



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee

NewsMakers

◆ Rudy Pulido, pastor of Southwest Baptist Church in St. Louis, sent a letter to the mayor signed by six other area pastors asking that the city stop seeking church membership records to verify city employees' residency. The letter stated the action is a "serious breach of First Amendment rights." Other signers were John Anderson, Gordon Murray, Richard Lay, Tom Firesek, Norman Hixson and Wendell Sapp.

◆ Johnny Hart's "B.C." comic strip for Palm Sunday did not run as scheduled in the *Los Angeles Times* because of the strip's Christian theme. That decision drew protests from newspaper readers. Narda Zachino, the *Times'* associate editor, said the paper later published the strip in its religion section because it had become a news story.

◆ Victor Virchev, president of the Bulgarian Evangelical Alliance, has complained in a letter to the World Council of Churches and the Council of European Churches that local authorities have a negative attitude toward church construction requests and the media treats evangelical groups as sects.

◆ Lloyd Ogilvie, chaplain of the U.S. Senate, told a Capitol Hill newspaper that he believes in "the separation of church and state, but I don't believe in the separation of God and state." Δ

Scalia speech sparks debate over religion's role in society

A Supreme Court justice's April 9 remarks at a Mississippi Baptist church ignited another flare-up over the role of religion in public life.

Addressing a breakfast at First Baptist Church, Jackson, Justice Antonin Scalia reportedly decried the modern world's ridicule of Christians who believe in miracles. The event was sponsored by the Christian Legal Society at the Mississippi College School of Law, a Baptist institution.

Scalia reportedly told the audience of more than 650 people that modern society views those who hold traditional Christian beliefs as "simple-minded."

CNN's "Crossfire" focused on the controversy generated by Scalia's address in its April 10 program, which featured Yale University law professor Stephen Carter and Baptist Joint Committee Executive Director James M. Dunn.

Carter, who has argued for a more visible role for religion in the public square, voiced some agreement with Scalia's views about the secularization of society.

Those who fight for or against public policy causes because of their faith often "are ridiculed and sneered at," he said.

Scalia would not have sparked the same reaction had he talked about other important aspects of his life, he said.

"But since he mentioned his faith and its importance to him in life, suddenly there's an uproar," Carter said.

Dunn applauded Scalia's courage in "bearing his Christian witness," but rejected the notion that the nation has become too secular.

"Religion in America is a powerful and

pervasive force and Christianity is the best-funded, the largest and most powerful religious group in America," he said.

The Baptist church-state specialist said it is "almost silly to talk about Christians being the object of ridicule.

"We have some pretty good advice about what to do when that happens," he added. "It's found in the Beatitudes when

Jesus said rejoice when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you."

Carter agreed that Christianity is a large well-funded religion and that the threat of ridicule should not deter Christians from speaking up.

But it's also the case, Carter said, that "a lot of Christians are very reluctant to talk about their faith" around co-workers.

Crossfire host Fred Barnes asked Dunn if he had a problem with President Clinton citing Commerce Secretary Ron Brown's favorite scripture verse after Brown died in a tragic plane crash in Croatia. "Here is the president professing his faith, Ron Brown's faith," Barnes said.

"I applaud the president," Dunn said. "I applaud Ron Brown. I applaud Justice Scalia for his courage in bearing his Christian witness in a situation like that. It's not the context of what he said, it's the content — his using his free exercise of religion to deny the existence of it."

Dunn added that his problem is not with "Mr. Scalia giving his Christian testimony," but with his analysis that the American society is irreligious and awash in Christian bashing.

"I just don't believe that's true," he said. Δ



1936-1996

Six Decades
of Securing
Religious Liberty



In January 1954, C. Emanuel Carlson began a 17-year tenure as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, succeeding the agency's first executive, Joseph Martin Dawson. Carlson came to the Baptist Joint Committee from Bethel College, a St. Paul, Minn., school operated by the Baptist General Conference. First as a teacher and later as dean, Carlson had helped lead Bethel in moving from a secondary school to a junior college and then to a four-year college. According to a doctoral dissertation by former BJC Director of Information Services Stan Hastey, Carlson's approach to his task was "characterized by deliberate, scholarly investigation of the issues confronting" the agency. In his first director's report, Carlson warned that "easy answers are oftentimes dangerous answers." He added that those seeking to apply Christian faith in public affairs should not expect quick or easy answers. **Δ**

Tennessee Senate kills controversial evolution bill

The Tennessee Senate defeated a bill that would have allowed school boards to fire teachers who told students that evolution is fact.

