

MAR 1 - 1995

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee

PROCLAIM LIBERTY

# REPORT from the CAPITAL

Volume 50, Number 4

February 21, 1995

## NEWSMAKERS

Adam Phillips of Voice of America was scheduled to host the Feb. 17 premiere broadcast of a weekly program on religion. "Perspectives" will air every Friday and will explore religion, spirituality, ethics and values in a contemporary society. The first broadcast will focus on the rise of spirituality in the United States. Bob Abernathy, longtime NBC newsmen, also will offer regular commentaries on religion later in the spring for Voice of America, the U.S. government's radio programming for foreign nations.

Lloyd John Ogilvie, the newly elected Senate chaplain, has denied allegations made in a lawsuit filed by a woman who claims he tried to talk her out of having an abortion and then refused to counsel her after she attempted suicide. Elisabeth Saret, 29, filed a lawsuit on Jan. 6 — two weeks before the Senate elected him as its 61st chaplain. He is scheduled to begin his new job March 11.

Richard D. Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, told a group of Jewish leaders that conservative Christians will continue to speak out on such issues as school prayer. Land made the comments to delegates to the annual convention of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council. He said he opposes "state-composed" school prayer, but supports a constitutional amendment that endorses student-initiated, student-led prayers. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, told the same group that school prayer was part of the religious right's agenda of "stealth evangelization." A United Church of Christ minister, Lynn added, "That is the threat posed to religious liberty in this country." Δ

## Clinton vows to focus on job, not critics

President Clinton said he will focus on doing his job rather than responding to persistent criticism.

In a Feb. 2 Oval Office interview with religion writers, the president said it would diminish his ability to serve as president "if I have to spend all my time trying to answer charges about what people say that I did years ago."

Clinton is a Southern Baptist whose views on social issues frequently have been criticized by leaders of the denomination and other conservatives. In addition, accusations about his personal conduct have been raised by religious and other critics.

Asked about the barrage of criticism, the president underscored the difference between reputation and character.

"I have increasingly less control over my reputation," he said, "but still full control over my character. That's between me and God."

Clinton lamented the fact that "we live in an age where anybody can say anything, and unlike in previous times, it gets into print."

The president told reporters faith has been important in facing criticisms. He said he recently read a number of Psalms and a book on Psalms by new Senate Chaplain Lloyd John Ogilvie.

"I think the important thing — I find this in the Scriptures over and over again — the important thing that I have to keep focusing on is what am I going to do today, what am I going to do tomorrow, how can I be free to call on the power to God to make the most of

this job that I have for a little bit of time in the grand sweep of things."

Asked about critics who question the sincerity of his faith or charge that he uses religion for political purposes, Clinton responded: "I think the truth is that there are people who don't believe

it's genuine because they disagree with me politically."

The president said that while he encourages people of all faiths, "including people who disagree with me," to be

activist citizens, religion and politics should not be merged.

"I don't think they should be bound together," he said. "I think the First Amendment is a good thing for our country, that we protect the right of everybody to be faithful to whatever they believe by not uniting church and state."

Clinton said he has not attempted to use religion for political purposes.

"I've never tried to say that there was a Christian coalition behind anything I did," or that "God had ordained us to do these following things and I knew it and anybody that didn't was seized by the devil."

He predicted that Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, which reportedly plans to spend \$1 million to support passage of the Contract with America backed by House Republicans, will increasingly be seen as a political party. "I think everybody knows that they basically are an arm of the Republican Party and that they're going to take all these positions," he said. Δ



Teliaa Harwell Photo

**"I've never tried to say that there was a Christian coalition behind anything I did."**

— President Clinton

## School prayer decision expected soon: attorney

A judge is expected to rule soon on a preliminary injunction to bar Bible reading and prayer over the loudspeaker and in the classroom of a Mississippi public school district.

Elliot Minberg, legal director of People For the American Way, said that a hearing on the preliminary injunction revealed no dispute over the evidence of the case. Both the school officials of Pontotoc County and the plaintiff Lisa Herdahl agreed that such practices were occurring.

Herdahl, who said she believes in God and the separation of church and state, sued the school district for violations of the Establishment Clause. She said her children had been taunted by classmates because they won't go to Bible classes and participate in daily prayer sponsored by the public school.

"I don't think a school or public institution has a right to push its religious viewpoint on a kid," Herdahl has said.

Minberg said he never liked to predict how a particular judge would rule but he is confident Herdahl's case ultimately will prevail. While he is expecting a ruling on the injunction against the prayers, he said there has not yet been a hearing on the Bible classes.

## U.S. tensions straining Jewish-Muslim relations

The budding national dialogue between American Jewish and Muslim leaders has been severely strained by a sharpening debate over the U.S. response to terrorist acts linked to Middle East extremists.

In recent years, mainstream Jewish and Muslim groups have engaged in a tenuous dialogue while trying to avoid the more contentious aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over which they differ vehemently. The 1993 Israel-Palestine Liberation Organization agreement gave the process a major push forward.

Fruits of that dialogue have included cooperation on behalf of Bosnian Muslims and joint stands on religious freedom issues. Both sides also have condemned acts of terror that have threatened to scuttle the Middle East

peace process.

