



REPORT from the CAPITAL

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NEWSMAKERS

Umar Abdul-Mutakallim, a Muslim, was rejected by a Cub Scout pack sponsored by a Kalamazoo, Mich., church for the group's top post, even though he has served as a den leader for the past two years. The Rev. Keith Lohman of Haven Reformed Church said the church did not wish to discriminate, but believed that since Cub Scout Pack 293 is a church program it should be led by a Christian.

Brittney Kaye Settle's claim that her free speech rights were violated when a teacher refused to allow her to write a research paper on the life of Jesus Christ will not be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. Without comment the high court refused Nov. 27, to review Settle's lawsuit, which was dismissed by lower courts. Settle had sued ninth-grade teacher Dana Ramsey and Dickson County, Tenn., school officials after she declined to select another topic and received a zero on the research project. A federal appeals court said courts should exercise restraint in teacher-student conflicts "over matters falling within the ordinary authority of the teacher over curriculum and course content." The court noted, "It is not for us to overrule the teacher's view that the student should learn to write research papers by beginning with a topic other than her own theology."

Judge J. Thomas Greene has recommended that officials of a Salt Lake City school should not be held in contempt because they tried to prevent students from singing the Christian song "Friends" during a June graduation ceremony. Rachel Bauchman, a Jewish student, sued because she thought inclusion of the song violated her rights. A court injunction forbade the school from performing religious songs but some students sang "Friends" anyway. Δ

Parent's guide on religion in public schools released

Transforming shouting matches into dialogue is one of the aims of a new parent's guide on religion in public schools that was released at a Dec. 7 press conference at the Freedom Forum in Arlington, Va.

The guide, produced by The Freedom Forum First Amendment

Center at Vanderbilt University and the National PTA, helps describe for parents what religious practices the law affords children in public schools. The guide will be sent to more than 30,000 local

PTA presidents, according to the group's president Joan Dykstra.

The 16-page guide provides legal answers to 15 of the most pressing questions parents face related to religion in school, ranging from graduation prayer to religious holidays.

Education Secretary Richard Riley said, "This guide is long overdue and another important step in the continuing effort of many groups in our nation to find common ground in the effort to protect religious liberty."

Riley, who said the administration opposes attempts to alter the First Amendment, said that the new publication will complement the administration's guidelines on religion in school sent to every school district this year. The administration guidelines were designed to help school administrators understand what religious expression the law permits in public schools.

The guidelines have been well received, he said. The American Association of School Administrators recently surveyed its 100 most active members, Riley said, noting that more than 80 percent of respondents said the guidelines have been "helpful."

Both documents "can go a long way to clearing up much of the confusion that has led some parents to believe that religion has no place" in public schools.

Dykstra said she hoped the new document will open dialogue between parents and

school officials.

"The emphasis in the guide is on tolerance, respect and individual freedom — the basis on which decisions about school programs should be made," she said.

Charles Haynes, scholar-in-residence at the First Amendment Center, said that regional workshops around the country will follow the distribution of the guide. Haynes said the primary goal is to inform and involve parents in policy discussions with the local schools.

Oliver Thomas, a Baptist attorney and consultant for the First Amendment Center, said the guide "is as good as it gets" from a legal standpoint. Thomas said some of the nation's foremost church-state attorneys — representing groups across the political spectrum — offered feedback after reviewing the document. Δ



Thomas (left) and Haynes discuss guidelines.

Dunn honored as Baptists recall leading ethicist

Television journalist Bill Moyers, church-state watchdog James Dunn and former Southern Baptist Convention President Jimmy Allen agreed. The greatest lesson seminary professor T.B. Maston taught them was to "love folks just because they are folks."

A foundation named in Maston's honor presented its fifth biennial Christian Ethics Award to Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee at a Nov. 30 banquet in Dallas.

At the awards dinner, Moyers led a panel discussion with Allen and others who offered personal reflections on Maston, Southern Baptist pioneer in Christian ethics and longtime professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth.

Moyers credited Maston with opening his eyes to racial injustice and helping to clarify his "calling" into public service in the Johnson administration.

"Dr. Maston's great contribution was what he revealed to us about ourselves, not what he told us," Moyers said. "He was that special teacher who drew us toward our own moral center of gravity, drawing out of us what we never knew was there."

