



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

Volume 55, No. 12

June 13, 2000

NewsMakers

◆ **Charles Cates** of Disputanta, Va., **Cody Robert Hand** of San Angelo, Texas, **Emily Helms** of Buies Creeks, N.C., and **Geoffrey Hoffmann** of Upland, Ind., have begun internships at the Baptist Joint Committee. Cates is a mechanical engineering major at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond; Hand will be a student this fall at Ohio Northern University Law School in Ada, Ohio; Helms will be a student this fall at Wake Forest University Law School in Winston-Salem, N.C.; and Hoffmann is an English/mass communications major at Taylor University in Upland.

◆ **Judge Roy Moore**, who became famous for his decision to post the Ten Commandments in his courtroom in Gadsden, Ala., has won the Republican primary for chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court. Moore defeated three other judges in the primary June 6. He will face Judge **Sharon Yates**, a Democrat who sits on the Court of Civil Appeals, in the November general election.

◆ **Russian President Vladimir Putin** said June 6 the Russian Orthodox Church, weakened by 70 years of communist rule, is resisting a papal visit to Moscow because it fears Roman Catholic competition. On his first trip abroad as president, Putin spoke with Italian journalists about his June 5 audience with Pope John Paul II. Δ

U.S. religious freedom panel cites impact, elects new officers

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom elected commissioner **Elliott Abrams** to serve as chairman and commissioner **Firuz Kazemzadeh** to serve as vice chairman during its second year of operation.

Abrams, a former assistant secretary of state during the Reagan administration, is president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C. Kazemzadeh recently retired as secretary for external affairs of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States.

A yearly election for officers is required for the commission. Previous chairman **David Saperstein** of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism will remain on the commission, as will vice chairman **Michael Young**, dean of the George Washington University Law School.

The new officers will serve until May 14, 2001, when the terms of all the current commissioners expire.

Last month the panel released its first annual report intended to provide the Clinton administration and Congress recommendations on policy changes to promote religious freedom abroad.

The report focused on three countries — China, Sudan and Russia. The panel's recommendation that China not be granted permanent normal trade relations by the United States was thwarted after the U.S. House of Representatives approved PNTR last month. But commission offi-

cials say that the administration appears open to some of the panel's dozens of recommendations.

Abrams said the commission "has had a real impact on U.S. policy toward Sudan this past year." He said that "the strong position the commission took on

PNTR for China also demonstrates that we can play a real role in the debate over American foreign policy."

He added, "We will be looking at a larger number of countries in the coming year, seeking

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— **Elliott Abrams**



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Steve McFarland, executive director of the commission, told Associated Baptist Press the panel soon will target additional countries where religious freedom abuses should be addressed by the United States.

He also said that in July, the commission will recommend places the State Department should designate as countries that are of "particular concern" in restricting religious freedoms. Once the countries of concern are officially designated, the president will have three months to detail his responses, if any, to those countries.

Saperstein said the commission has "been an extraordinary success." While acknowledging differences with the administration, he said the State Department's religious freedom report on 194 countries and the enlistment of all U.S. embassies to monitor the issue and nurture relations with religious leaders "in and of itself is a major advance." Δ

Evangelicals issue statement on religious liberty

Top evangelical leaders joined prominent Southern Baptists in a rejoinder to critics of efforts to preach the Christian gospel to people of other faiths.

A "Chicago Declaration on Religious Freedom" released June 2 challenged those who contend that attempts to proselytize non-Christians "undermine a peaceful, pluralistic society and may lead to intolerance, bigotry, and even violence."

That language echoed a plea last year by a council of interfaith leaders in Chicago for Southern Baptists to call off plans to blitz the city with volunteer missionaries.

The statement was drafted at the initiative of Robert Reccord, president of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Richard Land, president of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

"They are denying our rights, because our faith calls on us to witness," Land told *The Dallas Morning News*.

A Baptist critic of the statement said the leaders "are crying wolf about religious liberty."

Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn., said, "Rather than claiming their rights are denied, these leaders should share their faith without resorting to the denigration of other people of faith and targeting them for conversion." Δ

British think Church of England should end ties to government

Two-thirds of the British people think the Church of England should cease to be established and should break its links with the state, according to an opinion poll carried out for a BBC television series, "Soul of Britain," to be broadcast in June.

Belief in God has slipped from 76 percent in 1980 to 62 percent now, while a bare majority (51 percent) believe in life after death, according to the survey.

