle" limitations to religious freedom.
- Treat religious persecution in the broader context of human rights, avoiding a "hierarchy" of human-rights abuses.
- Impose sanctions only after other avenues have been exhausted.
- Expand the State Department's existing human-rights work by creating an "ambassador-at-large" position for religious freedom.
- Provide better reporting and training of U.S. personnel to be on the lookout for religious persecution.
- Provide more provisions for asylum of victims of religious and human-rights persecution.

Dunn and others said such changes would make the Wolf-Specter bill acceptable. "Now there is a pretty hopeful spirit that there will be a good religious persecution bill," Dunn told board members.

"To oppose religious persecution of Christians without showing sensitivity to other religious groups that might be persecuted does not make sense and is not Baptist," Dunn added.

In the fourth resolution, the BJC board asked that steps be taken to "ensure that religious liberty is once again recognized as a fundamental right" in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's June 25 ruling that struck down the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

The court ruled that Congress exceeded its authority in passing the law allowing governments to substantially burden the religious exercise of persons or institutions only for a "compelling" reason.

The resolution called the striking down of RFRA "a frontal assault" on religious liberties. It asked Congress to pass a new federal law to protect religious exercise under its power to spend, regulate commerce and provide remedies under the 14th Amendment. It also asked states to pass their own versions of RFRA which apply the "compelling interest" test to religion. It also calls for reversal of *Employment Division vs. Smith*, a 1990 Supreme Court decision which reduced religious protections under the First Amendment.

Earlier, Rep. Charles Canady, R-Fla., told BJC directors the best solution is for Congress to use its spending power to require states to accept a strict interpretation of the First Amendment.

Since Congress approves many bills that dispense federal funds to the states, Congress should "attach strings designed to protect religious freedom," said Canady said, chairman of the Constitution subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee.

Canady cautioned against legislation that challenged the Supreme Court's authority. "I don't think we will advance the cause of religious liberty by getting in the court's face," Canady said. "We would lose that conflict."

Board members also approved a strategic planning committee, which will recommend agency goals for the next five years, and adopted a budget of \$849,551 for 1998, a 1.7 percent increase over the revised 1997 budget. Revenue comes from the member bodies, several state Baptist conventions, donations from churches and individuals, and other sources.

Elected as chair of the BJC was Aidsand Wright-Riggins III, executive director of National Ministries for the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. First vice chair is Jim Arends, pastor of Shady Grove Baptist Church in Gaithersburg, Md., and a representative of the North American Baptist Conference. Second vice chair is Kevin Butler, editor of the Sabbath Recorder for the Seventh-Day Baptist General Conference. Secretary is June McEwen of Chattanooga, Tenn., representing the Religious Liberty Council.

-30-

-- By Greg Warner and Bob Allen

## **Supreme Court in 'profound disarray' on First Amendment, reporter says**

By Mark Wingfield

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court is in a state of "profound disarray" on issues of religion and the First Amendment, according to a veteran reporter covering the court.

"Religion cases are very heavy labor for this court. There is no part of its work that so certainly ties it in knots as do the cases testing the meaning of the First Amendment's establishment clause and free-exercise clause," said Lyle Denniston, a reporter for the Baltimore Sun who has covered the Supreme Court for nearly 30 years.

"In this sector of First Amendment law, the court's doctrine is in a state of profound disarray," he said. "The court finds it nearly impossible to develop consistent patterns of constitutional reasoning in this area."

Denniston spoke Oct. 5 to Baptist journalists during a briefing sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The briefing was held at Riverside Baptist Church in Washington.

As one illustration of his point about doctrinal disarray on religion cases, Denniston cited the confusing status of the so-called "Lemon test."

This test, created by the Supreme Court in 1971 as a means for weighing establishment-clause cases, asks three questions to determine whether a government action is permissible. The test says government action is impermissible if: (1) government acts with a religious or anti-religious purpose; (2) the action inhibits religion; or (3) the action excessively entangles government in religious affairs.