The proposed bill would have allowed, but not required, school boards to fire teachers who were considered offenders. It was defeated 20-13, according to news reports.

"I can't vote for this bill, but I don't want anybody to think I don't know God," said Lt. Gov. John Wilder, who presided over the discussion.

The bill had sparked memories of the 1925 Scopes trial, in which high school biology teacher John Scopes was convicted for violating a Tennessee statute banning the teaching of evolution in public schools.

District of Columbia gets funds without vouchers

Voucher opponents turned back a months-long effort to channel tax dollars to private and religious schools through a federal spending bill for the District of Columbia.

Voucher proponents retreated from their efforts to attach the provision as another partial-government shutdown loomed March 29. Congress approved and President Clinton signed the 12th short-term spending measure this fiscal year to fund federal agencies whose 1996 appropriations have yet to be enacted.

The measure, which expires April 24, allocated the remaining 1996 funds for D.C. It did not contain the \$5 million for "scholarships" to be used by low-income students to attend private and religious schools.

Opponents said the provision would have created the first federally funded private school voucher program in the nation's history. They argued that federal money would bring government regulations to religious schools and said it would only help a small number of students.

Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich of Georgia had said he did not want to approve funds for D.C. unless a voucher provision was in place. A spokeswoman for Gingrich said Senate Democrats held up the process and Gingrich planned to seek another legislative vehicle to move

vouchers forward.

The voucher provision was in an earlier D.C. spending measure, but the Senate refused to accept it.

J. Brent Walker, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said the removal of the voucher provision was a victory for D.C. and public education. "It was especially important to win this one because it would have set a precedent for the whole country."

Massachusetts court urged to shun polity dispute

The Baptist Joint Committee has joined 17 other religious organizations in asking Massachusetts' top court to dismiss a challenge to mass media expenditures by the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston.

In a friend-of-the-court brief written by University of Texas law school professor Douglas Laycock, the religious groups argued that the lower court ruling "is a precedent for Massachusetts courts to substitute their own views for those of the highest church authority on how a church should be governed and how its programs should be operated."

The religious group's brief argued that Massachusetts courts should not decide whether the media expenditures were a promotion of faith, as the church contends, or speculative investment, as the plaintiffs argue.

"Decision of that question is vested in the leadership of The First Church, not in the Superior Court," the brief states.

The religious groups said religious liberty includes the right of churches to interpret their own founding documents and traditions.

"Churches can have no prophetic voice if every controversial expenditure is subject to judicial review," the brief states. **Δ**

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Reflections

James M. Dunn

Executive Director



Give me your top-of-the-head reaction. "For liberal critics, it's an article of faith that people motivated by religion have no place in American politics." The lawyer said, "It's just not true." The teacher turned paralegal said, "history proves otherwise."

The Generation X computer nerd quoted Porky Pig with a colorful colloquialism remarking on the utter wrongness of the words and questioning the intelligence of the speaker. My own muted response: "poppycock." What do you say?

Senator Bob Dole said it speaking to the South Carolina Christian Coalition in February. But to be fair, he was simply echoing the conventional wisdom of a certain crowd. It is difficult to resist the peer pressure of whimperers.

A young Harvard philosopher, Michael Sandel, says that religion has been put outside the political order.

Supreme Court Justice Scalia complained this week about Christians being intimidated. That sounds like a self-contradicting protestation. A justice of the highest court uses his pulpit and magisterial robes to whine about not being allowed to do exactly what he's doing.

No, there's no naked public square in this good land. If anything, our corporate persona is bundled up in long Johns, boots and a fur coat in Houston heat.

It is true that for far too long Baptists and other Bible believers banished themselves from 'dirty politics. We saw ourselves as "in this world but not of this world." Even today a withdrawal strategy characterizes a rash of books by self-anointed spiritual politicians. They invoke a pox on both houses, Democrat and Republican. They eschew ordinary politics left and right and for the time being neuter themselves, longing for a purer way. But those strategies are self-inflicted. If, motivated by religion, these folks reject the real world, it is a monastic cop out of their own choosing.

People motivated by faith are all over

politics. Why, seven of the nine elected politicians at the top of the pecking order are Baptists: President Clinton, Vice President Gore, Speaker Gingrich, Minority Leader Gephardt, the hoary Senate President Pro Tem Thurmond, Majority Whip Lott and the ranking Democrat Byrd . . . religious people with a place in politics.

