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Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ Allison Lee has completed a seven-month internship at the Baptist Joint Committee. During that time she provided administrative support and worked in the general counsel's office on legal and legislative matters. Lee, a Samford University graduate, plans to attend law school in the fall.

◆ Janeé Pelletier, a student at Messiah College in Grantham, Pa., has begun a part-time internship at the BJC. She is participating in the American Studies Program, a work-study program based in Washington and sponsored by the Coalition for Christian Colleges.

◆ Sen. Paul Coverdell, R-Ga., has introduced a bill that would provide children from low-income families public funds for tuition payments to private or parochial schools.

◆ Adurahman Alamoudi, executive director of the American Muslim Council, stated his disagreement with 16 American Islamic groups asking the U.S. Supreme Court to remove a depiction of the prophet Muhammad from an historical frieze lining the chamber's ceiling. He said it was constructed many years ago and with good intentions. If constructed today, Alamoudi would oppose it, but he said Muslims should not "deface" the court and have people "remember that it was Muslims who are responsible." Δ

Lawmakers side with judge in 'Commandments' dispute

The U.S. House of Representatives threw its weight behind a controversial bid by an Alabama judge to keep a display of the Ten Commandments on a courtroom wall.

The House voted 295-125 to approve a resolution supporting Etowah County Judge Roy Moore's display of the commandments.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a suit to stop Moore from opening court sessions with prayers and from displaying the commandments. Montgomery County Judge Charles Price ordered Moore to cease the courtroom prayers and later ordered Moore to remove or modify the display. The Alabama Supreme Court has stayed Price's orders until it reviews the case.

Adding to the controversy, Alabama Gov. Fob James says he will use troops to prevent the enforcement of either ruling.

The nonbinding resolution states the "sense" of the House that the Ten Commandments are a declaration of fundamental principles that are the cornerstones of a fair society and that their display in government offices and court-houses should be permitted.

Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Ala., sponsor of the measure, said the "nation was founded on Judeo-Christian principles, which are embodied in the Ten Commandments." Excluding the display of the commandments "because it suggests an establishment of religion, is not consistent with our nation's heritage," he said.

Supporters pointed to a Ten Commandment display in the U.S. Supreme Court and the words, "In God we trust" in the Capitol, asking why an Alabama court cannot do the same.

Opponents argued that the high court's display does not contain the text of the commandments and said it is part of a larger display of historical symbols. They also said a courtroom should be neutral ground for all parties.

Rep. Robert Scott, D-Va., said, "Christians do not need the courts to endorse or legitimize our religion, and asking for support from a court for endorsement is self-defeating." He challenged the notion that a vote for the resolution represents a show of support for the virtues of the Ten Commandments. "This actually demeans Christianity rather than upholds it."

Rep. Steve Horn, R-Calif., said displaying a Judeo-Christian symbol leaves out a lot of religions. It is "wrong to single out two religions and carve what they believe on the walls," he added.

Baptist Joint Committee General Counsel J. Brent Walker said that while it would be permissible to include the Ten Commandments as part of a larger courtroom exhibit, the Alabama display "stands alone as an object of veneration to be read, believed and followed by those who come into court seeking justice."

Walker also said Congress has no business "sticking its nose into the workings of the courts in Alabama." Δ

"Christians do not need the courts to endorse or legitimize our religion."

— Rep. Robert Scott



Quoting

"In the past half-century, American society has become noisily and notoriously pluralistic. This has made Roger Williams more relevant, for he had strong opinions about what government should do about religious pluralism: leave it alone. Turks, Jews, infidels, papists: leave them alone. By 1990 the list had grown much longer, but the principle remained the same. Religion has the power to persuade, never the power to compel. Government does have the power to compel, but that government is wisest and best which offers liberty of conscience its widest possible range.

"As to the year 2000 and beyond, one cannot anticipate what will happen to the reputation of Roger Williams, how praised or how damned, how distorted or how ignored he might be. For the sake of both the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world, however, the hope remains that he will not again become an exile."

— Edwin S. Gaustad
in *Liberty of Conscience:
Roger Williams in America*

BJC panel revises budget, favors Williams statue

Responding to a decline in projected revenue, the Baptist Joint Committee's Executive Committee approved a revised 1997 budget during its March 3 meeting.

