



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ **Steven Wentland**, principal of Belridge Elementary School in California, said the school would return Christian textbooks and other materials to a Pensacola, Fla.-based publishing company. After an American Civil Liberties Union complaint, the public school decided to return A Beka Books materials, some of which described other religions as cults, suggested God helped Columbus discover America and said non-Christians would not be in heaven.

◆ **Wiley Drake**, a California Southern Baptist preacher, recently founded Americans United for Unity of Church and State according to Baptist Press. Commenting on posting the Ten Commandments in public places, Drake said "it's a bit hypocritical of us to ask the city, county and courthouses to put 'em up when they're not up in our own churches." Drake said his congregation has yet to do so.

◆ **Florida Gov. Jeb Bush** and Secretary of Education **Richard W. Riley** squared off Sept. 23 at a House Budget Committee hearing on the issue of education vouchers. Bush touted Florida's voucher program, which provides state money to private and parochial schools. Riley criticized such proposals, saying tax dollars would make non-public schools "less private and less parochial." ▴

Istook makes another attempt at amending Constitution

After suffering defeat in the 105th Congress, backers of an amendment to alter the Constitution's religious liberty protections are mounting another attempt at passing the Religious Freedom Amendment.

Fifteen months ago, the proposed amendment, sponsored by U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., fell 61 votes shy of the two-thirds needed to pass the U.S. House of Representatives. The measure would have allowed some forms of government-sponsored prayer and tax-financed religious activities. Istook reintroduced an identical constitutional amendment Sept. 15.

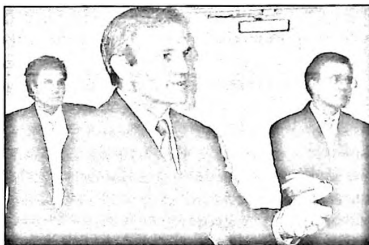
"Now more than ever, we need to protect Americans' right to express their belief in God and to pray on public property," he said. "Under the guise of promoting tolerance, religious expression is being singled out for censorship."

But the same coalition of religious and civil liberties leaders that opposed Istook's earlier proposal held their own press conference to say that prayers that are not sponsored by the government are already allowed in schools.

Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Texas, who fought against the amendment last year, said the Istook proposal "has no chance of passing. ... This Congress will not let the siren song of eight-second sound bites trample on the wisdom of our Founding Fathers when they built a wall

of separation of church and state over 200 years ago."

He said the question before Congress is not whether prayer should be allowed in schools, but "whether we should have government-organized and government-sanctioned prayer."



Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Texas (center), Oliver Thomas (left) and J. Brent Walker oppose Istook amendment at press conference

GOP leaders joined Istook at a press event to reintroduce the amendment. House Majority Whip Tom DeLay, R-Texas, said that a "godless education threatens to debase our society for generations." He told a District of Columbia church audience that "there is one thing that is not allowed in

school under any circumstance and that is prayer."

Members of the Coalition to Preserve Religious Liberty criticized Istook backers' characterization of current law concerning prayer in schools.

J. Brent Walker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, said that "students already have a right to pray, wear religious jewelry or shirts and offer religious remarks in the course of class discussion." Walker added, "Prayer is a sacred act that government must not influence or control."

Oliver Thomas of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, warned that the amendment would allow religious groups to receive government funds. "It will be more than your favorite religion that gets funded," Thomas said. ▴

Quoting

Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes remain determined to control religious belief and practice. The result — inevitably — is persecution. Other regimes are hostile to minority or unapproved religions. Some tolerate, and thereby encourage, persecution or discrimination. ...

Still other governments — often either democratic or aspirants to democracy — have adopted discriminatory legislation or policies that give preferences to favored religions while disadvantaging others, in contravention of international instruments. ...

[T]he United States seeks to promote religious freedom, not simply to criticize, or to make headlines. ... Such vital work usually is done out of the limelight, often without acknowledgment, occasionally without knowing its result.

But the work must, and does, take place. ... It happens when senior U.S. officials, responsible for balancing and pursuing all of America's vital national interests, make it clear that a single persecuted human being, perhaps obscure and insignificant in the grand affairs of state, matters to the world's most powerful nation.

— Executive Summary
State Department Annual
Report on International
Religious Freedom for 1999

Voter education, civility urged by interfaith group

Leaders of the Interfaith Alliance denounced the use of religion for political purposes by presidential candidates and unveiled a voter education initiative with a slogan of "register, learn, vote."

