

Nashville, Tennessee

# REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL



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## NewsMakers

◆ New Jersey Secretary of State DeForest B. Soaries Jr., a Republican and a Baptist minister, said faith-based organizations receiving federal money to provide social services should not be allowed to discriminate in hiring, even on religious grounds. "I believe if that part of the federal law is challenged, it will be overturned by the Supreme Court," Soaries said.

◆ The Rev. Andrew Young, president of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, said, "I believe in government support for faith-based initiatives, but when I look at the churches of Europe and I see that they all are funded by the government — and on Sunday morning they are almost all empty — I worry about dependence on government for maintenance of the spirit of religion in our midst."

◆ The Rev. C. Welton Gaddy, executive director of The Interfaith Alliance, asked supporters of Bush's faith-based initiatives, "Where is the compassion in creating a system where those in need must choose between receiving desperately needed services and the continuation of their civil and religious rights?" He spoke at the release of a petition sponsored by the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination and signed by more than 850 clergy opposing parts of the plan. Δ

## BJC opposes 'charitable choice' at House subcommittee hearing

**I**n the first-ever hearing on plans to fund religious social services with tax dollars, House lawmakers sparred over the practical church-state implications of the initiative touted by President George W. Bush.

Republicans say the initiative would level the playing field for religious groups previously unable to get government funding.

But Democrats say the plan is unnecessary and would undermine civil rights laws by allowing tax-funded church organizations to continue to discriminate in hiring based on religion.

The hearing held April 24 by the House Subcommittee on the Constitution came on the same day GOP "charitable choice" supporters kicked off a "faith-based summit" touting Bush's initiatives.

Only one of the four witnesses at the hearing opposed charitable choice.

"All too often," said Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, "a friendly pat on the back by Uncle Sam turns into a hostile shove by Big Brother."

He said a Baptist church could take tax money "to hang up a sign saying no Catholics or Jews need apply to this Baptist-run, federally funded facility."

He said the plan would favor majority religions. "It's the Baptist in Birmingham over the Buddhist in Birmingham, who's going to get the money," he said.

Lawmakers posed tough questions to witnesses throughout the hearing.

Walker told lawmakers that at least

one of the witnesses testifying on behalf of faith-based service providers could receive government contracts without enacting charitable choice since the organization involved is separate from the church and does not proselytize.

But Rep. Melissa Hart, R-Pa., complained that Walker's position would require churches to hire lawyers and set up separate nonprofit groups. "You're talking about all this government rigmarole that isn't really practical," she said.

Walker responded that "government rigmarole" better describes the actions "of those who want to expand charitable choice who have set up six new offices here in Washington."

Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., questioned witnesses heavily about the charitable choice provision that would allow, for the first time since civil rights laws were enacted, employment discrimination for tax-funded jobs.

He told Associated Baptist Press that such discrimination "has been against the law for more than 40 years."

Scott added, "I am surprised that there is not a greater sensitivity to this ... that a lot of people seem comfortable with this as if there is something natural about it."

Charitable choice supporters say that since enactment of the 1964 civil rights laws, churches have enjoyed an exemption so they can hire only people who agree with their religious views. Opponents, however, say exempt organizations should not be able to discriminate in filling tax-funded positions. Δ



Walker testifies at hearing.

## Utah loses bid to adjust census for missionaries

Federal judges have dismissed claims that Utah lost a congressional seat because the 2000 census excluded thousands of state residents working as missionaries abroad.

Utah had claimed that the Census Bureau did not acknowledge some 11,176 state residents working overseas as missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The state needed 857 residents to gain its fourth congressional seat. That seat went to North Carolina.

The three-judge panel ruled unanimously that counting those missionaries would have placed other states at a disadvantage, and that those missionaries make up a small percentage of the estimated 5 million Americans living abroad.

The panel also disagreed with the contention that Utah was the victim of religious discrimination, the Associated Press reported.