The new budget projects 1997 income at \$835,000, down 4 percent from the \$870,000 budget approved by the BJC board in October. The most significant change in the revised budget is a 16.6 percent drop in income anticipated from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

In January the CBF — one of 10 national bodies supporting the BJC — approved a mid-year budget cut due to less-than-expected income growth. That action reduced the BJC's anticipated income from CBF from \$288,000 to \$240,000 but still left the CBF as the largest single contributor to the BJC.

The revised BJC budget projects lower spending for travel, printing and postage.

The BJC panel also accepted an independent auditor's report showing that the agency's net assets increased by \$102,336 last year. That increase is largely due to a \$600,000 endowment drive launched last year by the agency. To date, gifts and pledges to the BJC endowment total \$306,000.

Also approved was a statement opposing a decision by the Joint Committee of the Library of Congress to move a Roger Williams statue from the Capitol rotunda.

The statement notes that after being banished from Massachusetts Bay Colony, Williams founded Rhode Island, which Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., described as "the first genuine democracy — also the first church-divorced and conscience-free community — in history."

The statement describes Williams as "the primary architect of the lively experiment of church-state separation as the necessary corollary of religious liberty" and the founder of the first Baptist church in America and the first Baptist denomination in the hemisphere.

The BJC panel's statement commends Sen. John Chafee, R-R.I., for "his efforts to prevent the statue's removal and calls upon all Baptists, especially those in Congress, to vigorously oppose this 'second banishment' of Roger Williams."

In his report to the panel, Executive Director James M. Dunn said the agency's December 1996 fund-raising mailing had netted more than \$65,000 in income for

the operating budget and endowment, with an average gift of nearly \$140.

Dunn said one of the major threats to religious liberty is presented in the push for vouchers for religious schools and other forms of government support for faith-based programs.

One of the challenges, Dunn said, "is to tell the truth" about the "insidious forces" behind the voucher movement in the face of pressures for political correctness.

He said the voucher movement is being fueled by:

- ◆ the denial of social responsibility for public schools by "well-off, upper middle class" Americans;

- ◆ the push to recast the voucher battle by the Roman Catholic Church. "Eighty percent of the schools that would benefit from vouchers are still the property of one church"; and

- ◆ "the implicit, systemic racism of a good hunk of this country, and it's not just the old South." Part of the push for vouchers, he said, "is an attempt to foster and pay for the segregated academies of this country."

It's difficult, Dunn said, to make those points in the debate over vouchers while maintaining political correctness.

"But what, after all, were the 8th century prophets but defiers of political correctness?" he asked.

BJC General Counsel J. Brent Walker and Associate General Counsel Melissa Rogers told the panel about the agency's role in coalitions working to defend the constitutionality of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act; to oppose constitutional amendments to permit school-sponsored prayer and tax support of religious programs; and to study the impact of tax reform initiatives on charitable organizations, including churches.

New British bill exempts taping of confessions

In the wake of the uproar in the United States over the taping by authorities of a sacramental confession in a prison, the British government has announced it will exempt religious confessions from a new law giving police wider power to use concealed microphones.

A government spokesman said police have agreed to exempt religious confessions from the new law, which boosts the surveillance powers of law enforcement officials.

Baptists emphasize uncoerced faith

Toby Druin

Editor, *The Baptist Standard*
Baptist General Convention of Texas



I consider myself a strict church-state separationist. I am opposed to government-sanctioned or government-written prayer in the public schools. There is a commercial running on television that demonstrates the peril of officially sanctioned prayer. A football coach is preparing his team for a game and calls in a seemingly endless line of preachers, priests, rabbis, swamis, etc., to lead the "prayer." That is the future of prayer in the public schools, if some efforts are successful. I am opposed to the approval of vouchers by the state or federal government to pay for children to attend private schools, even though such legislation would greatly assist the parents of two of my grandchildren. We need public schools; we also need private schools. If the government gets involved in the funding of private schools, the government eventually will get involved in the running of them — and should, if government money is involved.

