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Waymarks Names 2018's Top 10 Religious Liberty Issues

The year 2018 had many events impacting religious liberty in the United States and around the world, and church-state separation took a hit in several cases. Waymarks has selected a “Top 10” list for readers to review, and invites you to keep these issues in prayer as several will continue to influence 2019 and beyond.

1) Threat to Johnson Amendment Motivates Grassroots Supporters: The Johnson Amendment protects tax-exempt houses of worship from politicization. The House tax bill was weighing wording to end the requirement for churches to refrain from taking part in electoral politics. The Amendment was attacked in 2017 and 2018. Grassroots opposition of religious entities and nonprofit organizations influenced removal of that wording. However, a year-end proposed bill, “Retirement, Savings, and Other Tax Relief Act of 2018,” in Congress could keep the threat alive in 2019.

2) Trump Administration Issues New Faith-based Directives: Developments in 2018 include changing the structure of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships such that religious liberty protections have been removed for those who receive government aid from faith-based organizations; creation of the new Religious Liberty Task Force in the Justice Department, though purpose is still unclear; and the Labor Department’s expansion of exemptions from employment laws for religious organizations accepting government funds.

3) Brett Kavanaugh Replaces Anthony Kennedy in U.S. Supreme Court: Longtime Justice Anthony Kennedy was perceived as a frequent swing voter. New Justice Brett Kavanaugh is viewed by some as questionable on whether he will support the Establishment Clause as a limit

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Poland Sunday Law Bans Commerce

In 2015 Poland saw a return to a heavily conservative parliament, resulting in many changes. While the 1990s saw a liberal turn after the collapse of communism, the pendulum is swinging to more restrictive enforcement of older, conservative bans, like that on trade and work on Sunday.

The new law, signed by President Andrzej Duda, started by enforcing closure of retail businesses two Sundays per month in 2018. That number increases to three in 2019, with 2020 enforcement of every Sunday. There are seven built-in exceptions for the shopping holidays before Easter and Christmas.

The Catholic Church has applauded the move, but, as in cases past, it is never done with an emphasis on forced worship. Instead the Catholic Church praised the move as a good thing for families and communities, lauding the return to a day of rest, not so much for worship, but for utilitarian purposes.

The National Catholic Register ran an article lamenting the repeal of such closing laws here in the United States. Specifically praising "blue laws," the author refers to a 2008 study on blue laws in which the Notre Dame professor, Daniel Hungerman, who co-authored the study found that there was "little evidence" that declines in church attendance hap-

pened before the repeal of such blue laws.

Some trade unions have bucked against the new law. They claim that the law will demand that businesses push employees to work longer hours, especially on Friday and Saturday. And, while some believe that Europe is embracing a move toward Sunday closings, Hungary is a recent example of rebellion against such forced closings.

In 2015 Hungary passed similar closings, but within a year repealed them at the outcry over implementation. Whether the same will happen in Poland is yet to be seen. Germany and Austria, two countries who have also newly enacted Sunday trade bans, seem to have acclimated to the new shopping hours.

In Poland, Solidarity, the one trade union that pushed the law through, has called for citizens to report violators. There are penalties for breaking the law — starting with fines and leading up to two years of imprisonment!

However, organizations who work towards a fair marketplace have opposed the ban. They argue that the new rules have enough exceptions (more than 30) to make implementation unclear, especially for independent entrepreneurs. Additionally, fairness in trade is not the only issue. Individual Poles have spoken to the issue as an impediment to freedom. They are asking

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why the government decided when people should have a day off, rather than allowing individuals to make that choice for themselves.

As advocates of religious freedom, the argument of freedom of choice strikes a resonating chord.

- *Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin's lawyers have stated that taxpayers "should not have to collectively bear the financial responsibility for Davis' intransigence," referring to \$220,000 in legal fees resulting from lawsuits after Kim Davis, former Rowan County clerk, refused to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples in 2015. Bevin had previously been a staunch supporter of Davis, but now they oppose each other in federal court as lawyers argue over who will pay the fees.*
- *Proposed Senate Bill 20 in the New Mexico State Senate would allow individuals to change their birth certificate gender identity to male, female, or the letter "X" for undesignated or gender other than male or female, and no longer require proof they've gone through surgery before changing their birth certificate.*
- *"A new survey of college students released [Jan. 30] shows a growing intolerance to the principles of free speech," reports The Washington Times. A majority of 2,200-plus students polled favored inclusivity over free speech, felt students should have political views censored if they were hurtful to others, and supported exclusion from extracurricular activities for publicly expressed intolerant views.*

Top 10 Religious Liberty Issues, *Continued from page 1*

on government involvement with religion, due in part to his past referral to the “wall of separation” metaphor as “wrong as a matter of law and history.”