The survey asked whether it was proper for religious leaders to speak out on a number of topics. At the top of the list was poverty (82 percent), followed by racial discrimination (75 percent), the family (74 percent), global inequality (70 percent), ecology and environment issues (63 percent), education issues (59 percent) and disarmament (57 percent). At the bottom of the list of topics was government policy, with only 54 percent saying they believed church leaders should speak out on it. Δ

Greek church to protest plan to drop religion from ID cards

The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece announced June 6 it will stage two major rallies to protest the government's decision to remove religious affiliation from state-issued identity cards — a move church leaders say is an attempt to diminish the role of the church.

"(This) is the first in a series of measures aimed at putting religion on the margin of public, social and national life," said a statement released by the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece, according to Reuters news agency.

The protests will be held June 14 in Thessaloniki in northern Greece and on June 21 in Athens.

In May, Greece's Socialist government moved to comply with a 1997 law and ordered the exclusion of religious affiliation from the identification cards Greek citizens older than 13 are required to carry. The government also ordered that identity cards exclude a person's occupation and fingerprints, and the name of the cardholder's spouse.

Leaders of the Orthodox Church — the official state church of Greece — have called for a national referendum to decide whether compliance with the ruling should be optional.

Greece is one of a handful of European nations requiring state identity cards and is the only European nation to include reli-

gious affiliation on the cards. More than 90 percent of the Greek population is Orthodox Christian. Δ

States not implementing charitable choice, study claims

Many states are failing to implement the "charitable choice" initiative in the 1996 welfare reform laws, according to a Christian public policy center.

The Center for Public Justice released a study looking at how nine states have implemented the provision, which allows religious groups, including pervasively sectarian ones such as churches, to receive tax dollars to perform social services.

The public justice center said the study shows many states "are failing to comply with this important church-state guideline." A press release said faith-based groups are still facing "restrictive and secularizing rules" if they want to compete for the funds.

Stanley Carlson-Thies, director of social policy studies at the public justice center, said that "it is a scandal that, nearly four years later, many states have still not put into place new protections required by the law for faith-based groups and their clients." Δ

Review • Continued from Page 4

tence of American pluralism." I can only say, "Preach on, Brother," because, as Karl Barth once said, "The first object of prophetic religion is the criticism of bad religion."

In his introduction to the book, editor Paul Simmons hopes (1) this collection of essays will be informative and inspirational to readers who take the time to think about the crucial issues discussed in the book; and (2) the reader will join the dialogue and offer further insight as to sources that might be consulted, or guidelines that might be adopted, to make of America a better place in which to live.

The book accomplishes both purposes. America will remain a great country only so long as she continues to strive to include all peoples and assure them basic human rights regardless of race, culture, gender, or religion.

Those who would abolish separation of church and state and establish America as a theocracy must not be allowed to succeed!

— Al Sanders

A member of Westwood Baptist Church, Springfield, Va., and BJC legal volunteer

Art of the possible may shape politics of religious liberty bill



Melissa Rogers
General Counsel

You can't always get what you want, especially when what you want is Capitol Hill's and the U.S. Supreme Court's to give away.

For the past decade, religious liberty advocates have labored to shield religious practice from

unnecessary governmental interference. Protection is needed because current law generally gives the government much too much latitude to restrict individual religious exercise. This weak state of the law has resulted, for example, in zoning authorities attempting to restrict churches' times of operation and the number of persons who may attend worship services, and zoning policies that have effectively excluded certain minority faiths from particular residential areas and shut down the community ministries of houses of worship.

As regular readers of this publication know, the U.S. Congress first attempted to fix these and other problems by passing the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which reinstated a high level of protection for free exercise rights. In 1997, however, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *City of Boerne vs. Flores*, ruled RFRA was unconstitutional as applied to state and local governments.

After the *Boerne* decision, religious liberty advocates went back to the drawing board. We developed a two-prong strategy to attack the free exercise problem. First, broad, new federal legislation was proposed that would enhance free exercise protections by relying on Congress' power to spend, regulate interstate commerce and protect liberty consistent with the *Boerne* decision. This legislation is known as the Religious Liberty Protection

Act (RLPA). Second, we began to encourage states to develop state Religious Freedom Restoration Acts (state RFRAs), broadly applied laws that provide a high degree of protection for free exercise.

At present, we have a lot to show for our work on the latter strategy (see sidebar). Our work on the federal strategy has borne less fruit. In July 1999, the House of Representatives passed RLPA by a vote of 306-118, but the challenges to passage in the Senate have been substantial. Opponents of this effort are the "religious liberty, but ..." crowd. "Yes, I am all for religious liberty, but not when it might come into conflict with some other interest."