Utah's attorney general said he planned to appeal the panel's decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"I believe we owe it to the people of Utah to take their case to the highest court," Mark Shurtleff said.  $\Delta$

## Nonprofits announce support for non-itemizer deduction

Seeking a boost in charitable giving from Americans "whose hearts are often larger than their wallets," a coalition of more than 500 nonprofit organizations announced support for a proposal that would allow non-itemizing taxpayers to deduct charitable gifts.

Leaders of the Coalition to Help America Give say the move could help the 85 million households — 70 percent of all taxpayers — who do not itemize deductions on their tax returns and could increase giving to charities by \$14.6 billion every year.

"Our tax system should acknowledge and reward the generosity of all taxpayers, including those whose hearts are often larger than their wallets," said John Seffrin, co-chair of the coalition and CEO of the American Cancer Society.

Marsha Johnson Evans, co-chair of the coalition and national executive director of Girl Scouts of the USA, told the crowd at the kickoff of the coalition's work that "it takes a lot more than cookies" to fund the Girl Scouts.

A coalition official said the proposal has been introduced in Congress in past years but without much success. Now, as part of President George W. Bush's sweeping faith-based initiative, the proposal has gained new momentum and stands a good chance of becoming law, the aide said.

In 1981 Congress enacted legislation that allowed non-itemizers to deduct charitable gifts. But that measure, which was phased in over five years, was allowed to expire in 1986 when Congress and the Reagan administration declined to extend it as part of new a tax reform package.

Reps. Phil Crane, R-Ill., and Jennifer Dunn, R-Wash., have introduced separate bills to provide a charitable deduction for non-itemizers.

Also, Reps. J.C. Watts, R-Okla., and Tony Hall, D-Ohio, have introduced non-itemizer legislation, but it is part of a bill containing the more controversial "charitable choice" plan to send tax dollars to religious social service ministries.

In the Senate, charitable choice has been separated from the tax deduction measure, giving it a better chance of passage.

Officials from the 550-member coalition said the group agrees only on supporting the tax-deduction provision and not other portions of the Bush plan.

The group, spearheaded by Independent Sector, includes Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina; Baptist Mem-

orial Health Care Foundation in Memphis, Tenn.; the American Heart Association; Salvation Army; National Council of Churches and hundreds of other local and national nonprofit and advocacy groups.

Both the Baptist Joint Committee and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention support the deduction for non-itemizers but have not yet joined the coalition.  $\Delta$

## 'Charitable choice' opponents kept out of faith-based summit

As Congress begins to dissect President Bush's plan to funnel government money to faith-based organizations, supporters received a warm welcome April 25 from Republican leaders who promised to pass the package despite increasingly vocal concerns from opponents.

A daylong summit sponsored by House and Senate Republicans rallied supporters of faith-based projects and featured a host of influential black clergy who said more government money in private hands will help cure social ills.

Opponents were kept out of the summit, which at times seemed more of a love fest between conservative black clergy and Republican leaders.

The Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said, "This isn't a legitimate summit; it's a carefully controlled pep rally for a rapidly sinking proposal."