"For a good many years, that seemed to work fine as a constitutional rationale," Denniston explained. "But more recently, no one can be sure whether the Lemon test survives, in what form it survives or what might replace it if it were to be cast aside explicitly.

"No observer of the court knows, when any new establishment clause case arises, whether the court will or will not use the Lemon test. It continues to be under very heavy attack from Justice Antonin Scalia, and his aggressiveness has made most of the other justices wary about their continuing embrace of the formula."

Denniston said the court sometimes appears ready to replace the Lemon test with a "coercion test," that government acts unconstitutionally toward religion only when it coerces someone to believe or not believe a tenet of religion. Then at other times, he said, the court appears ready to replace Lemon with an "endorsement" test, that government acts unconstitutionally toward religion only when it seems to be lending an official stamp of approval or disapproval to a religiously motivated practice.

"But neither formulation seems able to attract a majority of five justices," he explained. "And in fact, the idea of abandoning the Lemon test altogether never has commanded five votes."

The court's conflicting view of the establishment clause and religion cases also explains "why the court has lately been making a mess of the controversy over school prayer, and why it is displaying such a reluctance to return to that issue in new cases," Denniston suggested.

The court's disarray has resulted in lower courts taking differing positions on student-initiated prayers in public schools, he said, noting that the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals has allowed them, the 9th Circuit Court has forbidden them and the 11th Circuit Court has allowed them only at graduation ceremonies.

"This clearly is a constitutional question that cries out for resolution by the Supreme Court, yet it refuses to get involved," Denniston said.

He argued that the court has refused to get involved in such cases because it "simply does not trust itself to 'get it right' should it take on that question."

Denniston said an unnamed justice told him last year that until it appeared likely the court could speak with clarity on this issue, that justice never would vote to hear another school prayer case.

On the other side of the First Amendment, the court also reflects confusion over the free-exercise clause, Denniston said.

To illustrate, he cited a chain of events that have occurred since the court's controversial 1990 decision *Employment Division vs. Smith*. In that case the court abandoned use of a so-called "compelling interest" test, which said government must have a compelling interest before it may restrict the free exercise of religion.

That decision, which most religious bodies in the United States have criticized as taking away constitutional protection shielding religion from government regulation, sparked congressional action to adopt the Religious Freedom Restoration Act as a cure.

However, the Supreme Court in its last term ruled RFRA unconstitutional in a case called *Boerne vs. Flores*.

Some critics of the *Smith* decision saw the *Boerne* case as an opportunity for the court to revisit the *Smith* decision and overturn it. Instead, the court ignored the concerns about the *Smith* decision and invalidated RFRA, saying Congress had no right to pass legislation to counter a Supreme Court decision.

The division of the court shows up clearly in the *Boerne* decision, Denniston said. "There definitely are three justices who believe strongly that the court was wrong in 1990 in the *Smith* decision ... . But it would have taken the votes of five for the court even to consider overruling *Smith*, and it was clear the effort to garner those five in the *Boerne* case had been made but fell short."

In a question-and-answer session after his speech, Denniston said he does not see the *Smith* decision being overturned anytime soon. "The only way *Smith* will be taken down is to get new personnel on the court or pass a constitutional amendment spelling out the pre-*Smith* view," he said.

No current justice is likely to retire within the next two years, and Congress is not likely to pass a constitutional amendment of any nature, he predicted.

-30-

## **Constitutional amendment will fail, Canady predicts**

By Greg Warner

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Religious Freedom Amendment, which would write new religious protections into the U.S. Constitution, probably won't pass in the House of Representatives, according to the chairman of the subcommittee handling the amendment.

"This is one that right now isn't going to make it," Rep. Charles Canady (R-Fla.) said of H.J. Res. 78, introduced last May by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla. Canady is chairman of the Constitution subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee.

Proponents say the Istook amendment is necessary because the U.S. government -- particularly the court system -- has overstepped its authority in restricting religious practices, such as school prayer and aid to religious schools. Critics say the amendment is unnecessary and would have undesirable consequences, such as allowing state governments to endorse one religion over others and forcing taxpayers to support religious institutions.

