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# REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL



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## NewsMakers

◆ **Fatimah Herman**, a Muslim worker with National Maintenance Inc. in Crestview, Fla., has been allowed to return to work and given back pay after she was sent home in early September. Herman was told she had violated company dress policy by refusing to remove her head scarf while at work. The Council on American-Islamic Relations sent a letter to the company on her behalf explaining the significance of the head scarf to Muslims.

◆ **The Rev. Barry Lynn**, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, commented on the mixed success of candidates and positions supported by religious conservatives in the Nov. 7 elections, saying, "The religious right is not in the driver's seat, but they are definitely in the car and will undoubtedly make frequent attempts to grab the steering wheel."

◆ **Derek Davis**, director of the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies and special counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, recently joined other religious and human rights leaders in criticizing steps taken by the French government to restrict religious liberty. Davis and others expressed concern about legislation that could bar proselytism, as well as the government's designation of 173 religious and philosophical groups as "sects." Δ

## Voters in California, Michigan reject voucher ballot initiatives

Voters in California and Michigan, by almost equal margins, overwhelmingly rejected ballot initiatives to enact controversial education voucher plans.

Seventy-one percent of voters in California and 69 percent in Michigan voted against voucher plans on the Nov. 7 ballot in those states.

The National Education Association lauded the results, claiming the verdict was proof of the lack of public "enthusiasm for new voucher experiments."

"The overwhelming defeat of private school tuition vouchers in California and Michigan is the most compelling evidence yet that parents and the public dislike and distrust the idea of public support for private schools," said Bob Chase, president of the NEA.

The measure in California would have authorized "annual state payments of at least \$4,000 per pupil for private and religious schools" to be phased in over three years. It was backed by Silicon Valley millionaire Timothy Draper, according to news reports.

Michigan's plan would have allowed local school districts to approve plans providing \$3,300 tuition vouchers to parents residing in school districts failing to meet a two-thirds minimum graduation rate. It was backed by Amway founder Richard DeVos with support from religious right groups and the state's Roman Catholic bishops, according to news

reports.

"No one should be surprised by voters' strong rejection of voucher proposals in California and Michigan," said Brent Walker, Baptist Joint Committee executive director.

"Virtually every time they have been asked, voters have flunked proposals to shift tax dollars to private and religious schools."

Since 1966, voters in more than a dozen states have soundly rejected proposals for vouchers or other forms of aid to religious schools.

"Voters seem to understand better than some politicians the folly of attempting to strengthen education by draining support from the public schools, not to mention the damage of breaching the wall of separation between church and state," Walker said. "And they understand that the government regulation that would accompany vouchers would jeopardize the autonomy of religious schools."

Some voucher opponents believe the recent votes should deliver a death blow to the movement toward school choice.

Jon Lezner, coordinator of the campaign against the school voucher measure in California, told *The Washington Post* that "with a victory here and in Michigan, it's clear that the voucher flame would start to die out."

However, at least 21 states have voucher proposals pending in their legislatures, the *Detroit Free Press* reported. Δ



## Judge Moore elected Alabama chief justice

Judge Roy Moore, the Alabama judge who gained prominence with his crusade to keep the Ten Commandments posted in his courtroom, was elected Nov. 7 as chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court.

He had pledged to take his handmade plaque of the Ten Commandments with him to the Supreme Court building in Montgomery if he was elected.

"I believe God is looking down on these efforts of those people who wish to acknowledge his sovereignty over the affairs of men," Moore told his supporters. "I think it's time in this state and nation that we did just that."

Some voters worried that a Moore win would reduce church-state separation in the courts.

"I'm a Christian and I believe in the Ten Commandments, but I don't believe they should be in a courtroom," said Montgomery retiree Joy O'Brian. "I can't see forcing that issue like that." Δ

## Missionaries' relatives to press for retrial in El Salvador

Relatives of four U.S. missionaries murdered 20 years ago in El Salvador are demanding a retrial of two former Salvadoran military generals recently cleared of responsibility for the slayings.

Relatives of Roman Catholic nuns Dorothy Kazel, Ita Ford and Maura Clarke and lay worker Jean Donovan say they reject the Nov. 3 decision by a West Palm Beach, Fla., federal court jury that former Salvadoran National Guard leader Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, 62, and former Salvadoran Defense Minister Jose Guillermo Garcia, 67, bore no "command responsibility" for the Dec. 2, 1980, slayings.

Five National Guard soldiers, three of whom have since been released, were convicted in El Salvador of the murders, which occurred during the nation's 12-year civil war that ended in 1992, Reuters news agency reported.

The women were suspected of sympathizing with forces opposed to the government.