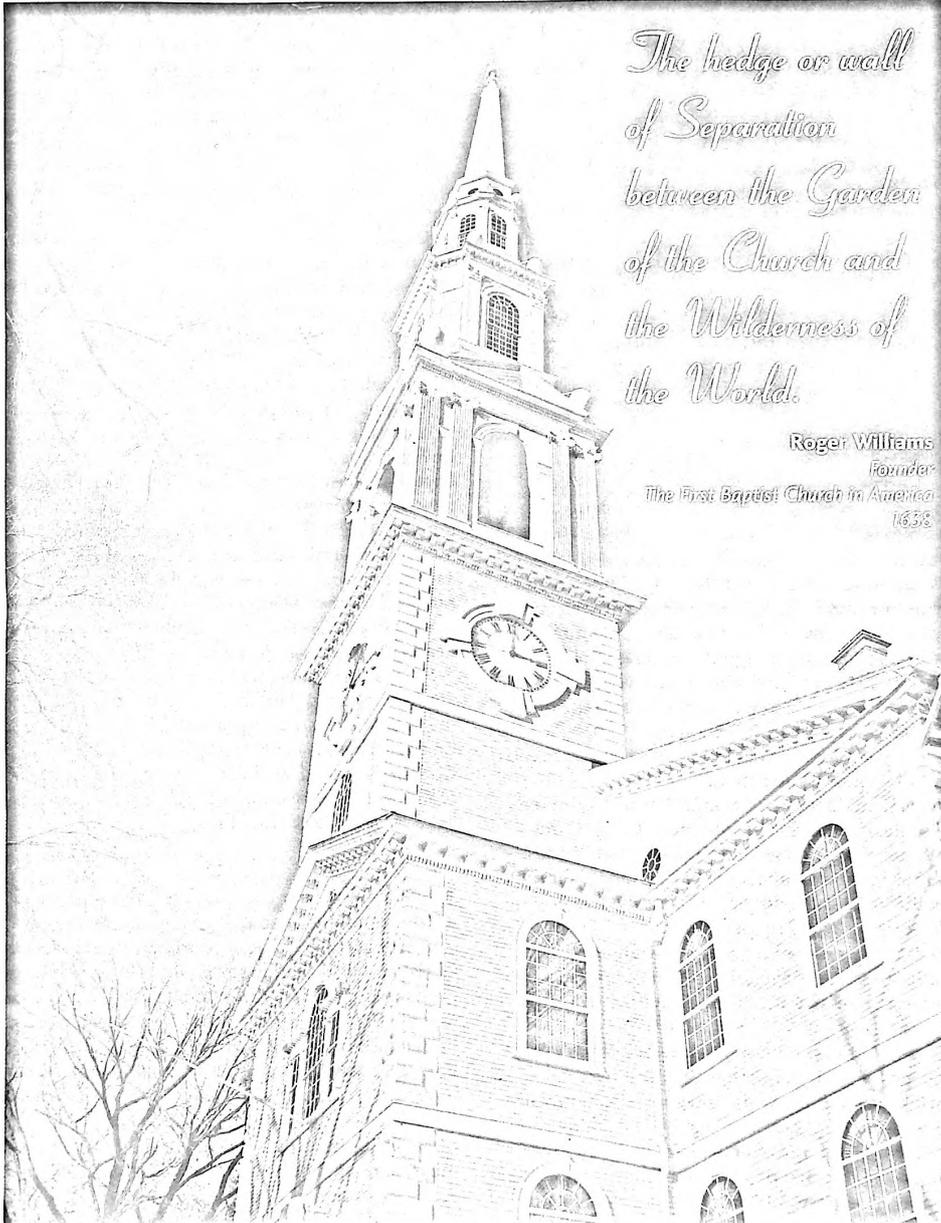
Bishop Harold Calvin Ray, a Florida pastor and head of the National Center for Faith-Based Initiative, who helped orchestrate the event, dismissed those concerns as "distractive and divisive."

Hearings already have begun on the bills containing charitable choice in the House and the Senate.

The House bill, sponsored by Rep. J.C. Watts, R-Okla., would provide incentives for increased charitable giving and open up the government grant-bidding process to religious organizations. The Senate version deals only with charitable-giving incentives.

The summit came one day after more than 850 pastors, rabbis and spiritual leaders delivered a petition to Bush and Congress opposing charitable choice part of the faith-based plan.

Critics are worried that churches would be allowed to discriminate in hiring and that government red tape would tie the hands of service providers.  $\Delta$



*The hedge or wall  
of Separation  
between the Garden  
of the Church and  
the Wilderness of  
the World.*

Roger Williams  
Founder  
The First Baptist Church in America  
1639

# Between Worlds & End Times



by  
**James C. Miller**  
Minister  
*The First Baptist Church  
in America  
Providence, Rhode Island*

## I.

Baptists have had a passion for preaching about “end times.” We have been lodged “between worlds” on vital issues. Thus, our identity has been shaped in a matrix of dissent and propagation as we have examined faith and polity of other church worlds and encountered polices and values of secular worlds. The worlds we want kept and the ones that should end are critical choices.

Certain experiences have influenced me to preach about the “end of the world.”

