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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ **Robert Tiller**, a former board member of the Baptist Joint Committee and an ordained American Baptist minister, has been named director of government relations at Bread for the World. Tiller said the D.C.-based Christian anti-hunger organization will try to increase aid to Africa and will seek substantial changes in the welfare laws that soon must be reauthorized by Congress.

◆ **Stan Hastey**, executive director of the D.C.-based Alliance of Baptists, welcomed a decision by National Council of Churches General Assembly declaring the Alliance eligible to become a member of the NCC. Hastey, a board member of the Baptist Joint Committee, called the vote "an act of true grace." The Alliance is a supporting body of the BJC.

◆ **Zhang Kunlun**, a Canadian follower of the banned Falun Gong spiritual group, has been sentenced by Chinese authorities to three years in a labor camp, according to a Hong Kong-based human rights group. This three-year sentence marks the first time Chinese officials have given a labor sentence to a Falun follower who is a citizen of another country. Zhang was taken into custody in October in the city of Jinan and staged a hunger strike to protest his arrest. Δ

BJC, other religious groups seek ruling on school building access



Nine religious organizations want the nation's highest court to send a clear signal that school districts may not bar religious groups from after-hours use of facilities that are otherwise open to community groups.

In a friend-of-the-court brief, the Baptist Joint Committee and eight other groups argue that denying access only to religious groups violates the First Amendment.

The religious groups want the U.S. Supreme Court to invalidate a New York school district's policy that barred the use of its facilities by individuals or organizations "for religious purposes."

The Good News Club, a nondenominational Christian youth group, challenged the policy when denied after-hours use of a facility in Milford, N.Y.

A trial court and the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sided with the school district, but the U.S. Supreme Court agreed in October to review the matter. The appeals court said the club's activities go beyond simply teaching moral values from a religious viewpoint and "fall clearly on the side of religious instruction and prayer."

In urging the high court to reverse the lower rulings, the religious groups argue that by singling out religious groups for adverse treatment, the policy violates their free speech rights.

The constitutionally required separation of church and state neither requires nor justifies the exclusion of religious groups, the brief argues.

"This case ... is about *private actors* engaging in religious speech in a public forum *after the school day* at programs sponsored and run by a *private community group*," the brief states.

The religious groups further argue that permitting after-hours access for students with parental permission to attend the Good News Club would not create an impression of school sponsorship in the minds of elementary school students.

"It defies common sense to conclude that, while young children might view a religious organization's use of public property as an endorsement from the State, they would not also perceive the organization's *exclusion* from that facilities as State *hostility* toward religion," the brief states.

In addition, the brief argues that by singling out religion for inferior treatment without proving a compelling governmental interest, the policy violates the free exercise rights of the Good News Club.

Perhaps most troubling, the brief argues, is the policy's "requirement that State officials scrutinize proposed religious events to decide if they are 'merely' the presentation of a religious viewpoint or if they consist of forbidden religious instruction or worship." That process, the brief states, impermissibly entangles church and state.

"It's really important for religious groups who believe in the separation of church and state to tell the court that this practice does not violate that principle," said Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee. "As long as access is provided after hours without school sponsorship, religious groups should not be discriminated against." Δ

Report finds mixed results in study of religion

State mandates are increasingly requiring public schools to integrate religion into the curriculum for social studies classes, but those mandates are not without flaws themselves, a joint report from the First Amendment Center and the Council on Islamic Education has concluded.

"Language framing the study of religion in U.S. history is generally fair and neutral," the report said. "In most states, however, the language is too general to provide a clear indication of how accurate instruction on each tradition will be."

Before the start of their senior year, most students in public schools in the nation "will have been exposed to the basic outlines of the major world religions," the report found.

And though students also will have been exposed to religion's role in U.S. society and the origins of the U.S. government, most exposure to religion occurs between the sixth and ninth grades, "and relatively little is found elsewhere."

Often students are given an incomplete picture of religion in world history. "With some exceptions, very little content on religion is written into state world history standards for the period after 1800 in European history, and after 1500 in non-Western cultures," the report said. Δ

Russian court decision bodes ill for groups linked to West

An appeals court decision against the Salvation Army in Moscow appears to be an ominous sign for dozens of religious organizations with links to the West, just as they face a year-end deadline for registering with the Russian government.

The decision announced Nov. 28 could force the Salvation Army to relocate its headquarters, move five congregations into home churches and shut down operations that include providing about 6,000 meals a month to the city's homeless and poor.

