

REPORT from the CAPITAL

PROCLAIM LIBERTY

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NEWSMAKERS

Lloyd John Ogilvie, a prominent Presbyterian minister and popular religious broadcaster, was elected chaplain of the U.S. Senate. Ogilvie, 64, senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, was chosen from a pool of 200 candidates by a search committee led by Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore.

Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., has asked the Christian Coalition, Pat Robertson's conservative political organization, to support passage of the GOP-sponsored "Contract with America" with its prayers. "He told our people that this (passage) can only happen with prayer and with an emphasis on new spirituality and religious revival in our country," said Ralph Reed, executive director of the group.

Tony Campolo, a Baptist minister and professor at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pa., has requested time on Jerry Falwell's "Old Time Gospel Hour" to rebut accusations about President Clinton's personal and political behavior made in a video Falwell is selling on his religious broadcast. The video makes unsubstantiated charges about Clinton, who, like Falwell, is a Baptist. Campolo's request was denied.

Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ, has condemned the Jan. 22 terrorist bombing that killed 19 people in Israel, saying that for too long extremists on both sides have frustrated hopes for peace.

Thich Quang Do, a senior monk of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, is being held on charges of causing disturbances and violating the law. But the government denied that a second monk, Thich Huyen Quang was being held. The government has said some Buddhist monks have tried to sabotage economic reform efforts. Δ

Why evangelicals oppose school prayer amendment



Perhaps more than any other group, conservative evangelical Christians, should oppose a constitutional amendment to restore state-sponsored prayer in public schools.

That assessment came from Joe Loconte, deputy editor of *Policy Review*, the quarterly journal of The Heritage Foundation, a conservative public policy organization. He presented his ideas in a journal article and during a Jan. 25 forum at the foundation's headquarters.

Because evangelical Christians historically have paid excruciating attention to the content of their faith, they ought to be among the most wary of promoting generic prayers in public education, he said.

In making his case, Loconte quoted a number of Evangelical Christians, a group typically supportive of public school prayer.

Steve McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, was among those quoted. He said Loconte's article sent a powerful message that the school-prayer debate should not be settled through tokenism. McFarland said he favors serious attempts to secure students' free exercise rights, including prayer, not just token political gestures.

In his article, Loconte said state-sponsored prayer does not provide social stability but coerced religion. Many conservatives disagree with those who insist the return of school prayer will reverse alarming societal trends, like teen pregnancy, he said.

Loconte also refuted the majority-

rules approach to school prayer.

"There is much to be said for communities helping to shape the curricula and moral climate of their public schools; however, when it comes to matters of faith, the majoritarian impulse ignores the lessons of church history," he said.

"This is so because faith is the most intimate of matters, concerned not with personal preference but with the moral dictates of conscience. And the consciences of society's most vulnerable members — its children — require special protection, particularly in a setting as volatile and influential as public education."

Loconte said school prayer proponents have two options if they want to avoid offending the consciences of various faith communities: construct a prayer devoid of controversial theology or allow every faith group to offer its own prayer.

The one-size-fits-all approach weakens the prayer, he said, while allowing every group to recite its own prayers could result in "theological vertigo."

Even though state-sponsored prayer is unworkable, he said, religious believers should avail themselves of the "legal tools already open to them."

First, evangelical Christians can try to reintroduce the religious dimension of American life in school curricula. Teaching about religion is permissible and has been encouraged by a number of organizations.

Second, religious conservatives can make full use of the 1984 Equal Access Act, which requires that public schools grant student religious groups the same privileges of other extracurricular groups. While he considers the law useful, he said it is "insufficient in scope," applying only to secondary schools. Δ

Clinton offers nation 'new social compact'

The religious community must help Americans forge a "new social compact" of responsibility, opportunity and citizenship, President Clinton said in his Jan. 24 State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress.

Clinton, a Southern Baptist, said he is proud that the United States has more houses of worship per capita than any other country in the world.

Religious leaders "can ignite their congregations to carry their faith into action, can reach out to all of our children, to all people in distress, to those who have been savaged by the breakdown of all we hold dear," he said.

"And our religious leaders and their congregations can make all the difference."

During the 80-minute speech, Clinton proffered centrist themes, calling for a leaner government that focuses on civic responsibility. Δ

Evangelism in Russia faces weaker opposition

A few vocal legislators still are working to limit non-Orthodox religious activity in Russia, but their latest attempts lack the punch of earlier days.

Winds of change appear to have carried Moscow too far into freedom to allow even politically astute lawmakers to pass laws openly opposing Russian evangelicals.