These church-state separation views are consistent with positions taken by Baptists for centuries. No one has ever articulated it better than George W. Truett did in 1920. Symbolically, the pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, spoke from the steps of the Capitol in Washington, where the Southern Baptist Convention was having its annual meeting. Truett's message was titled "Baptists and Religious Liberty." In his opening remarks, Truett called attention to "our Baptist fathers, who paid such a great price, through the long generations, that liberty, both religious and civil, might have free course and be glorified everywhere." Later, he said, "It is the consistent and insistent contention of our Baptist people, always and everywhere, that religion must be forever voluntary and uncoerced, and that it is not the prerogative of any power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to compel men to conform to any religious creed or form of worship or to pay taxes for the support of a religious

GUEST VIEWS

organization to which they do not belong and in whose creed they do not believe. God wants free worshippers and no other kind."

We don't hear many Baptist leaders making those kinds of speeches these days. Too many have vested interests in their own schools or are interested in pushing political party agendas. They have traded their leadership roles for a mess of political pottage. Our God has no political party. He has His own agenda that transcends partisanship, and Christians on both sides of the aisle are serving Him.

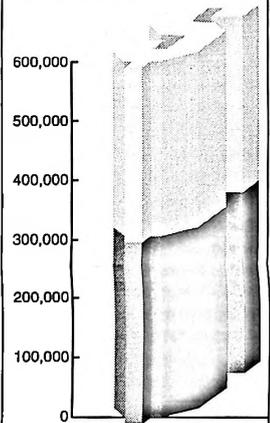
Nevertheless, it was greatly satisfying to see President Clinton and Vice President Gore take their oaths of office with their hands resting on the Bible, to hear them add "so help me God" to the oath (it's not part of it as stated in the Constitution) and to hear Billy Graham invoke God's blessing on the inauguration, on the nation's elected leaders and on the United States. But that part of the ceremony — the hand on the Bible, Graham's presence and prayer, and the presence of Clinton's church's choir — was the choice of the office-holders; it's not the law of the land. All that is required is that the president and vice president be sworn to uphold the Constitution.

It can be done with no Bible under the outstretched hand of the president. Considering the continuing diversification of the country, the day may come when his or her hand may rest on the Koran or the Book of Mormon. No doubt when Kennedy was sworn in, his hand was on a Douay Version of the Bible.

Naturally I hope every president will be a practicing Christian, but if we are true to our heritage, we must be as open to a non-Christian holding office as we are to a Southern Baptist doing so. And while we are open to that prospect, we must work to get the most committed Christians to run for office. Δ

Reprinted from the Feb. 12, 1997, edition of *The Baptist Standard*.

Endowing the Baptist Joint Committee



Whether popular or not, for six decades the Baptist Joint Committee has faithfully championed the separation of church and state. If you believe having government sponsor prayers for school kids or if you think there is no harm in having taxpayers bankroll religious schools, you probably should think twice before giving to this endowment drive. But if you share our view that government support trivializes faith, there is no better place for you to invest in the work of securing religious liberty for the next century. We're counting on you.

James H. Druin

Baptist Joint Committee

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/churches

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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Book Review

School Prayer: Handbook for Attorneys (1997 Edition)

Edited by David Heller, The National Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty, New York, 160 pp. (\$25, 212-750-6461)



School prayer, moment of silence laws and religious observances at public athletic events continue to be hot button issues in the 1990s.

Historically, the Supreme Court has recognized the need to protect against state-sponsored religion in public education for the benefit of both church and state. But recently school prayer advocates have pushed for legislation that would result in state-promoted religion and undue entanglement between church and state. So the debate continues.

This handbook — the second in a series on religion in public schools — is intended to be a reference guide for educators, lawyers and advocates alike. It is tailored in such a coherent way that one need not be a legal expert to comprehend the information.

Organizationally, the handbook is divided into five distinct sections: 1) samples of a model school prayer act, a complaint and brief; 2) a broad summary and analysis of case law that covers both Supreme Court cases and lower federal court cases; 3) state law provisions that focus on state constitutions, statutes and attorney general opinions; 4) an annotated bibliography that includes numerous authors ranging from Thomas Jefferson to President Clinton; and 5) a section of personal testimonials by individuals who are

involved in different challenges to religious activities in public schools.

This handbook is a convenient and user-friendly source for a quick lesson in church-state law or as a guide to the "how-tos" of challenging unconstitutional religious exercises in public education. Most of all though, this handbook is a step forward in the long process of educating the public about the appropriate relationship between church and state in the public schools, and is among the materials and efforts of numerous organizations that share a commitment to both the freedom of religious practice and the separation of church and state.

Starr Smith
BJC Intern

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