At a Sept. 15 press conference in the National Press Club building, Welton Gaddy, executive director of the Interfaith Alliance, said that "while a candidate's talk about personal faith is a very legitimate means of personal identification, a candidate's talk about faith as a campaign strategy smacks of the manipulation of faith for political gain."

Pointing to the Democratic and Republican front-runners in the 2000 presidential race, Gaddy said, "Diligently in search of support from religious voters, both candidates use the language of faith to suggest a consensus among people of faith — a consensus that simply does not exist around issues affecting the faith community."

The alliance, a group of progressive religious leaders established five years ago to counter the influence of the religious right, is asking candidates to accept its "Framework of Civility for Political Candidates." The framework asks hopeful lawmakers to show: integrity in making their case to voters; fairness in addressing the issues and opponents; respect for the dignity of others; and responsibility for words and actions.

The group is also launching a voter education and registration drive, but Gaddy — a regular critic of Christian Coalition voter education efforts — said there is a "vast difference" in the alliance's approach.

It will be "voter education, not voter persuasion," Gaddy said. He also said that voter guides would not be distributed.

Gaddy said the alliance will encourage people to register and vote but will also stress the importance of learning about the issues. The alliance will promote issue forums "in which persons from all parties and points of view are involved."

He said that "much of the present political talk about religion suggests the existence of a monolithic faith — the one 'true faith' — within the nation."

Other alliance leaders spoke at the conference about the need for politicians to avoid using religion in manipulative ways.

"Religion and politics often intersect," said the Rev. Philip Wogaman, senior minister of Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C. "But unfortunately we see vividly the growing trend of many

to cloak political self-interest in the language of narrow religious doctrine." Δ

Religious freedom report lacks controversial listing

Leaders of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, established under a law enacted last year, are awaiting the administration's designation of countries that are "of particular concern" in restricting religious freedom.

The deadline for the designations, mandated by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, was supposed to coincide with the release of last week's 1,100-page State Department report that detailed the status of religious freedom around the world. The Annual Report on International Religious Freedom was the first such report mandated by the new law.

But a State Department official said "since this is the first time we've done this, we want to do it right." The official said the secretary of state — designated by the president — will make the listings soon.

Leaders of the commission, a separate entity under the law, applauded the Sept. 9 detailed report, saying it marked an "extraordinary shift" in American foreign policy making.

"For the first time in American history, every American embassy in the world has focused significantly on our first freedom," said Steven T. McFarland, executive director of the 10-member commission. But he criticized the report for "what's not in it," including the listing of countries of particular concern.

The law gives the president 90 days after making the designation to notify Congress of a U.S. response. Actions range from minor to severe penalties. But the law gives the president broad authority to refrain from imposing penalties at all.

"All eyes are looking at whether China is on the list," said McFarland. He said the 24 pages in the State Department report on China make clear that it "is a violator of religious freedom."

Robert Seiple, U.S. ambassador at large for international religious freedom issues, said the report is a "comprehensive record" of the status of religious freedom, and it will "help alleviate suffering, recalling to persecutors and persecuted alike that they are not, and will not, be forgotten."

When releasing the report, Seiple told reporters that the International Religious Freedom Act "was never conceived primarily to be a sanctions act. Sanctions are a last resort." Δ

Carrying his own bag and our cause into the future



Melissa Rogers
Associate General Counsel

When I arrived at the Baptist Joint Committee five years ago, I had recently left the offices of a buttoned-down, Washington, D.C., law firm.

Shortly before I left the law firm, an

individual I barely knew from the firm's personnel office called to inform me that employees leaving after one to three years of employment (as I was) were eligible for a goodbye party with their practice group, a cake, punch and my choice of three parting gifts. If I had been at the firm three to five years, however, I would have moved up into the next bracket and thus been eligible for a firm-wide goodbye party, hors d'oeuvres and my choice of three slightly more grand parting gifts.

The Baptist Joint Committee was across town from my former place of employment, but it might as well have been on another planet.

When I walked in the door of the BJC, James Dunn greeted me like a long lost friend with a big bear hug. Later, as I watched him greet countless people this way, I learned that this is simply the way James welcomes folks.

Of course, other differences between my law firm life and new job were immediately apparent. This time my boss owned nary a pair of tasseled loafers, no one placed his phone calls, there was no car and driver and no one to carry James' Texas Cattleman's Association attache and worn garment bag.

Unlike my former superiors, James seemed utterly unfamiliar with playing the role of the imperial executive. He wrote his own letters and speeches. James called the cleaning staff by their names and inquired about their families. He made his own copies. James personally saw to it that there were birthday parties and welcome parties

and goodbye parties for everyone from interns to executive staff. He didn't even try that nifty trick whereby an underling's good idea becomes the executive's, while the executive's bad idea becomes the underling's. In contrast, James bragged about his staff's good ideas to anyone who would listen, magnifying our strengths and mercifully overlooking shortcomings.