But that dialogue is threatened because Jewish groups in the United States are sounding the alarm that Islamic extremists pose a threat to Middle East peace and in the United States. The warnings have angered U.S. Muslims, who argue that the Jewish groups have unfairly stigmatized them.

At the heart of the renewed tensions between American Jews and Muslims are dramatically differing views of the Middle East conflict. They differ on who is responsible for the recent increase in violence there and the impasse in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

*"We're at a flash point. The perceptions are so different."*

— Rabbi A. James Rudin  
American Jewish Committee

## American Jews ask pope to censure anti-Semitism

American Jewish leaders expressed alarm to Pope John Paul II about the recent surge of attacks against Jews and asked him to denounce anti-Semitism in an encyclical.

Amid warming relations between Catholics and Jews, members of the American Jewish Committee sought to enlist the help of the pontiff, who forcefully has spoken against the Holocaust and anti-Semitism.

"We believe that repetition has its uses and this needs to be repeated in Europe and indeed, not only in Europe," said Robert S. Rifkind, president of the American Jewish Committee, in a news conference following a one-hour session with the pope.

The meeting marked the third time that the Jewish group has met with the pope and the first in five years. Since then, the Vatican has established relations with Israel and the pope has stepped up his rhetoric against the Holocaust and anti-Semitism.

*"We cannot fail to remember together the horrors of the Shoah. The memory of the Shoah should impel us to renew our commitment to work together in harmony, to satisfy this hunger and thirst for justice innate in every human being."*

—Pope John Paul II

## Church leader says U.S. must address racism

Entrenched racism in the United States is not simply a domestic problem, but a violation of human rights that must be addressed by the international community, a World Council of Churches leader told the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

"It is our hope that the United States government will not only recognize that human rights 'challenges' or 'lapses' exist, but that there are serious human rights violations," said Aaron Tolen, a political scientist from Cameroon and one of seven presidents of the World Council of Churches.

His observations were based on conclusions drawn when he and eight other WCC representatives held hearings on racism in seven U.S. cities last fall.

Tolen's testimony drew immediate criticism from Diane Knippers, president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy.

"It's going to give ammunition for every repressive government on the face of the earth," said Knippers.

"The moment the United States starts to try to complain about or criticize or bring up serious government-sponsored human rights abuses in places like China, North Korea or Cuba or Iran this is just going to be thrown back," she said.

However, Sammy Toineeta, coordinator of the Racial Justice Program at the National Council of Churches, defended the decision to bring complaints of American racism to the United Nations.

*"I think we're playing a dangerous game if we ignore what happens in the United States because we think in another country it's much worse. Unless you are middle class, or upper middle class, you live in a Third World atmosphere."*

*"We can't afford at this moment in time to turn our backs on what's happening here in the United States because it's not a country at war. We are at war. It's a different kind of war, but we're at war."*

—Sammy Toineeta  
Racial Justice Program Coordinator  
National Council of Churches

## Pew, Pulpit & the Law

**Q:** Doesn't the new religion and ethics program on the government-run radio network, Voice of America, violate the separation of church and state? (See "NewsMakers," Page 1.)

**A:** Probably not. Similar programming has long been a part of National Public Radio and Public Television. This appears to be a program that simply reports on religion, a topic of critical importance in our contemporary culture. It is also akin to teaching about religion that is perfectly permissible in the nation's public schools.

Of course, the new Voice of America program on religion should not be used to proselytize a particular religious point of view or to broadcast worship services. The Voice of America has no plans for such uses, according to the agency's director. The new program is informational in nature, the agency reports. (JBW)

## REPORT from the CAPITAL

### Single Subscription:

- ☐ One year \$10.00  
☐ Two years \$18.00

### Student rate

- ☐ One Year \$ 6.50  
☐ Two years \$12.00

### Bulk rate (one year)

- ☐ 100 copies \$250.00  
☐ 50 copies \$175.00  
☐ 25 copies \$125.00

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

### Baptist Joint Committee

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.  
 Washington, D.C. 20002  
 202-544-4226

## REFLECTIONS

# That Godless Court?



**JAMES M. DUNN**  
Executive Director

**H**ush!  
 Curtail  
 your  
 complaining. No  
 more gritchin'.  
 That's griping  
 and slightly  
 stronger.

We should  
 and do cherish  
 our right to  
 protest.  
 Citizens'  
 screaming about  
 evils in  
 Washington is

absolutely essential to justice, to progress, to democracy.

But you and I have no right at all to yelp about any issue about which we know nothing. Oh, it may be legal, but it's wrong.

I know, it's a great American tradition: Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up. But it's downright immoral, by inference dishonest, and, hence, un-Christian.

In fact, many of our nation's serious problems stem from erroneous popular perceptions. Genius has its limits, but stupidity knows no bounds. One of the stupidest things one or all of us can do is to pop off out of ignorance.

*That Godless Court?* — the title of Ronald B. Flowers'

new book on Supreme Court church-state decisions — is a phrase lifted right out of America's vast ignorance pool. The widespread notion that the U.S. Supreme Court is somehow hostile to religion is neatly captured in the phrase "that Godless Court."