But families of the victims say blame also lies with the two Salvadoran military leaders, who retired to Florida in 1989 and became U.S. residents.

The families filed their lawsuit against the two men under a U.S. law that permits legal action against anyone who bears "command responsibility" for the criminal activity of subordinates.

The families' lawyer said jurors may have been confused about command responsibility, noting they repeatedly questioned the judge about the issue. Δ

## Postal service to issue stamp recognizing Muslim holiday

Earning praise from several Muslim organizations in the United States, the U.S. Postal Service on Nov. 13 unveiled a stamp commemorating the Muslim holiday of Eid-al-Fitr, a feast that marks the end of fasting for the holy month of Ramadan.

The stamp also commemorates Eid al-Adha, which marks the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.

The holidays join Thanksgiving and Christmas as the only ones honored with commemorative stamps for the year 2001.

"This is one sign that the Muslim presence in America is being recognized," said Omar Ahmad, board chairman of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. CAIR joined the American Muslim Coun-

cil, the Islamic Institute and the Islamic Supreme Council of America in praising the move.

The stamp will be available in October 2001, just before the start of Ramadan for that year. Δ

## Kosovo election a mixed blessing for churches

Recent election results in Kosovo and the dramatic rise of Vojislav Kostunica to the Yugoslav presidency are mixed blessings for the region's faiths, local religious leaders and analysts say.

But Kosovo's Serbian Orthodox Church, with its dynamic, politically moderate bishop, is one of the few clear beneficiaries of the changes in Belgrade.

Unlike his atheist predecessor, Slobodan Milosevic, President Kostunica is a member of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Yugoslavia's dominant faith that is viewed warily by Kosovo's Muslims.

Kostunica is quite public about his faith, telling Belgrade crowds in a victory speech, "I am proud to be a citizen of Serbia. I am proud to belong to our sacred church."

Within days of securing his hold on power in Belgrade, Kostunica met with Kosovo's Bishop Artemije Radosavljevic, head of Kosovo's Serb National Council.

According to a Serbian Orthodox Church statement, the pair discussed the possibility of Kostunica visiting Gracanica, the 14th century monastery where Artemije lives with well-armed NATO protection.

Such a meeting would have been unthinkable between Milosevic and the bishop.

"This puts him (the bishop) back in a more central position," said Alexander Belopopsky in a telephone interview from Geneva, where he is Europe secretary for the World Council of Churches.

As a religious leader who has "really consistently proposed a moderate line," Artemije fits in well with the WCC's Southeast Europe Ecumenical Partnership, said Belopopsky, referring to a program that helps churches cope with issues ranging from the return of 1.5 million refugees to improvement of relations with other faiths.

Interfaith relations are generally warm in Kosovo, where about 70 percent of the population is at least traditionally Muslim. Some religious leaders criticize Artemije for playing an overtly political role as head of the Serbian National Council. Δ

# Baptist witness for freedom rooted in good news, discipleship



**B**aptists throughout the centuries have insisted upon religious liberty for all people. Religious liberty is a term denoting the right of every person to worship God or not to worship God as conscience dictates. As

important as religious toleration is, it is not the same as religious liberty. Religious toleration is a privilege granted, often begrudgingly, by humans in positions of power. Religious liberty, Baptists believe, is a gift from God.

Religious liberty has found expression in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and is the foundation for an understanding of the separation of church and state. The separation of church and state is a legal principle and legislative method for implementing the important principle of religious liberty.

This distinctive Baptist witness in its source and essence, however, is not a political proposition or a matter of constitutional legalities and guarantees. For Baptists, the reality of religious liberty is essentially a theological conviction grounded in Scripture. Baptists, believing that religious liberty is a gift from God, bear witness to the freedom of God the Creator who creates humans in God's own image. Freedom inheres in humanity's nature as created by God. Humans are free to make choices, even to reject God, for God does not coerce, and humans are responsible for the choices they make in the freedom that God grants.

The witness for freedom finds an even greater expression in the Lordship of Christ. The Baptist commitment to religious liberty is a Christ-centered commitment. The incarnation is the axis doctrine around which all other statements and expressions of religious liberty revolve. As Roger Williams insisted, at a great cost to his own personal well-being, an enforced uniformity of religion is a denial of the incarnation. To see God most completely revealed in the life, death and res-

urrection of Christ is to see the loving freedom and the freeing love of a God who will not coerce faith through means of power and manipulation but who reaches out to the world through the apparent powerlessness of a loving sacrifice. Freedom-loving Baptists, confident in the power of the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation, reject the way of coercion and manipulation and instead choose the way of persuasion and Christ-like example. The call to discipleship, then, is predicated upon a free, uncoerced response, lovingly and willingly given.

