



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ **Rich Hamlin**, pastor of Evangelical Reformed Church, Tacoma, Wash., won his bid to maintain the confidentiality of a confession given by a man charged with a crime. In a major victory for the clergy-penitent privilege, the Washington Court of Appeals ruled 3-0 that such confessions are privileged under Washington state law.

◆ **Barbara G. Green** has been named interim director of the Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy, an ecumenical research center based at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C. A Presbyterian minister who served for more than 15 years in that denomination's Washington office, she will begin a two-year appointment to the post Sept. 1. Green said there "is a lot of diversity and polarization around what it means to incorporate faith and public policy issues in the country right now. The center may be helpful in providing a context for dialogue among those diverse perspectives."

◆ **Rajendra Gupta**, excise minister of the Delhi union territory in India, has recommended canceling the official status of Christian churches that use wine during Holy Communion, calling the use of wine in religious places a sacrilege. Gupta has apparently received unofficial approval for the move from Chief Minister of Delhi Sheb Singh Verma. Δ

Religious persecution bills face significant obstacles in Senate

Unable to rally the support of key Republican lawmakers, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee pushed aside a bill designed to punish countries that permit or endorse religious persecution.

The International Religious Freedom Act, sponsored by Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla., was on a list of committee bills to be considered and voted on July 23. But it was removed from the markup session after it failed to receive the support of enough GOP panelists to clear the committee, a spokesman said.

Nickles was prepared to alter the bill, but apparently those changes were not enough to win the support of the panel's Democrats and at least three GOP members.

The Nickles bill would establish a State Department office, an advisory committee and a White House adviser to evaluate and monitor persecution in other countries. The State Department office would report annually on countries engaged in religious persecution, and the president would be required to choose from a list of sanctions and other penalties to impose on those nations.

Before the scheduled committee action, a Senate official told Baptist News Service that "everybody and their dog" is asking for changes. The source also said that an anti-persecution bill approved by the House earlier this year has no chance of passing in the Senate. The Freedom From Religious Persecution Act (H.R. 2431), sponsored by Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., and Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., would put in place an offi-

cer who could automatically impose economic and other penalties against countries that endorse persecution.

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., has promised a floor vote on some religious persecution bill before the August recess. The lack of support for the Nickles bill leaves few options.



Global religious persecution
resists congressional fix

Steven T. McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, listed two options: attaching a modified version of one of the bills to the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill being

considered before the recess; or bringing up the Wolf-Specter bill, which is sitting at the Senate desk, and allowing amendments.

McFarland said, "The action of the committee has increased reliance on divine intervention, which is a good place to be."

The Clinton administration opposes both bills, and religious groups are split over the measures.

James M. Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, said the debate over legislation to curb religious persecution in other nations has increased awareness of the issue and been a "learning experience for both the well-intentioned champions of human rights and those whose involvement was driven by domestic politics."

Dunn said, "We also know better than before that although there is a universal agreement that the United States should affirm religious freedom around the world, it is much more difficult to know how to craft legislation to achieve it." Δ

Utah governor wants policy on prosecuting polygamists

Gov. Mike Leavitt has asked Utah's attorney general to explain why the state is not prosecuting polygamists, many of them members of Mormon splinter groups.

The Republican governor recently was drawn into the controversy surrounding polygamy when he said that cases of human or civil rights violations involving polygamists should be prosecuted, but that the practice itself may be protected by the religious freedom clauses of the First Amendment.

Polygamy was banned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1890 and the Utah Constitution also contains an anti-polygamy clause.

Still, there are an estimated 30,000 polygamists in the West — many of them connected to small, Mormon splinter groups that rejected the Mormon church's ban on polygamy, according to The Associated Press.

A spokesman said Leavitt has asked the Utah attorney general to issue a "policy statement" on polygamy prosecutions. The last time Utah prosecuted polygamists solely for practicing multiple marriages was in 1952. Δ

Grants to faith-based groups to fight violence announced

President Bill Clinton recently announced more than \$2.5 million in grants to community-based programs, including religiously affiliated ones, that work to curb youth violence, drug and gang involvement and other juvenile problems.

Clinton said the Justice Department will make the \$135,000-grants available to 16 cities to help law enforcement, schools, business and faith communities work together to prevent truancy, mentor, teach values and offer children positive alternatives to gangs and drugs.