I was reared in West Virginia’s most rugged terrain of the Appalachian Mountains. Long before electronic billboards were anchored into hillsides, itinerant preachers amazingly suspended themselves over cliffs that hung above winding roadways. Onto rock ledges they boldly painted scriptural warnings such as, “Jesus is coming again. The end of time is near. Prepare Ye.” As a kid I could not appreciate the eagerness in revival meetings to end the world so quickly.

When I got to seminary I discovered there was a language and body of thought to deal in a more comprehensive framework and sophistication with the whole matter of eschatology — “last things and end times.” But immediately after seminary I was plunged into the bizarre again. I enrolled for a summer of clinical pastoral education at a state mental hospital. Typical of that day, it was a warehouse of all forms of mental illness. A patient who was to be

my case study whispered in my ear, “The world is coming to an end on Friday,” then scooted to a corner of the ward. By Friday, the articulate soothsayer had cast a haunting anxiety throughout the ward, just as in biblical times strange figures alarmed passers-by with their apocalyptic portents.

In every age there have been predictions and descriptions about the end of time. Some are to be dismissed — they are psychotic. Some cannot be ignored — they are factual. In biblical times there was expectation of the imminent return of Christ to close the age. Second Peter 3 is one graphic image. In our times the religious writings of Hal Lindsey, *The Great Late Planet Earth*, are at the top of best-selling lists. Thought about the end of times sinks deeply and widely into the psyche of a good many church folk.

End of the world predictions do not emanate solely from silly sources and scary fundamentalists. Environmentalists and eminent scientists carefully document how fragile is the world! They disseminate computer printouts that chart an eventual doomsday unless we reverse the ecological damage inflicted on earth’s ozone layer. Their words are just as graphic as the Bible — we’ll be burned up! Or, nuclear holocaust! Desperate nations and unstable rulers yet have the capacity to unleash nuclear warheads and end everything we know and love.

So, I do have a passion to preach about how the world might end. However, I have been “setting you up” a bit. Surely, you surmised the teasing route thus far. There is another way in which I believe Christians should speak and act concerning the end of the world. Let me make a right angle turn and head in that direction of thought.

## II.

My life has been decisively influenced by a splendid human being named Clarence Jordan — my John the Baptist. If ever I had a mentor in the Christian faith, he is a master one! He and other pilgrims of faith founded Koinonia Farms, known and revered by many. Their intent was to teach itinerant farmers, be they poor whites or ostracized blacks, how to farm with productive land management and how to market their crops at a fair economic advantage. Their community encompassed all sorts of people — Th.D. preachers, field hands, Ph.D. agronomists, and lots of sojourners we Baptists like to call Seekers. Koinonia shaped its community according to the ethical and spiritual principles enunciated for the New Testament Church in Acts 2 — a communi-

ty bound and guided in Christ's spirit with no demarcations of race and class. It was a place of kindred spirits who wanted to put overalls on their faith and live out the high calling of the Servant Jesus.

They attended and joined the little local Baptist Church nearby. You can imagine how lucky the church first felt when the people of Koinonia first started attending. What a crop of seminary-trained Sunday school teachers, choir members and tithers they embodied! It was not long, however, until the white Baptist church realized that Koinonia was a racially integrated compound. You know what was bound to happen in that era of the mid-50s. They were told to **get out!**

Why? Why was this cadre of Christians commanded to get out of a local church? Why were they branded and ruled out of their Christian fellowship? Clarence Jordan's wife, Florence, explained it in a way that forever will grip my soul. **"It was because of what we were doing. What we were doing was preaching the end of the world — THEIR WORLD: the end of the big plantation owners, the end of the boss who'd sit on the porch and let somebody else do their work for nothing, the end of separate and unequal status as God's children."**

Christians should preach and long for **the END OF THE WORLD —**

**END** the world of bigotry!

**END** the world of hunger and refugees!

**END** the world of despotism!

**END** the world where people are violated, where dreams and hopes are denied, where freedoms and dignities are squelched and disavowed!