Any honest examination of the history, the intent and the content of decisions of the high court dispels that barber shop slogan.

Dr. Flowers' book is written for "clergy and laypeople within religious

communities" and provides a valuable survey of the subject. Chapter headings listed below give a sense of the scope of the primer.

Flowers clears the air of many of the myths held so tenaciously by those who have taken their views from those as misinformed as themselves. Now, don't get your back up about an elitist comment from inside the Beltway. Ron Flowers is a "Campbellite" preacher-professor who is about as "Texas" as you will find. He and Robert T. Miller wrote *Toward Benevolent Neutrality: Church, State, and the Supreme Court*, the invaluable reference book that contains all the church-state decisions of the Supreme Court and is used widely by scholars in the field.

In addition to making some sense of cases related to religion and civil authority, organizing them logically, and removing the legal gobbledygook from them, Flowers lifts the most memorable and eloquent passages from the decisions and dissents, making them available to ordinary mortals.

The author also includes two classic documents: Madison's "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious

Assessments" and Jefferson's "Act for Establishing Religious Freedom."

The Texas Christian University professor gives us the introduction that did not exist in the

### Inside *That Godless Court?*:

- The Court and Its Procedures
- Background of Constitutional Principles
- Defining the Scope of Religious Freedom
- The Uncertain Status of Religious Freedom: 1963-1990
- From Congregational Fights to Pacifism
- Aid to Church-Related Schools
- Religion in Public Schools
- Blue Laws, Bars, Taxes, and Plastic Reindeer
- Flash Points and the Future

1980s when I needed it for a seminary textbook.

Will Rogers rightly observed that "we are all ignorant, just about different things." How true!

A good way to work on the category — Supreme Court ignorance — is to pick up Flowers' new book.

Before we join in the harangue of the herd about that godless court, let's do our homework. Then we can howl with the rest of them, as informed howlers. Δ

## GUEST VIEWS

### ROLAND WILSON

I first learned about prayer in Ecru, Miss., the site of a current public controversy over prayer which has become national in scope (See story, Page 2). I was born there, into a family who cherished prayer and was deeply devoted to the Baptist church. We were also a family who valued public education; in fact, my father, Loyd Wilson, supervised the public school there in the late 1920s, and he was superintendent of public schools in Union County in the mid-30s. In the '50s Dad was chair of the Union County School Board.

I cannot imagine being told that I couldn't pray because prayer is not just a moment of silence for me; it has become part of who I am. Therefore, I sympathize with all of you who feel that your right to prayer is in jeopardy, but I am troubled that some of those who are learning to pray where I first

learned believe that they have a constitutional right to be led in prayer and Bible study by government workers on government time to the exclusion of some who pray differently than they do. I would think that Christians would be most sensitive to the plight of those who feel that they are being told how and when to pray by any government, no matter how benevolent. Perhaps we simply haven't told the story enough of how our predecessors who have faced public exclusion, ridicule and death for their refusal to pray as the government told them to. From the prophet Daniel, who was thrown in a lion's den for refusing to pray to King Darius, to the early Christian martyrs who were scorned and executed as atheists for their refusal to bow to their local gods, to Roger Williams, the Baptist who was exiled from Massachusetts in the dead of winter by the established church there — Jews and Christians alike have paid a high price for their conviction that no prayer is neutral and intelligible to all.

I applaud the Herdahl family for

knowing the difference between a watered-down, government-sponsored prayer and the life-changing prayer taught by their church, and I wish that we all knew our own traditions so well. If we knew our own stories better, we would know that prayer has always been a risky endeavor, for in prayer we seek to follow a God who would change us. For Christians we seek to follow a God who would have us pick up a cross, and I suspect that no public school wants to get into the business of cross-bearing. Indeed, although I was first taught to pray by one who supervised the public schools in Ecru, I don't think the public school is the forum where true prayer can be taught.

I hope that no one will hear me saying that our children should not have the right to pray. Instead, I ask that we consider that our predecessors died, not in seeking the right to pray but out of what they believed was an obligation to pray as our Lord taught them. Δ

*Roland Wilson is a layman and a member of Dunwoody Baptist Church, Atlanta.*

### REPORT from the CAPITAL

**James M. Dunn**  
*Executive Director*  
**Larry Chesser**  
*Editor*

**Pam Parry**  
*Associate Editor*

**J. Brent Walker**  
*Book Reviews*

REPORT (ISSN-0346-0661) is published 24 times each year by the Baptist Joint Committee.

Established in 1936

### Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs

200 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002  
202-544-4226

**Supporting bodies:** Alliance of Baptists • American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. • Baptist General Conference • Cooperative Baptist Fellowship • National Baptist Convention of America • National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc. • National Missionary Baptist Convention • North American Baptist Conference • Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc. • Religious Liberty Council • Seventh Day Baptist General Conference • Southern Baptist state conventions and churches.

Baptist Joint Committee  
200 Maryland Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002

Non-profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Riverdale, MD  
Permit No. 5061

06020      FAG57J      K  
REV A R FAGAN  
901 COMMERCE ST.  
NASHVILLE, TN

37203