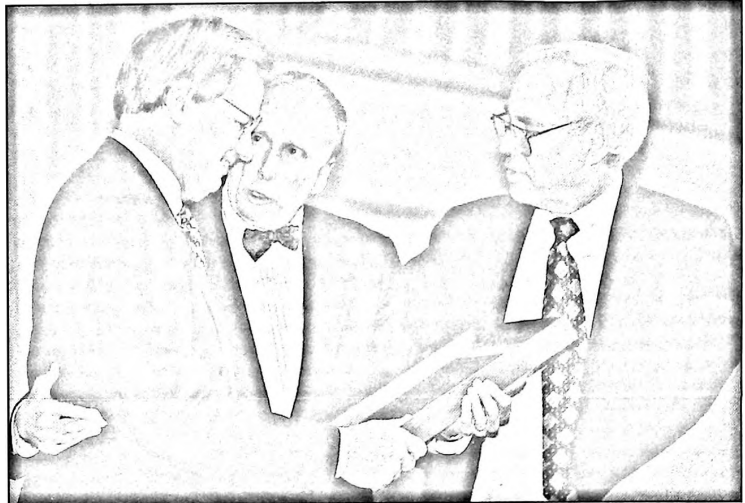
Maston feared the tyranny of the majority, with its appetite for power, Moyers said. He placed his confidence in God's ability to preserve a "faithful remnant" who would not succumb to the temptations of ambition.

"I believe he would say it is a great time to be a Baptist today if you don't mind living in the remnant," Moyers said.

Allen praised Maston as a champion of "the underdog" who taught students "to love people because God loved them, not because they deserved it."

Earl Martin, a former missionary and seminary colleague, wrote a book on Maston's contributions to missions, *Passport to Servanthood*. He saluted him as one whose commitment to Christian ethics was wedded to a passion for authentic evangelism and missions beyond all racial boundaries.

The "authenticity of his life at home and at church" was the great impression Maston left on Daniel Vestal, pastor of Tallowood Church, Houston. He



James Dunn (center) receives the T.B. Maston Christian Ethics Award, presented by Weston Ware (right), chairman of the Maston Foundation and associate director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, and television journalist Bill Moyers. (Photo by Ken Camp)

knew Maston as a neighbor and fellow church member at Fort Worth's Gambrell Street Church.

"Here was an authentic Christian man who cared about me as a high school student, who affirmed me but confronted me with Christian truth," Vestal said.

Maston's teachings continue to "ring true," said award-recipient Dunn, who served 14 years as director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission before joining the BJC in 1981.

"The oneness of the human family, rooted in our all being made in the image of God, was an inescapable presupposition in Maston's thought," he said. "It flared up in his passion for racial justice. It burst out in his rock-solid dedication to religious liberty. It shaped ... his philosophical ethic."

That understanding of God's image in each person was the foundation of Maston's teaching on soul liberty, Dunn said.

"We are wired up to be free — programmed for freedom. Our software demands it," he said, pointing out that without freedom, ethics is meaningless.

"All sorts of determinism — economic, environmental, physical, psychological, sacred or spiritual — reduce

people to things," Dunn said. "Only with soul freedom ... does authentic morality have a chance." Δ

— Ken Camp
Texas Baptist Communications Office

Soviets tortured, killed 200,000 clergy, group says

Some 200,000 clergy, many crucified, scalped and otherwise tortured, were killed during the approximately 60 years of communist rule in the former Soviet Union, a Russian commission reported Nov. 27.

In addition, another 500,000 religious figures were persecuted and 40,000 churches destroyed in the period from 1922 to 1980, the report said. Half the country's mosques and more than half the synagogues were destroyed.

"Clergymen were crucified on churches' holy gates, shot, scalped (and) strangled," said Alexander Yakovlev, head of the Commission for the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Political Repression that prepared the report for Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

"I was especially shocked by accounts of priests turned into columns of ice in winter," Yakovlev said. Δ

Religion in Public Schools

Q: How should religious holidays be treated in the schools?

A: Teaching about religious holidays, which is permissible, is different from celebrating religious holidays, which is not. Study of holidays serves academic goals of educating students about history and cultures as well as about the traditions of particular religions.

The use of religious symbols as examples of religious or cultural heritage is permissible as a teaching aid or resource. ...

Sacred music may be sung or played as part of the school's academic program. School concerts that present a variety of selections may include religious music. The use of music, art, drama, or literature with religious themes is permissible if it serves a sound educational goal in the curriculum.