Still, a proposed new law spells out restrictions that would limit foreign religious influence. And it leaves gray areas concerning how Russians can worship within legal guidelines, according to Moscow religious liberty specialists.

The latest religion law would require foreign religious workers to show an official invitation from Russian counterparts. It also would require them to meet certain accreditation standards. And it could affect some who travel to Russia from the West on tourist visas.

A select committee of the Russian Parliament's lower house recently sent a draft of the new bill to President Boris Yeltsin's legal staff.

Religious liberty specialists in Moscow say the law specifically seeks

to curtail the activity of Western evangelicals who developed campaigns to teach Christian values in public schools after atheism, along with communism, started losing popularity several years ago. The specialists also say little interest in the law exists except from a small group of extremists. Δ

Groups quarrel over religious pluralism

Three Orthodox organizations have suspended their memberships in a major Jewish umbrella group because of conflicts over religious-pluralism issues with non-Orthodox Jews.

The dispute surfaced in the American Zionist Movement, a broad-based umbrella group of some 20 organizations headquartered in New York City. Three of its Orthodox constituents — the Religious Zionists of America, Amit Women and Emunah Women — suspended their membership to protest passage of a resolution favoring religious pluralism in Israel.

The resolution "calls upon the government and Knesset (parliament) of Israel to extend full freedom of religion to all Jews in Israel and equal treatment to all movements and ideologies reflected in the American Zionist Movement."

Judaism's Reform and Conservative movements have been fighting for official recognition in Israel, a struggle that faces formidable obstacles. Δ

Creationism controversy erupts in New Hampshire

A New Hampshire school board has been warned that it will likely be sued if it adopts a proposal to have creationism made a part of the school system's science curriculum.

At the request of 20 parents whose children attend schools in Merrimack, N.H., People For the American Way told the board that teaching the biblical account of creation is unconstitutional.

The organization, citing a 1987 Supreme Court ruling, said that "creationism is religious doctrine, and the teaching of religious advocacy or doctrine in public schools violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment."

A local Baptist pastor made the proposal to teach creationism. Δ

British villagers object to Hare Krishna worshippers

The public worship services of a Hare Krishna sect have prompted the ire of residents of Letchmore Heath in England.

Hearings began recently on complaints by the villagers that sect members have overrun the town, some 15 miles northeast of London.

On the weekends, some 2,000 worshippers come to the 17-acre Bhaktivedanta Manor. On festival days the number climbs to 6,000 and on the two-day Janmashtami festival celebrating Krishna's birth, a reported 25,000 visitors descend on the small village.

The Hindus say that religious persecution — not clogged roads — is the root of the villagers' opposition. Δ

Chinese persecutions alleged, downplayed

Allegations — and denials — of government persecution and harassment of Chinese Christians continue to swirl through human rights circles.

Amnesty International, a London-based human rights group, called for an investigation of allegations that Chinese officials subjected female members of a Protestant sect "to cruel and degrading treatment." Some 30 members have been jailed since 1992.

In Geneva, Switzerland, Han Wen-Zao, acting general secretary of the Chinese Christian Council, the officially recognized Christian religious group, downplayed the reports of harassment and intimidation. Δ

Jerusalem needs special status, say Christian groups

Leaders of all the major Christian communities in Jerusalem have issued a rare joint statement calling for a special "judicial and political" status for Jerusalem that "reflects the universal importance and significance of the city."

"Jerusalem is too precious to be dependent solely on municipal or national political authorities, whoever they may be."

Joint Statement by Christians in Jerusalem

Liberty & Law

Our ancestors who fought so passionately for religious liberty are precisely the ones who steadfastly resisted state assistance to help propagate those religious opinions. As a result of their insistence that the state set the church free, religion has thrived, and the state has been relieved of the daunting task of making decisions about religion — something it does poorly. This is the genius of the American experiment in religious liberty. The separation of church and state has resulted in a vital constitutional democracy envied by the whole world and a robust religious landscape the likes of which history has rarely witnessed.

Excerpts of amicus brief filed by
the Baptist Joint Committee and
other organizations in
*Rosenberger v. University of
Virginia*
January 13, 1995

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VIEWES of the WALL

Treat religion differently



MELISSA ROGERS
Associate
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for religion.

The debate involves the distribution of university funds to student groups. The state university makes these student activity funds available to some student groups but has refused to subsidize religious activities due to the Establishment Clause's prohibition on direct state funding for religion. The university does nothing to censor religious speakers, allowing student religious activities the same access to school property as other activities. But it has drawn the line at providing a direct subsidy to religion.