He made the announcement at a ceremony with religious and community leaders in the Old Executive Office Building. "What is working in America is a community-based, prevention-oriented, broad-based partnership to try to bring crime down. ... And the faith community has an important role to play," he said.

The "Value-based Violence Prevention" initiative is modeled on recent successes in Boston, Mass., where there has been a dramatic reduction in youth violence.

Boston Police Commissioner Paul Evans told the audience that "no partner is more critical to this strategy than the faith community." Evans told Baptist News Service that Boston officials have been concerned about church-state issues. "We don't give money to churches to push their doctrine. ... Religion really doesn't play a role that much."

A White House press official told Baptist News Service that the administration, working with Justice Department officials, put in place two safeguards to thwart a major church-state issue.

The official said grants cannot be used to advance religious activities. Also, she said there can be no direct aid to "pervasively sectarian institutions, like churches."

Baptist Joint Committee General Counsel J. Brent Walker said the two safeguards urged by the Justice Department will keep the proposal from violating church-state separation "as long as the program is implemented at the local level in a manner consistent with the safeguards."

Several congressional proposals to boost funds for community-based programs would allow funds to flow directly to churches as well as separate nonprofit groups merely affiliated with a church.

Rob Boston, associate communications director at Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said his group has concerns about Clinton's proposal and

needs more information.

Boston said the proposal leaves unanswered questions. "Who polices the funding to make sure the money isn't used for religious programs? Who polices whether a group is pervasively sectarian or not?"

At the unveiling of the proposal, Clinton said that "there is a critical, fundamental role for the faith community in teaching our children a sense of right and wrong and self-discipline and respect. Boston pastors and faith communities took the lead. Often, they are the most stable institution left in unstable neighborhoods."

He said that "we will never jail our way out of America's problems," and called on Congress to provide more funds for the approach.

Cities selected for grants are Los Angeles, Washington, Miami, Chicago, Indianapolis, Baltimore, Detroit, Philadelphia, San Antonio, Seattle, Kansas City, Mo., Portland, Ore., Hempstead, N.Y., Charleston, S.C., Richmond, Va., and Salinas, Calif. Δ

Clinton vetoes tax-favored education savings measure

President Bill Clinton vetoed an education reform package July 21 that included a provision to provide tax breaks for parents who send children to private and religious schools.

Currently, money saved in special education savings accounts can only be used for higher education.

Sen. Paul Coverdell, R-Ga., sponsored a plan to increase the amount parents could place in the accounts and allow parents to use the funds for kindergarten through higher education. Parents could use the tax-favored accounts to pay for tuition at private and parochial schools.

In a veto message to the House of Representatives, Clinton said the proposed changes to the education IRAs would be "bad education policy and bad tax policy."

He said the bill "would divert limited federal resources away from public schools by spending more than \$3 billion in tax benefits that would do virtually nothing for average families and would disproportionately benefit the most affluent families."

Advocates of tax support for private education in Congress and elsewhere were quick to criticize the veto.

House Majority Leader Richard Armey, R-Texas, said Clinton vetoed the bill to appease teachers' unions. Δ

Helwys' demand for religious freedom for all troubles some



James M. Dunn
Executive Director

Who was the first Baptist? Some think it was John the Baptist. But seriously, how far back can one go with the distinctly Baptist family tree.

Personally, I do not want to be more than a distant cousin to some of the sects

mentioned in J.M. Carroll's booklet, *The Trail of Blood*. Much can be made of Baptist kinship with Anabaptists.

My nominee for the first Baptist who matches pretty much the present breed with that label is Thomas Helwys (ca.1550 - ca. 1616).

We are profoundly indebted to Mercer Press, 1998, for bringing within reach of ordinary mortals *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* by Thomas Helwys. Richard Groves has edited and introduced this brief book (154 pp).

He has rescued this classic from unintelligible and antiquated punctuation and spellings and made available a text accessible to modern readers.

Helwys, along with John Smyth, identified first with Puritans. Later he joined Separatists and then Anabaptists but after that established the first Baptist church. In the *Mystery of Iniquity*, he sets out, for the first time in English, the notion of liberty of conscience as a stack pole theological concept, church-state separation as a basic belief.

Barry White sees Helwys distancing himself and a little band of believers from their Anabaptist brothers and sisters. Helwys, like Baptists today, used a modern English translation of scripture, gave power to all church members, saw civil government as ordained by God, allowed civil servants to be members of the church, practiced believer's baptism and eliminated infant baptism. Thomas could probably join the Baptist church in your town.