These arguments ignore the fact that RLPA simply reinstates a traditional balancing test and is not an automatic trump card for religion. To win, the religious claimant must show that the government has placed a substantial burden on sincere religious practice. Then it must be shown that the government has no

narrowly tailored compelling interest to justify that burden. Even when this test has been applied, religious claimants often lose their cases.

Our work in the Senate also has been hampered by the Supreme Court's shrinking interpretation of Congress' various powers to legislate. All these difficulties have led religious liberty advocates to consider more limited legislation that would attack a few of the areas in which free exercise problems are most numerous and pervasive. Work is under way to draft such legislation which we hope will pass the Congress and be signed into law this year. The number of legislative days are few, so time is of the essence. Stay tuned for more details on this strategy.

Strategies change, members of Congresses and Supreme Court justices come and go. Our goal, however, stays the same — full religious liberty for all. Δ

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States offer protections for free exercise

Nineteen states have either passed state RFRAs or have state constitutions that have been interpreted to afford a high level of protection for the free exercise of religion. These states are:

- ◆ Alabama
- ◆ Arizona
- ◆ Connecticut
- ◆ Florida
- ◆ Idaho
- ◆ Illinois
- ◆ Kansas
- ◆ Massachusetts
- ◆ Michigan
- ◆ Minnesota
- ◆ New Mexico
- ◆ Ohio
- ◆ Oklahoma
- ◆ Rhode Island
- ◆ South Carolina
- ◆ Texas
- ◆ Vermont
- ◆ Washington
- ◆ Wisconsin

Currently, efforts are under way to pass state RFRAs in other states, including:

- ◆ Louisiana
- ◆ Maryland
- ◆ Missouri
- ◆ Pennsylvania
- ◆ South Dakota
- ◆ Virginia

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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REPORT from the CAPITAL (ISSN-0346-0661) is published 24 times each year by the Baptist Joint Committee. Single subscriptions, \$10 per year. Bulk subscriptions available.



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Book Review

Freedom of Conscience: A Baptist/Humanist Dialogue

Edited by Paul D. Simmons, *Prometheus Books, Amherst, N.Y., 2000, 274 pp.*



At a ground-breaking conference at the University of Richmond in October 1995, Baptists and secular humanists came together to discuss their differences and to determine what were their shared concerns and common values. The result of the conference is *Freedom of Conscience*, which features essays by leading Baptist thinkers such as Robert Alley and E. Glenn Hinson and by such well-known advocates of secular humanism as Paul Kurtz and Vern Bullough.

Some Baptists, who apparently do not know that "secular" and "humanism" are two different words, spit them out together with such contempt and disgust as to indicate that secular humanists are the source of all moral maladies and the root of all evil. Thus, to some, the immediate question appears to be: What can a Baptist possibly have in common with a secular humanist?

Hinson's essay titled "Must Humanism be Secular?" answers the question best. He defines humanism by quoting the four presuppositions attached to humanism by British humanist H. J. Blackham: (1) We are on our own. (2) This life is all. (3) We are responsible for our own lives. (4) We are responsible for the life of humankind. Hinson says that Christians cannot agree with the first two statements. All Christians — fundamentalists and liberals, conservatives and moderates — believe in an Other, a transcendent reality beyond this life. Only if such an Other exists do we

finite mortals have reason to hope or to make sense out of life. However, as a Christian, Hinson says he can agree with the other two statements. If we accept his formulation, it readily becomes apparent that Baptists and humanists ought to have much in common. Historically, Baptists have been champions of religious liberty, academic freedom and moral and ethical values, all of which are principles that secular humanists also fight to uphold. Likewise, both humanists and Baptists at the conference saw some representatives of the "Religious Right" as a threat to good morals, political values and vitality in religion.

In a well-documented essay titled "Jefferson and the Danbury Baptists: The Interaction between Baptists and the Nation's Founders," Alley tells how Virginia Baptists worked with James Madison and Thomas Jefferson to make possible the distinctively American institution of separation of church and state. In a speech delivered on the East Steps of the U.S. Capitol in 1920, George Truett affirmed the story of the Virginia Baptists and declared that "Baptists have one consistent record concerning religious liberty throughout all their long and eventful history."

But not so anymore! In a 1984 television interview, W. A. Criswell, Truett's successor at First Baptist Church in Dallas, declared that "the notion of separation of church and state was the figment of some infidel's imagination." The dangers of this and other such mean-spirited and ridiculous statements are pointed out by George H. Shriver in his essay "The Dangers of Being Tolerant of the Intolerant." Shriver writes, "Pure and simple, neofundamentalism is a real threat to the continued exis-

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