Supporters of the amendment include the Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Coalition and the National Association of Evangelicals. Opponents include the Baptist Joint Committee, the National Council of Churches and various Jewish, Muslim and African-American groups.

"I think the amendment, possibly changed, will pass the subcommittee and full committee sometime next year," said Canady. "I think it will be on the floor of the House and it will fail to pass the House by the requisite two-thirds majority. I think its going to be difficult to put together the votes for that effort."

Speaking to directors of the Baptist Joint Committee, the conservative Florida congressman did not say whether he supports or opposes the amendment. Canady said he is supportive of Istook's concerns for religious liberty but has not signed on as a co-sponsor of the amendment.

Canady noted constitutional amendments are intentionally difficult to pass. "The founding fathers very wisely put in place mechanisms that make it difficult to change the basic document. This is one that right now isn't going to make it."

-30-

## **Religious persecution bill would do more harm than good, U.S. official says**

By Greg Warner

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Something needs to be done about the growing problem of religious persecution worldwide, a top State Department official said Oct. 6, but legislation to impose U.S. economic sanctions on offending governments is not the solution, he said.

To automatically impose sanctions on governments that allow persecution would have "a severe negative impact" on religious freedom, said John Shattuck, assistant secretary of the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

The Freedom From Religious Persecution Act, introduced in Congress by Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., and Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., would impose sanctions on nations that condone religious persecution.

But Shattuck said the "one-size-fits-all" approach of the Wolf-Specter bill would nullify other methods of influencing governments and prompt "retaliation" against persecuted faith groups. He proposed changes to make the bill more acceptable.

The issue of religious persecution has "skyrocketed" to a much higher place on the State Department's agenda in recent years, Shattuck said.

The United States can have a role in reducing such persecution, he said, "but we need to do it in a way that helps the people we want to help, rather than make the situation worse."

Particularly in places like the Sudan, Egypt, China, Tibet and the Middle East, sanctions would only bring more persecution, Shattuck said. As in the case of Egypt, he added, it may not be the government causing the problem but the larger society. Punishing those governments would weaken their ability to make improvements, he said.

On a recent visit to a house church in China, Shattuck said, Christians told him a strong response from the United States would jeopardize the freedoms they have earned.

The Wolf-Specter bill would impose immediate sanctions on several Middle Eastern countries and harm the Middle East peace process, Shattuck added.

The bill -- H.R. 2431 and S. 772 -- has other weaknesses, Shattuck said. It would create a "hierarchy of human rights" by elevating religious persecution over other human-rights violations, and it would set up a "bureaucratic struggle" within the U.S. government by creating a special White House office to monitor religious persecution.

Shattuck suggested several amendments which would make the bill more acceptable to the Clinton administration. Instead of automatic sanctions, the bill should authorize a "range of options" that could be pursued against offending countries, saving sanctions for a last resort. And instead of creating a new White House office, the bill should direct more funding to existing agencies.

Proponents of Wolf-Specter say such changes -- particularly restricting sanctions -- would seriously weaken the bill. Sanctions are needed to show the United States is serious about human-rights violations, said Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. "Lack of State Department action creates a climate susceptible to persecution," Land said.

The Wolf-Specter bill was scheduled for consideration by a House committee Oct. 9, but that action was postponed.

Shattuck noted religious persecution has worsened worldwide since the end of the Cold War. The "global instability" that followed the fall of communism has unleashed religious hatreds, and -- as in Bosnia -- many political leaders are stimulating religious conflict to further political objectives, he said.

Among the responses of the State Department, he said: Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has told U.S. ambassadors to monitor religious persecution in their countries more closely; the administration has counseled U.S. companies doing business overseas to employ business practices that serve the cause of religious freedom; and the problem of persecution has been highlighted through broadcasting outlets like Radio Free Europe.

-30-

CORRECTION: The Oct. 2 ABP story "European Baptist seminary shifts focus of academic program" contains an error. In the second paragraph, the vote total should read 66 for, none against, with six abstentions.

---

END