Excerpts from "A Parent's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools."

VIEWS OF THE WALL

Calling parents to the table



J. BRENT WALKER
General Counsel

between the National PTA and The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, a manual — titled *A Parent's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools* — was released at a press conference in Washington on Dec. 7. It's a good one.

The 16-page guide is arranged in question-and-answer format and seeks to deal with some of the more commonly asked questions about what can be done in the public schools. Extolling the benefits of the guide at the press conference, Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley said: "This will be a valuable guide to parents and go a long way to clearing up much of the misinformation about the role of religion in our public schools." And Joan Dykstra, president of National PTA, highlighted the importance of parental involvement in the education of their children: "Parents must accept the responsibility for nurturing their children's spirituality and for being involved in the decisions about how religious issues are handled in the school."

The guide deals with many issues that parallel the *Joint Statement of Current Law* — though it does so in perhaps in a more practical, user-friendly way. It discusses the many avenues by which students may express their faith in school, the circumstances under which students may pray out loud, the vexing question of graduation prayer, the tricky issue of religious holidays, religious symbols and sacred music (see sidebar), the

In the wake of the highly successful *Religion in the Public Schools: A Joint Statement of Current Law*, another document has come out to help parents understand the proper role of religion in the public schools. In a collaborative effort

right of students to be excused from activities for which they have religious objections, equal access clubs, student religious garb, the right of students to distribute religious literature and the issue of character education.

The guide also sets forth some overarching advice to parents and school officials about how they should go about "finding common ground" in their quest to accommodate the religious freedom of students, while preventing the school from taking sides in religious matters:

- *Include all stakeholders.* Policy should be fashioned only after the appropriate involvement of those affected by the decisions and consideration given to dissenting views.

- *Listen to all sides.* School officials must acknowledge the sometimes-valid criticism of school policies, particularly concerning the treatment of religion.

- *Work for comprehensive policies.* By cooperating with parents to outline comprehensive policies, administrators show they are taking religious liberty seriously.

- *Be pro-active.* School officials should be out in front on this issue anticipating problems, rather than waiting for problems to erupt and fester.

- *Commit to civil debate.* The manual discourages personal attacks, name calling and similar tactics that undermine the educational mission.

In short, *A Parent's Guide* exhorts parents and school officials to do "not only what is constitutional, but also what is *right* for all citizens." This helpful manual gives them a blueprint for how to do just that.

More than 30,000 copies of the guide will be sent to local PTA presidents. Copies may be obtained from: The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center
ATTN: Parent's Guide
1207 18th Avenue, South
Nashville, TN 37212

The report is also available on the First Amendment Center's home page: <http://www.fac.org>. Δ

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Trifling with the Constitution

The religious right and its Republican allies in Congress, bent on amending the Constitution to redefine religious liberty, have now produced two mischievous constitutional amendments. In any rational competition the winner would be neither proposal but the First Amendment, which forbids laws that establish religion or deny its free exercise.

Each of the sponsors, Representatives Henry Hyde of Illinois and Ernest Jim Istook of Oklahoma, says his amendment is superior to the other. But to outsiders, the amendments seem equally broad, vague and dangerous. Both would repeal half a century of Supreme Court rulings that have guarded the Founding Fathers' imperative to keep government out of religion and vice versa. Both say government may not deny benefits or otherwise discriminate against private cit-

izens on account of religious expression. Both could authorize coerced piety in the schools and force governments to subsidize parochial schools. Both also proceed from the same misguided assumption, that government invidiously discriminates against religion.

In one sense the Constitution does discriminate, and rightly so. It allows government, if it chooses, to promote officially a whole range of activities. Yet it expressly provides that government may not establish religion, which the Supreme Court has construed as barring laws "which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another."

This broad interpretation of the Bill of Rights has well served the Constitution's high purpose of taking some intractable issues, including personal religious matters, out of the

political arena. It bestows expansive liberty of conscience on Americans and spares them the sectarian strife and violence that plague much of the world.

Occasionally an official or a court gets it wrong. An official may give undue support to people who demand the public square for ceremonies better held in a church. Or a bewildered teacher hides behind a mistaken interpretation of the Constitution to justify excluding not only classroom worship but serious discourse on religious topics. The remedy is not to amend the First Amendment but to study and correctly apply its command that government be neutral as to things religious. Δ

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