### III.

America was once called "the new world." Old worlds of religious and social tyranny had to end in order for the new worlds of liberty and dignity to be birthed and manifested. When I ascend the stairway to the pulpit of The First Baptist Church in America, I am cognizant of the people called the Baptists who preached the end of the world in their day. And I am also awakened to new alliances in civil and religious arenas bent on the end times of separation of church and state and religious liberty principles we have preciousy instilled and guarded. What to end and what not to end are vital issues.

The masterful Methodist preacher, Harold Bosley, sounds the reveille for Baptists when he preached long ago: "All vital issues are controversial issues.

This being true — and not more than a moment's reflection is necessary to substantiate it — the sobering corollary comes to mind: The only way to avoid controversial issues is to avoid vital issues. This the Christian preacher can scarcely afford to do."

Here are some of the worlds whose age should close, I believe:

**END ANY WORLD that lies to us and conceals the truth.**

A world of deceit, corruption and exploitation will surely end us if we do not end it first. This is true in personal relationships and societal manifestations. Domination and exclusive privileges make up a world that will not unite or protect us, but will ultimately destroy us. Know the falsehoods that the world speaks cleverly and deceptively. When we are caught between worlds, choose the one where truth and freedom reign.

A.J. Muste was a sane soul who labored in the same era and similar spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. Muste constantly traveled to remote towns and unpublicized locations where nuclear weapons were stockpiled. There he engaged vigils of prayer and witness to abolish destructive arsenals against humankind. A news reporter once asked him what good he thought such lonely vigils could ever effectuate in the outcome of the world, particularly when no one else seemed to care? Muste answered: "I don't do this to change the world; I do it to keep the world from changing me."

There are emerging world conclaves that want to end liberty of conscience and sanctions of religious freedom in the delicate intertwine of church and state polity. If they succeed, they might end what generations later will regret that they ended capriciously and mistakenly. What to end and what not to end are pivotal issues and moments for Baptists!

**THE END TIMES of religious antagonism should be near at hand.**

A divided world does not need a divided Church. Households of Faith are split by religious antagonism. It is wrenching and scarring the Body of Christ.

Baptists emerged from a world antagonistic to our dissent. We spoke our convictions with intellect and honor. There is a difference between antagonism bent toward destructiveness and dissent shaped toward honest engagement. We must ever show due regard to the antagonist who is in our face; yet we

must not allow vehement religion to abridge our freedom of conscience. Religious convictions can be stated with civility and Christ-like graces. Sadly, there is a surge of militant religion across the land and throughout the world. It looks ugly, sounds spiteful, and feels vengeful. Let its world not end our world.

**END ANY WORLD that offers no freedom, hope and enabled opportunity.**

We must ever strive to be a liberating Church in a world of despotic empires.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, one of the greatest Baptist and ecumenical preachers of the 20th century, cries in my soul these days as I ponder anew one of his famous sermons: "There is the need for a clear insight into the main issues of modern Christianity and a sense of penitent shame that the Christian church should be quarreling over little matters when the world is dying of great needs."

Too many hopes are being denied today. Too many dreams are being deferred. Too many opportunities for human betterment are aborted. That is why I am passionate for the themes of religious liberty and prophetic social consciousness. They are indispensable in weaving the fabric of human rights and building solidarity out of our diversity.

I have been Minister of The First Baptist Church in America for a short time. Each week I am afforded the opportunity to speak with visitors from around the world. I marvel at how special and needed are our Baptist principles in the world community. Some visitors are tourists. They wind their way to the upper sanctuary and under the vaulted steeple admire architecture and the crystal chandelier. I am impressed by those who visit us not as tourist but worshiper. They kneel reverently in our sanctuary and later say as they leave, "I purposely have come here to be refreshed by a spirit and legacy of this church. In my country today the candle of religious liberty is snuffed out or burns hidden and precariously."

We then swap stories of what daring tasks of discipleship are before us in this age. What worlds must end; what worlds to be brought into new creation? There is consensus to our thought. We want to end times in which hope vanishes and possibilities are snuffed out. We want to enlarge worlds of servitude in Christ's name.

In this regard, I am inspired by a terrific story that Tony Campolo once retrieved and dusted off for our hearing. It is a courageous story told by the Baptist

inspirational writer, Margaret Applegarth.