Wide Awake, a Christian magazine produced by students, has challenged this policy in *Rosenberger v. The Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia*, now before the U.S. Supreme Court. *Wide Awake* claims that the direct subsidization of its religious activities with state funds would not violate the Establishment Clause. Rather, *Wide Awake* argues, the denial of university funds to it violates guarantees of free speech and press.

The BJC applauds the school's policy of allowing religious speakers equal access to state property. We also commend the student staff of *Wide Awake* for taking religion seriously enough to publish a magazine examining and publicizing its beliefs. But, in a "friend-of-the-court" brief, the BJC urges the court to reject *Wide Awake's* demand that the state buy the ink and paper for its magazine.

We oppose the use of compulsory state funds to support religion for the same reasons that Thomas Jefferson,

The University of Virginia was founded by Thomas Jefferson, fierce advocate of church-state separation. Ironically, Jefferson's university is now the center of debate over the constitutionality of state funding

James Madison and Virginia Baptists opposed it more than 200 years ago: It destroys religious liberty. Forcing citizens to support religion robs them of the opportunity to make voluntary choices about religion. It also creates a relationship in which the sacred is dependent on the secular, thus compromising religion's witness. For these reasons, the "no-funding" principle has been upheld in a long line of Supreme Court cases.

Court watchers have asked: Does the fact that the university treats *Wide Awake* differently than non-religious student activities mean the state is acting with hostility toward religion?

The answer is no. In Establishment Clause cases, as well as Free Exercise cases, the Supreme Court has ruled that government must maintain neutrality toward religion. This sometimes means treating religion differently. Although religion seems to be advantaged when free exercise exemptions are granted and disadvantaged when "benefits" are denied under the Establishment Clause, by treating religion differently in this manner, government ultimately maintains a neutral position vis-a-vis religion.

The problem is that *Wide Awake* wants the benefits of the Free Exercise Clause, but not the limits of the Establishment Clause. True neutrality, however, requires that religion accept both.

Another question raised is whether the university's refusal to fund *Wide Awake* violates the Christian students' rights of equal access to speak and publish a religious message.

Again, the answer is no. Although *Wide Awake's* funding request is framed in equal access language, what *Wide Awake* really wants is equal advancement of its religious message by the government. There is a difference between allowing access to existing forums and direct subsidization. When government pays the bills, it is no longer granting access, it is actually advancing the religious message.

The Establishment Clause's prohibition on this type of church-state collusion is built on centuries of experience. It should not be abandoned now. Δ

VIEW from the PULPIT

BARRY STRICKER

Many Baptists don't know who they are. Many attend this church because it is a wonderful place of worship and faith and community and ministry. And for many people the fact that it is a Baptist church is irrelevant, maybe even meaningless. I'm glad that you are here for whatever reason, but if our Baptist identity is somehow meaningless or irrelevant, then we are in grave danger of losing something that should never be lost.

Please understand: We are Christian people first. What is most important is the fact that we claim Jesus Christ as Lord. But beyond that, there is something wondrous and rich and glorious about being a Baptist Christian — and you need to know what that is.

Baptists have from the beginning believed in spiritual freedom. It is a freedom that only God can give — but

it is a freedom that God has given. God alone is Lord of your conscience. That distinctive is uniquely Baptist — and if we ever lose it, we will cease to be Baptist. This is our heritage, our birthright. Baptists are not Baptists unless they are willing to think for themselves. Baptists are not Baptists unless they are free to interpret Scripture for themselves. We cannot settle for less and still be Baptists.

And that is why Baptists do not adopt creeds. That is why Baptists do not impose their views on other groups. That is why Baptists fight for the freedom of local churches to make their own decisions. That is why Baptists plead for the religious freedom of other groups — even groups with which we cannot agree. And that is why Baptists have historically been staunch opponents of state-sponsored prayer in schools. I probably need to repeat that last sentence: That is why Baptists have historically been staunch opponents of state-sponsored prayer in schools.

In March of 1984, an amendment regarding school prayer worked its

way through committee to the floor of the United States Senate. There were 56 "yes" votes and 44 "no" votes. Still, the proposal failed because it did not receive the required two-thirds vote. Most Baptist senators voted "yes" — revealing their own identity crisis as Baptists. Those Baptist senators had evidently forgotten the words of John Leland, a Colonial Baptist who greatly influenced Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Leland said: "Experience has taught us that the fondness of the magistrates to foster Christianity has done it more harm than all the persecutions ever did. Persecution is like a lion; it tears the saints to death, but it leaves Christianity pure. State establishment of religion, though, is like a bear; it hugs the saints, but corrupts Christianity." Δ

Above are excerpts of a sermon preached Jan. 15, 1995, by Dr. Barry Stricker, pastor of Tiburon Baptist Church, Tiburon, Calif.

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