He founded in 1612 the first Baptist church on English soil. It was the little book, however, that got him in trouble.

Mere toleration was the liberal idea regarding religious freedom, as it is yet in

much of the world.

Helwys called for "universal religious liberty — freedom of conscience for all."

"Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure."

Helwys' Baptist qualifications include his bundle of beliefs that are seen as a distinctly Baptist configuration:

1. believer's baptism;
2. congregational church government;
3. the right of individual interpretation of scripture;
4. universal religious liberty; and
5. separation of church and state.

His demand for religious freedom for all humankind — made in God's image — troubled some Christians then and troubles some now.

His understanding of the church and of sin, his high view of scripture, his estimate of humankind, his theology in the strictest sense of the word make him a candidate for Baptist No. 1.

Thomas Helwys put passionate commitment behind his beliefs. He would certainly have trouble with Baptists who claim the name and defame the same.

In the context of his time, he crafted a confession of faith that collected key concepts still Baptist. His emphasis upon a religion that was distinct from the state, his juxtapositions with tangible alternatives gave shape to being Baptist. Other expressions of Christianity had multiple authorities. With Helwys scripture rules. Some had external religiosity. Helwys held high inner devotion. There were those who could accept some measure of coercion in religion. For Helwys, faith had to be voluntary to be vital.

This little book may well be the defining Baptist document. In fact, one key phrase fixed Helwys' fate. He wrote, "The king is a mortal man and not God, therefore, hath no power over ye immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual Lords over them . . ."

That king, the same King James whose name is in the front of your Bible, had that first Baptist jailed and killed. Church-state separation dearly bought. Δ

Quoting

Oh, let the king judge, is it not most fair that men should choose their religion themselves, seeing they only must stand themselves before the judgement seat of God to answer for themselves, when it shall be no excuse for them to say we were commanded or compelled to be of this religion by the king or by them that had authority from him.

— Thomas Helwys

A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity
edited and introduced
by Richard Groves

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 Reviews

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Sen. Rod Grams
R-Minn.

Among people of faith, religious persecution — the harassment, torture, or even killing of an individual as a direct result of that person's religious beliefs — is an incomprehensible act. Religious liberty is central to any civil-

ized society; Americans in particular, raised in a nation built on a foundation of freedom, find the concept of religious persecution morally offensive. Yet, religious persecution has rarely been at the forefront in discussions about international human rights abuses. This has changed, however, as Congress has recently turned its attention to the issue of religious freedom with hearings on legislation that seeks to protect religious beliefs by targeting governments that engage in persecution.

On its surface, the bill introduced by Sens. Don Nickles, R-Okla., and Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn. — The International Religious Freedom Act (S.1868) — has great appeal. The legislation would establish a special White House adviser on religious persecution, an ambassador-at-large for religious liberty at the State Department and a bipartisan commission to investigate religious persecution. The bill would require the president to impose sanctions on those governments identified as "gross violators."

But a menacing truth hides beneath the surface: By attempting to legislate religious freedom around the world, Congress runs a serious risk of promoting abuses instead of curbing them and harming people of faith instead of persecutors.

First, sanctions have never been an

effective tool of change. Consider the recent nuclear tests in India and Pakistan, where not even the well-advertised threat of imminent U.S. sanctions halted the explosions. Most countries consider such sanctions to be an attack on their sovereignty, which often impedes the very progress the United States hopes to achieve.

Second, this legislation could harm people of faith in other countries and put at risk the men and women who seek to better the world through their service as missionaries.

These are the individuals who would bear the brunt of Congress' actions, and it is they who prompted my concern. Together with the White House, they are strongly opposed to the Nickles-Lieberman bill in its current form.

The Nickles-Lieberman bill can be made more palatable by giving Congress and the president greater flexibility in determining whether sanctions would work. In addition, more effort needs to be placed on a multilateral approach, where the United States acts in partnership with its allies, not alone. These are essential changes that will protect believers in countries labeled "gross violators" and ultimately win wider support within the international religious community.

Congress must resist the urge to pursue legislation that generates big headlines but does not work, and must instead focus on efforts that will achieve progress. The problem of religious persecution is real; in fairness to its many victims, any solutions devised by Congress must be positive and avoid, at all costs, the unintended consequences of further endangering religious workers. Δ

U.S. Sen. Rod Grams is a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.



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