And, of course, James taught me to serve a new client — religious liberty. James can explain this complex theological and constitutional principle concisely, dramatically and emphatically. As James says:

This Baptist belief in religious liberty is not just "doctrine," or First Amendment or a political elective. It is, rather, *the* baptist basic: soul freedom. Each individual comes immediately to God. All vital religion is voluntary. Even God will not trample the freedom to say "yes" or "no" to God.

During the critical years of 1990-91, I remember hearing that, like the Southern Baptist Convention and the seminaries, eventually the BJC too would slip through our hands. A courageous executive director, staff, and the entire Baptist Joint Committee, however, defied this conventional wisdom.

As he steps down from his 18 years of service as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, I have two words of thanks for James Dunn. Thank you, James, for providing me with a warm, lighthearted, democratic, challenging, interesting place to work. And thank you, James Dunn, for ensuring that the cause endures. Δ

Quoting

If soul freedom is important;
If the priesthood of all believers is more than a slogan;
If one insists on interpreting the Bible for himself;
If one defends the right of each person to come to the Bible and led by the Holy Spirit to seek its truth;
If one believes that she must accept Jesus Christ personally, freely or not really;
If the church functions as a democracy;
If in the fellowship of churches each one is autonomous;
If there is no pope, presbyter, president or pastor to rule over you;
If no mortal has the power to suppress, curtail, rule out or reign over the will of the congregation, **you have probably been baptized.**

These consistent freedom forces form an orderly pattern. Being baptist also means respect, affirmation and honest honoring of differences. After all, if folks are free they may not all agree with us. Everyone has a right to be wrong.

— James M. Dunn

in 1994 address

Religious Freedom:

A Threatened Heritage

Dunn served as the fourth executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee,

heading the agency

from 1981-1999

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

Keepers of the Faith: Illustrated Biographies from Baptist History

Jeffrey D. Jones; Judson Press: Valley Forge, 1999, 140 pp. List price \$22.



Jeffrey Jones has found a way to make history fun for everyone. Filling the need for an accessible history of Baptist heroes and heroines appropriate for a variety of age groups is Jones' new book, *Keepers of the Faith: Illustrated Biographies from Baptist History*.

Jones has written and illustrated short biographies of 71 Baptist notables, from Thomas Helwys to Martin Luther King Jr. Each biography is illustrated in twelve panels in a comic strip format, confined to one page each.

The black-and-white images in each entry, although a tad simplistic, vividly portray several important life events of the featured character. Each story tends to focus on the conversion and evangelism of the person. The text is geared toward young readers; however, all may benefit from some minimal details from the lives of the lesser-known and seldom-studied historical figures.

There are a plethora of uses for this book. Jones makes clear in his introduction that the reader may copy pages for use in a variety of church-related activities such as Sunday school supplements, bulletin inserts, and take-home handouts. These handouts offer Sunday school teachers at the elementary education level a great way to incorporate Baptist history into their curriculum. The short and entertaining entries make for perfect bedtime reading and family faith bonding.

The format of the book is extremely user-friendly. Arranged alphabetically, from Annie Armstrong to Roger Williams, the 71 entries are indexed both chronologically and topically for easy reference. A multinational, multicultural and socio-economically diverse Baptist population is well represented. Jones sensitively and wisely includes the contributions of 15 heroines of the faith.

Of particular interest to *Report* readers may be the eight biographies of church-state heroes. Jones describes Roger Williams as America's "first proponent of religious liberty." Jones also devotes an entire panel on George Truett's page to the famous quote of the legendary Baptist: "Each one must ... believe for himself ... repent for himself ... be baptized for himself ... answer to God for himself."

The biographies of Richard Furman, Thomas Helwys, John Smyth, John Leland, Isaac Backus and John Clarke offer further historical background of the Baptist distinctive of religious liberty.

Jones' attention to the ministry of church-state activists undergirds the theme of the stories of all 71 selected Baptists: the importance of soul freedom.

Keepers of the Faith is not an academically challenging work for the serious student of Baptist history; fortunately, this was not Jones' intent. It is, however, a useful resource to a Sunday school department or a creative gift for a young-at-heart Baptist. After reading Jones' new book, it would be difficult for anyone to claim, "Don't know much about (Baptist) history." Δ

—Mandy Tyler
*Assistant to the General Counsel
Baptist Joint Committee*

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