A feisty French woman was my dinner partner a few years back at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies. She reflected her Sorbonne saturation as she argued amusingly that religiosity in the United States is thin and meaningless. She just didn't get it. Profound religion is alive and well in America, shaping all of life. Roger Williams' "lively experiment" is working. This nation has:

- ◆ the greatest freedom of religion;
- ◆ the least religious conflict;
- ◆ the largest attendance at church/synagogue/mosque weekly;
- ◆ the highest percentage of voluntary religious participation;
- ◆ the most people helpers sent out to hurting lands; and
- ◆ the best giving for religious causes on the face of the earth.

Clearly, there's a big place in American politics for people moved by religion. They shouldn't, however, retreat when their philosophy, agenda or tactics are evaluated and criticized.

If they behave as if they alone are the Christians coalescing, if their agenda is narrow, limited and, in some instances, fueled by hate, and if their tactics include dishonest scorecards and stealth candidates, why should they be surprised when they are exposed? When one enters the political kitchen, he must expect the heat.

People motivated by religion are up to their gills in American politics, left and right, as they should be and have been.

It's PC all right, to join the complaining chorus, but not "politically correct" — pitifully correct. Δ

Quoting

I do not know how best to educate the young in civilized and moral standards of conduct. I do know that those who think that the way to do it is by introducing religion or prayer into our public schools are playing with matches on a powder keg. How I address my maker, in what posture, with what words, in what language, in what garb, in what company, at what times and in what seasons are not matters I am prepared to submit to majority vote, nor is any other American who takes religion seriously.

I can imagine no surer way to generate disruptive, dangerous, irreconcilable conflict than to submit religious questions to the political process. The conflicts and hatreds that will be engendered when a school-prayer amendment is debated in 50 states or when the question of prayer becomes an issue in thousands of school-board elections around the country is simply unimaginable.

Robert S. Rifkind
President
American Jewish
Committee
May 3, 1995

Baptist Joint Committee

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- ◆ 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/churches

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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Book Review

Faith and Politics:

What's a Christian to do?

C. Welton Gaddy, *Peake Road* (an imprint of Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc.), Macon, Ga., 1996, 127 pp.



The intersection of faith and politics generates tremendous enthusiasm in today's society and raises numerous intricate questions.

In his most recent book, *Faith and Politics*, C. Welton Gaddy responds to many of these questions with striking clarity and thoughtfulness. He affirms the need for sound answers while warning against the absolutism that permeates the discourse of faith and politics.

Gaddy opens his book with a discussion of the relationship between faith and politics. He traces the present confusion regarding their relationship to the right wing-religious organizations which began gaining prominence in the late 1970s. After a description of the religious right's themes and strategies, Gaddy addresses some of his serious concerns with the movement. In this rebuttal, he presents a strong defense of church-state separation. Gaddy points out that "were the religious right to be successful in its assault on the separationist wall, the big loser would be religion."

Christians often question the relationship between their personal convictions and political persuasions. Gaddy focuses the second part of his book on the principles that he thinks should be of primary consideration when developing one's own political platform. Included in this chapter are thoughts on economic justice, law enforcement, environmental issues

and international affairs. Gaddy's writing is refreshing in that he does not arrogantly assume that he has God's answer to every political question facing society today. Gaddy's purpose in writing this book is to "prod thought," and he is successful in this effort. Throughout the book he offers his views, followed by a series of questions designed to stimulate further reflection by the reader.

Gaddy affirms the principle of religious liberty in his writing calling it "the cornerstone for all other freedoms." Gaddy responds to the attacks on the wall of separation between church and state. His discussion leads into the debate over proposed religion amendments to the Constitution now pending in Congress. Gaddy argues that these amendments "look simple, innocent, and general at first glance. However, each opens the door to a whole new constitutional perspective on religious freedom and church-state separation." He asserts that if the amendments are passed, "government would be worse off, and religion would suffer even more."

In the final section of the book, Gaddy urges Christians to expand their political vision. He argues that Christian citizens need to be the voice of the voiceless and to help change society's vision from "me" to "us." The renewed vision that he calls for is one that values freedom and diversity over "forced unity."

For persons grappling with questions regarding faith and politics, Welton Gaddy's most recent book is invaluable reading. The reader will find a thoughtful examination of the current issues facing people of faith. Δ

— Edward F. Meier
BJC Intern

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