"In terms of the legal processes, it is the end of the road," said Colonel Ken Baillie, an American who commands the Salvation Army's operations in Russia and four other former Soviet republics.

"We've had registration here for six years. Never a problem. With the new law, we had to re-register," he said, adding that an appeal to Russia's Supreme Court was unlikely.

The appeals court upheld a lower court ruling that the Salvation Army is a foreign-based "military association" and therefore ineligible for registration as a full-fledged religious organization. Under a controversial 1997 law, the registration is necessary for religious groups to function as legal entities with the right to enter into contracts, open bank accounts and hire employees.

According to the most recent statistics from the Justice Ministry, about 60 percent of the religious groups required to register by Dec. 31 have completed the process. Failure to do so could result in court-ordered "liquidation" under a law adopted earlier this year that extended the original deadline by one year. Δ

Groups fight for Nativity scene on historic Lexington Green

The first battlefield of the American Revolution has become the latest battleground in the fight for religious expression in the public square.

A Christian group is suing the town of Lexington, Mass., for the right to continue displaying its Nativity scene on the historic Lexington Green, where Colonial minutemen fired the famous "shot heard 'round the world" to begin the War for Independence from the British in 1775.

The privately owned manger scene with Jesus, Mary and Joseph on the town green has a history of its own, dating back

more than 70 years. That tradition could end this year, however, if a federal district court upholds a new town ordinance that bans "unattended structures" on the green for more than eight hours at a time.

Members of the Lexington Board of Selectmen have said the green could become a "circus" if any religious group can erect a display. But a local chapter of the Knights of Columbus, a Roman Catholic fraternal group, says the town is instead violating every group's constitutional rights. Δ

House, Senate chaplains get special seats at cathedral

The Washington National Cathedral has designated "perpetual seats of honor" for the chaplains of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

An interfaith evensong service was held Nov. 15 to recognize the chaplains now held by the Rev. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, Senate chaplain, and the Rev. Daniel P. Coughlin, House chaplain.

"Although many leaders of Congress are nurtured by the spiritual care of their own religious affiliations in their own home states and districts, congressional chaplains provide a unique pastoral presence by means of their intimate understanding of the demands and challenges of legislating and interpreting democracy," the Very Rev. Nathan D. Baxter, dean of the cathedral in the District of Columbia, said in a statement. Δ

Clinton names 5 recipients of annual human rights award

On Dec. 6, President Bill Clinton commemorated Human Rights Day by naming the five recipients of the 2000 Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights.

Award recipients were Tillie Black Bear, a leading advocate for victims of domestic violence; Frederick Charles Cuny, an advocate for civilian victims of conflict and disaster; Norman Dorsen, a defender of civil rights as president of the American Civil Liberties Union; Elaine R. Jones, a civil rights attorney who has spent nearly 30 years at the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund; and the Most Rev. Theodore Edgar McCarrick, a lifelong human rights advocate for immigrants, refugees and the homeless.

Aung San Suu Kyi, a prominent figure in the struggle to advance democracy and human rights in Burma, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Δ

All Baptists have responsibility for religious liberty education



J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

and ethical issues, religious freedom and church-state separation have always been at the very core of what it means to be Baptist. The lessons of Scripture and experience of history inspire us to seek religious liberty for all and to separate church and state.

But not all Baptists today embrace this heritage. Our historic consensus is coming apart. Some Baptists are hostile to the very idea of separation of church and state. Others are apathetic; they don't think it matters much. Still others want government to help promote their religion. In short, there are Baptists on both sides of virtually every contemporary church-state dispute.

We have our work cut out for us. What can the BJC do? What can you do? I can think of several things to ensure that our grand heritage turns into a lasting legacy for years to come.

First, we need to *reread* the words of Scripture and heed the witness of Jesus. Jesus never took a solitary shekel from Caesar or accepted help from Herod in proclaiming the gospel and advancing his mission. He taught us there is a difference between the kingdom of God and that of Caesar.

Second, we must *recover* our heritage by recalling the names of the heroes of our faith and their stories. The prophet Isaiah urges us to "look to the rock from which you are hewn." The writer of Hebrews extols that "great cloud of witnesses." Carlyle Marney spoke of those

"balcony people" — exemplars, role models and heroes who, from their lofty perch on the balcony of our lives, continue to encourage and inspire us to greater heights.