She summarized a sociology class project at Johns Hopkins University engaged decades ago to study a blighted area in the inner city of Baltimore. Case studies were written about the children of that area, examining their homes, gang patterns, school and church environment, etc. When the survey was completed, 200-case studies were lumped into one category and labeled with the frightful prediction — "Headed for Jail." Sociologically, it was measured that these children had little chance to "make it." Most likely, their world would end up in jail by the time they entered adolescence or young adulthood.

A few decades later another sociology class at Johns Hopkins came upon those old research files, and some bright graduate student asked, "What actually happened to those two hundred or more children marked "Headed for Jail?"

The new tribe of young sociologists sought the whereabouts of those youngsters twenty-five years ago. Surprisingly, they located a goodly number of them and were able to interview them again but this time in their adult years. Amazingly, the early prediction about them had not been true for a great majority of them. When the new researchers looked for reasons that invalidated the earlier assessment, one reason kept reoccurring. **The reason was a person — Aunt Hannah!**

Aunt Hannah was a teacher who lived in that same blighted area of Baltimore during the growing up years of those particular children. She was not only teacher to most of them, but she was neighbor and Sunday school teacher to a lot of them. When those re-interviewed children spoke of their experiences in the hindsight of adulthood, they insisted that Aunt Hannah was the one who had made a difference in the outcome of their lives. They told how she kept them after school for additional tutoring. They told how she often invited them to her home giving them the only square meal they had eaten in days. They told how she imparted deep and lasting inspiration and courage into their minds and hearts.

And so, these children who had been classified as "Headed for Jail" became doctors, teachers, ministers, solid homemakers and parents, good factory workers and community leaders. I challenge us — be an Aunt Hannah who opens new worlds for others, ending the worlds where kids have no fair chances to grow up safely, freely and healthfully.

The End of Times — come quickly, Lord Jesus, to help us. Δ

# Government's power to tax should not coerce support for religious entities



Mel Deason

**E**lizabeth Backus was taken to prison in Massachusetts Bay colony on Oct. 15, 1752. Her crime? Refusal to pay the "church tax" charged by the authorities to support the established church.

Like many others who were not affiliated with that church, she refused to be coerced into supporting a religion not of her choice by the government. Many early colonists fled England in search of freedom to worship as they pleased and to escape being compelled through taxes to support the state church. But as they planted themselves in the new land they, in turn, established their own churches by law and forced others to support them through taxes.

## First Amendment

Of the 13 Colonies, nine had established churches. During the formation of the United States, many fought for the separation of church and state, led primarily by Baptists. They wanted liberty of conscience for all citizens to believe or not to believe in matters of religion without interference from the state. And they strongly opposed the state seeking to promote a religion or support it through the power to tax.

These colonists were successful, with the help of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and other national leaders, in securing the First Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees separation of church and state. For 200 years under this arrangement, religion has thrived in the United States.

Today many support the return of the church tax. The ability of the government to tax citizens and businesses and then funnel tax money to various religious causes has great allure. Therefore, "faith-based initiatives" and "school vouchers" have popular support. Strong arguments are offered in favor of such proposals.

In response to these arguments, it is conceded that some religious-based

organizations are doing much good in our society. Likewise, some religious schools have praiseworthy records. In addition, it is truthfully asserted, the percentage of total revenues to be diverted to religious enterprises is a small percentage of total revenues. Again, we are told, these funds will not be used to promote the recipient's religion. They will be used, it is argued, in social ministry projects or in educating individual students. But a quick study of proselytization by various religions will reveal that ministries and schools are among the chief tools in winning converts.

## Regrets later

No matter how persuasive the arguments, however, in the final analysis a church tax, or religion tax, is just as unfair today as it was in the days of the Colonies. The principle is the same. The government should not use its power of taxation to coerce individual citizens or businesses to support religious organizations against their will.

It may not be as overt as the state churches of the Colonial period, but the effect is the same. And once government begins to involve itself in religion, as with anything else in which the government becomes involved, the entanglement will grow. Those religious ministries and schools that are so anxious for tax money now, if they succeed in getting it, most likely will also rue the day it began. With tax money will also come control and loss of independence.