4) Project Blitz Initiated: Project Blitz appears to be a coordinated national effort by several religious right groups to create a code for Christian America. It has created 20 model bills and proposed them to 750 state legislators. It wishes to promote “Judeo-Christian heritage” in public schools, and prompt state public policy to “favor of biblical values concerning marriage and sexuality.”

5) Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Masterpiece Cakeshop: The issue was whether the owner of a custom cake designing shop had to make a custom cake for a same-sex wedding. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Masterpiece Cakeshop in June, influenced in part by religious hostility shown by the Colorado Civil Rights Commission toward the owner’s request for accommodation. However, their ruling was specific to this case, and the Court reaffirmed that public businesses must remain open to all.

6) Supreme Court Agrees to Hear Memorial Cross Case: This Establishment Clause case involves a challenge to a large cross on public lands in Maryland. The 4th Circuit ruled it an unlawful display. One concern raised is that crosses are not necessarily Christian symbols, but rather generic memorializations. The Supreme Court’s eventual decision could also impact how courts evaluate religious symbols displayed on government property.

7) Pastor Freed after Two Years Imprisonment in Turkey: Andrew Brunson, a pastor from North Carolina, has been in prison and then under house arrest in Turkey since October 2016. He was accused of being part of a terrorist organization, and Turkish prosecutors sought a 35-year sentence. Calls for release by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and numerous U.S. government officials resulted in his release in October 2018.

8) State Department Holds First Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom: More than 275 government officials, religious leaders, human rights advocates, and civil society organiza-

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tion representatives from around the world gathered for the first Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, in July 2018. Vice President Pence announced a multinational International Religious Freedom Fund and a Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response Program; the U.S. will partner with faith and other local leaders to aid those persecuted, with an effort beginning in Iraq.

9) 10 Commandments Amendment in Alabama Passes: Alabama voters overwhelmingly approved an amendment to the state’s 1901 Constitution to allow for Ten Commandment displays in public in November 2018. Groups like the ACLU believe it could lead to federal lawsuits. The president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State cautioned, “Government sponsored religious displays on public property clearly violate the core constitutional principle of religious freedom and put the seal of approval on one religion over another.”

10) Poland Passes Sunday Law : Poland’s president signed into law, in January 2018, a bill that limits and will eventually eliminate all Sunday trade. Stores operated two Sundays a month in 2018, will open one Sunday a month in 2019, and close all Sundays in 2020. Fuel stations, airports, bakeries, pharmacies, and flower shops will be allowed to remain open. The law was put forward by the ruling Law and Justice party and backed by unions and the Catholic church. (*See article in this issue.*)

New Year, New Look for Waymarks

This year marks the 22nd year of Waymarks. We have a new editor and a new look, but our goal is still the same — to provide you with

a snapshot of events in the world that touch on religious freedom and prophecy. Longtime readers of this newsletter know we aim to

report what is happening in a non-partisan way. Our goal is not to shape your opinion, but merely to inform you and to make this a useful tool for

you and your church. Thank you for reading Waymarks!
~Amireh Al-Haddad, director of public affairs and religious liberty

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Lewis Stout, 88, Editor of Waymarks Newsletter, Dies

Lewis Alan Stout was born in Washington, D.C., May 27, 1930, and died June 30, 2018, in Upland, Ca.

He graduated in 1953 from Washington Missionary College, Takoma Park, Md., going on to seminary. He began as pastor/teacher, served four years in Peru, pastored churches in Virginia and Mississippi, and served as Bass Memorial Academy principal and secretary of Gulf States Conference.

He was director of the Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) in the Southern Union Con-

ference from 1986 until retirement in 1997. Under his leadership and vision, PARL reorganized religious liberty work in this territory, making the department a true service to Southern Union members by offering consistent assistance to those dealing with forced Sabbath work. He also started the government watchdog program still in place in each state, overseeing legislative activity affecting the Church. Additionally, his dream to start a newsletter for members was realized, following his passion to ed-

ucate and keep members informed of important news and current events.

With a heart for service, a love for Jesus, and an eye on prophecy, Elder Stout wanted Waymarks to keep members abreast of current events. He strove to report the news without injecting commentary or opinion. After retirement he continued as editor for 21 years, until his death following the first issue of 2018.

Two children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren survive him. His wife, Betty, died in 2015 after 65 years of marriage.

Elder Stout:
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