Third, we should *remember* what it's like to be a minority. Retelling the stories from the past will help. But we don't have to look to the past to learn a lesson here. Baptists may be in the majority in Birmingham and Waco, but they are a distinct minority in Salt Lake City and Honolulu and throughout most of the world. Yes, we need to remember and know what it's like to be a put-upon minority.

Fourth, we must *resist* triumphalism. This brash attitude that we often see lurking behind an in-your-face evangelism and the use of secular political power to advance the spiritual gospel needs to be held in check. This "soul freedom for me but not for thee" is simply wrong. We need to exhibit a spirit of humility and servanthood.

And finally, we must *redouble* our efforts to educate Baptists and all Americans. Many have already made up their minds. But most Baptists and Americans — when they get past the facile bumper stickers and slick sound bites and think about these issues — will come around. This is our primary focus for the work of the BJC over the next five years.

So our destiny as freedom-loving Baptists and as Americans depends the willingness of all of us to come together, to reread Scripture, to recover our heritage, to remember what it was like to be a minority, to resist a spirit of triumphalism and to redouble our efforts to educate an unbelieving and skeptical world.

Roll up your sleeves and join us! Δ

Survey: Mainline clergy don't run from politics

A new survey of Episcopal and Lutheran clergy shows that pastors in the two churches do not shy away from delivering political sermons from the pulpit and are more likely to talk politics when their congregations disagree with them.

The preliminary findings from a three-year study of 60 congregations in the Episcopal Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America hint that mainline clergy are more political than they are thought to be. The final study is expected to be released next year.

The survey was conducted by Christopher Gilbert, a professor of political science at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minn., and Paul Djupe of Denison University in Granville, Ohio.

Gilbert and Djupe said they wanted to explore what role mainline clergy play now, after years of historic leadership on slavery, prohibition and civil rights. The researchers also wanted to know how much political information parishioners received at church, and how that might influence their political activities.

"We learned that both ELCA and Episcopal clergy are more likely to speak about politics publicly, in and out of church, when their congregations are a minority in their communities," Gilbert told a Lutheran newspaper, the *Metro Lutheran*. Δ

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Book Review

Religious Liberty in Northern Europe in the Twenty-first Century

Ed. Derek H. Davis (Waco, Texas: J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, 2000) 237 pp.



Without the benefit of a constitutional amendment securing personal freedoms or a bill of rights that protects all citizens, the people of Northern Europe

have struggled to maintain any semblance of religious liberty. This people's struggle, which by Derek Davis' standards has been as fierce as that suffered by the people of any other region, has been unpredictable at best and unbearable at worst.

Each European country mentioned in this book has handled the steady rotation of mistrusting political regimes and war in its own way. While some countries enjoy a great deal of religious opportunity, others lie nearly broken by oppression. This collection of essays — largely composed by natives of Northern Europe — considers individual histories, highlighting the dignity of each nation's own struggle. Collected, these stories converge in a way that grants readers a unique opportunity to understand a region from within while working for it from without.

Not to be confused with the distant academic postcards that flood the shelves of modern scholarship, Davis relies heavily on scholars reporting from the countries they discuss in their essays. Matching historical context with personal observation, these writers put flesh and bones on stories that might otherwise be dismissed as detached history lessons.

The advent of religious toleration in

Great Britain, for example, is explained not as the product of religious liberals, as might be expected, but as the result of conservative pluralism. In another essay, Hitler's activity prior to World War II is explained as an extension of the bigotry that ensnared nearly all of Germany during the early 20th century. And later, Peter A. Eidberg explains the way United Methodists in Norway led a fight in the 1980s to ensure extension of the same laws to all communities of faith, Christian and non-Christian. These stories and others tracing the plight of religious liberty in Great Britain, Poland, Germany, Russia, Norway, Sweden and Finland are told with clarity using historical documentation and poignant critique.

These essays provide a nice introduction to religious liberty in Northern Europe without asking readers to endure a lot of text (Davis manages to get 12 essays inside of 250 pages.). Also, the titles are clear, giving readers a preview before they get started. Besides being valued for its convenience, this book might push American readers to consider religious liberties available to those outside the United States. Pushing us past a simple appreciation for the laws of this land, works like this one can help us achieve a more appropriate global mentality. As it turns out, much work remains to be done if religious liberty is to be a reality for all.

— Brandon Jones

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