Søren Kirkegaard, the Danish philosopher, understood the witness of freedom to be rooted in the incarnation of Christ. He tells the story of a powerful king who falls head over heels in love with an ordinary peasant girl. His dilemma, however, is that he is a king, and she is a peasant. How can he win her love? With his power, he could issue a command and she would find herself at the altar. As a man of riches, he could dazzle her with the splendors of his palace and woo her with his wealth. But if he forces her, would her response be true love? If he appeals to her materialism, will she love the trappings of power more than him? He finally concludes that she will either love him freely or not at all. Anything else or less would not be love. He then does the only thing that he can do, not knowing if she will be his. He comes to the maiden dressed not as the potentate of his domain but as a common peasant.

God through Christ operates in this kind of freedom through which only the truest of loves is possible. The Baptist witness for religious liberty is rooted in this message of good news and is central to the believer's understanding of what it means to follow Christ in dedicated discipleship. This is the distinctiveness of the Baptist commitment to religious liberty.  $\Delta$

*Brad Creed, professor of Christian history at George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas, is a scholar-in-residence at the Baptist Joint Committee and visiting professor at the John Leland Center for Theological Studies in Falls Church, Va.*

## Mainline pastors support lobbyists, survey reports

Research released from a Princeton University study of mainline Protestants shows overwhelming support for denominational lobbying in Washington, even though most pastors have little or no contact with their church's capital offices.

The survey, released earlier this year, is a sweeping look at all aspects of mainline churches. Laura Olson, a researcher at Clemson University, profiled the political role of Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal and American Baptist churches, among others.

According to Olson's study, 84 percent of mainline pastors support their denominations' Washington offices, while 8 percent feared losing their voice in Washington.

"The fact is that these offices do fulfill a vital role for their denominations," Olson said. "They undertake the national political work that many clergy cannot or will not do."

Olson surveyed five Washington church officers, and 62 pastors around the country. Olson said many pastors feel their Washington lobbyists are an important alternative voice to the well-funded influence of conservative evangelical activists in the religious right.  $\Delta$

## Baptist Joint Committee

### Supporting Bodies

- ◆ Alliance of Baptists
- ◆ American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
- ◆ Baptist General Association of Virginia
- ◆ Baptist General Conference
- ◆ Baptist General Convention of Texas
- ◆ Baptist State Convention of North Carolina
- ◆ 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

### REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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## News Extra

### Group claims Vietnam guilty of persecuting Christians

Days before President Clinton was scheduled to visit Vietnam, a U.S.-based human rights group claimed to have documents showing a government campaign "to arrest and reverse the country's growing Christian movements."

"Although Vietnam is a signatory to international conventions on human rights that guarantee religious freedom, these documents provide irrefutable evidence that repression continues to drive day-to-day policy and practice," the Center for Religious Freedom, an arm of the human rights organization Freedom House, said Nov. 13.

Vietnamese authorities Nov. 14 denounced as slanderous the report that charged the country with suppressing Christianity.

Several of the documents refer to the Protestant movement among the Hmong and other tribal peoples as being "hostile," "dangerous" and a "problem."

One of the documents, which date from early February 1998 to June 6 of this year, questioned the role of Christian churches in the downfall of communism in Eastern Europe, and suggested the government "work hard to control religious leaders, officials and missionaries" and "be sure that the 'religious law' yields to the 'secular law.'"

Another document prohibits religious study groups and encourages informing "government officials if a stranger arrives to preach religion."

Also included among the documents was a pledge asking Christians to renounce their faith.

"These documents are the smoking gun," said Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom. "They show

that church closures, arrests and Bible burnings are not isolated acts of overzealous cadres, but are the policy directives of the Vietnamese Communist Party and state religious officials. They give the lie to Vietnam government claims that the state has liberalized religious freedom in recent years. We urge President Clinton to raise religious freedom concerns with top Vietnamese officials on his impending trip."

Clinton began his three-day tour of Vietnam Nov. 16, the first time a U.S. president has visited the country in 31 years. Δ

### British government proposes lowering church repair taxes

To the delight of British churches, especially the Church of England, Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown has announced that in his next budget he will propose reducing value added tax (VAT) on repairing and maintaining church buildings from the present 17.5 percent to 5 percent. The proposal has to be approved by the European Commission in Brussels.

It has been a long-standing complaint of the Church of England, responsible for the upkeep of the vast majority of the country's historic churches, that it has to pay VAT on church repairs whereas no VAT is charged on building a new church.

That makes it cheaper to raze a historic church and build a new one than to maintain the old building.

The Church of England's annual expenditure on building maintenance is \$150 million, including a VAT of more than \$30 million.

The Church of England estimates that the VAT bill for all denominations of the United Kingdom is nearly \$75 million a year. Δ

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