Through the centuries in every land, when the state has inserted itself into the realm of religion or when a religion has sought to control the government, the results have not been good.

A look around the contemporary world will confirm this to still be true. For the first time in history, the United States succeeded in untangling the two. Let's keep them untangled. Δ

*Dr. E. Melton Deason, is pastor of Carson Road Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. He resides in Hoover, Ala.*

## Panel wants U.S. to emphasize religious freedom

Pointing to "egregious" violations of religious freedom in countries such as China, Vietnam and Sudan, a federal commission on religious freedom abroad has issued a new report urging the administration to make the issue a key part of U.S. foreign policy.

In its second annual report, released April 30, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom reviewed the status of religious freedom in North Korea, India, Iran, Indonesia, Sudan, Vietnam, Russia, China, Nigeria and Pakistan.

The panel said religious freedom in China has deteriorated since its first report in May 2000.

"The government has intensified its campaign against the Falun Gong movement and its followers. It apparently has also been involved in the confiscation and destruction of up to 3,000 unregistered religious buildings and sites in southeastern China," the report said.

It said "government control over the official Protestant and Catholic churches has increased."

That deterioration "valued" concerns the commission had last fall that Congress' decision to grant permanent normal trade relations status to China without demanding religious freedom reform would foster the assumption that Washington attached little importance to freedom of religion in China, the report said. Δ

### Baptist Joint Committee

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#### REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

J. Brent Walker  
*Executive Director*  
Larry Chesser  
*Editor*  
Jeff Huett  
*Associate Editor*

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### Coalition unveils petition against 'faith-based' funding

More than 850 religious leaders — including more than 230 Baptists — have signed a statement urging the rejection of President George W. Bush's "charitable choice" expansion plan, saying civil rights laws and church-state separation would be undermined.

Leaders of the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination publicly released the letter to President Bush and members of Congress. It opposed the provision that would allow religious social service providers access to billions of federal dollars.

Spearheading the collection of signatories are Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Baptist Joint Committee, The Interfaith Alliance, People For the American Way and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

The petition was signed by 879 religious leaders that included Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and other leaders of smaller groups, such as Wiccans.

"It is out of our commitment to the success of such faith-based enterprises that we are writing today to express our serious reservations," said the letter.

Charitable choice would "inject government dollars and bureaucratic oversight" into houses of worship, they said. It would "entangle religions and government in an unprecedented and perilous way," and it would "undermine the independence" of churches while fostering "unhealthy competition" between religions, the letter stated.

The Rev. Henry Green, pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Annapolis, Md., and a member of the Religious Liberty Council of the Baptist Joint Committee, said portions of Bush's faith-based initiative were like selling "our birthright of religious freedom for a few federal dollars."

The Rev. Jeffrey Haggerty, a BJC board member and pastor of Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., said charitable choice "threatens to undermine the credibility, impact and volume of the church's prophetic witness."

Religious leaders in the coalition presented the petition to four Democratic House lawmakers

at the foot of the Capitol building during a press conference to oppose charitable choice.

Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Texas, said "Charitable choice is a solution in search of a problem. Under long-standing law, faith-based groups may already receive funds if they create a 501(c)(3), as long as they don't proselytize or discriminate using federal dollars."

Edwards called religious liberty and church-state separation the "crown jewel" of American democracy. "We tamper with that right at our own peril." And he noted that in 1995 Congress shut down parts of the federal government "over the question of how to divide the federal pie. Do we really want to export that infighting and animosity to our houses of worship?"

Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., also spoke at the press conference, calling for hearings on H.R. 7, the House version of the Bush faith-based package. Δ



Jeffrey Haggerty



Henry Green



**BAPTIST  
JOINT  
COMMITTEE**

200 Maryland Ave. N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002-5797  
202-544-4226  
Fax: 202-544-2094  
E-mail: [bjcpa@bjcpa.org](mailto:bjcpa@bjcpa.org)  
Website: [www.bjcpa.org](http://www.bjcpa.org)



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