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“...we as Christians are called to reject this spirit of hostility and continue to live and serve as ambassadors for Christ.”



“Reconstructing Religious Liberty” Conference Held at SAU

The following, written by Alana Crosby, senior at Southern Adventist University, is excerpted from her article on the North American Division news site.

Academics, theologians, religious freedom experts, students, and church members gathered on the campus of Southern Adventist University on October 20-21, 2023, for a North American Division (NAD) conference “Reconstructing Religious Liberty in a Time of Religious and Secular Extremes.” The two-day event, organized by the NAD Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) ministry team, featured five keynote speakers.

The conference focused on the current state of religious liberty and its place in Bible prophecy, and explored ways to address increasing political divisions in our nation and our churches. Speakers covered topics including political and religious extremism, keeping the Kingdom of Heaven central, and avoiding the distract-

ing lure of derisive politics. Panel discussions highlighted the role of social media in identity politics and practical steps for transcending the partisan divide.

“Recognizing our nation’s current climate of partisan politics and societal schisms, our goal for the conference was to emphasize how we as Christians are called to reject this spirit of hostility and continue to live and serve as ambassadors for Christ,” explained Melissa Reid, NAD PARL associate director.

The conference opened with a welcome from Orlan Johnson, NAD PARL director, who asked the audience, “Is your faith forming your politics, or are your politics forming your faith?” He went on to emphasize the importance of civility in political dialogue and of keeping hope in Jesus at the forefront of discussion. Our primary goal, Johnson said, should be to find ways to speak respectfully about differences of opinion.

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SCOTUS Cases Could Impact Religious Liberty in Future

There are several Supreme Court cases — some pending review — that will be worth keeping an eye on in the new year:

Moody v. NetChoice, LLC & NetChoice, LLC v. Paxton will look at whether social media companies can ban content based on political or religious viewpoint.

Federal Bureau of Investigation v. Fikre concerns a Muslim resident from Portland who challenged his placement on the “No Fly List,” and the government removing him — and now

trying to avoid a negative judgment (as sometimes impacts other religious liberty cases).

Tingley v. Ferguson deals with religious liberty and free speech for counselors.

Missouri Department of Corrections v. Finney deals with religious discrimination in jury selection.

M.C. v. Indiana Dept. of Child Services has implications for the parental rights of families who want to raise their children consistent with their religious beliefs.

Lowe v. Mills and *Biden v. Feds for Medical Freedom* and *Kendall v. Doster* all revolve around the COVID-19 vaccine mandate and the denial of religious accommodation in the workplace, including healthcare workers, government employees, and Air Force airmen.

Matadi v. Garland involves an Angolan citizen who applied for asylum, claiming religious persecution in his home country. Lower courts denied his request, leading to an appeal to the Supreme Court.

NEWS OF THE WORLD

Nigerian Christians Persecuted

Though Nigeria has a substantial Christian population, the Islamic majority is persecuting and killing them, ac-

cording to the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ). In fact, 90% of all Christian martyrs worldwide are killed

in the country of Nigeria.

Despite Nigeria’s international commitments to protect the rights of its citizens, Christian citizens are daily executed, beheaded, kidnapped, beaten, and sexually assaulted, and their churches and villages are being burned. The ACLJ reports that a Christian is killed for their faith every two hours in Nigeria, and thousands are being killed each year.

The United Nations Human Rights Council was presented with this information at their 54th Session, and asked to consider a response by the ACLJ.

- An Indiana federal district court has dismissed the challenge filed by The Satanic Temple (TST) under Indiana’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act regarding the state’s ban on abortion. Concerning *The Satanic Temple, Inc. v. Rokita*, The court found that TST had a “lack of standing” because they didn’t identify any members who are pregnant, and they have no clinic of their own in the state.

- In the ongoing saga of Southwest Airlines and their court-ordered religious liberty training, their lawyers have received a “reprieve” from the training which was to be conducted in October. The New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals put a hold on the sanctions order while it considers extending a hold while Southwest pursues an appeal.

- Massachusetts has banned a Catholic couple from adopting or fostering children, and the couple has taken the state to court. Mike and Kitty Burke went through interviews, training, and home visits, but were eventually denied the right to foster or adopt any of the state’s 1,500 vulnerable children because of their religious beliefs about marriage, sexuality, and gender — despite the couple emphasizing that they would love and accept any child.

LIVE WEBINAR:

Religious Accommodation in the Workplace

Have you ever been faced with workplace religious accommodation issues? This could be anything from training issues to Sabbath scheduling problems, and even vaccine requirements. This live webinar reviews the EEOC Guidelines and will help to clarify some common misconceptions about the employment law that covers religious accommodation. Learn the basic “dos and don’ts” before you head into a crisis.



Presenter:
Kevin James



Zoom Link
passcode: freedom

Date: February 24, 2024
Time: 5:00 pm – 6:30 pm
Where: Zoom Session
Hosted by: Southern Union
PARL Department

Religious Liberty Challenged in Three Public School Systems

Illinois

An Illinois Circuit Court has ruled that the Chicago Board of Education violated a student's religious liberty rights when they forced her to participate in Hindu rituals, and they awarded Bogan High School student Mariyah Green \$150,000 in damages and legal fees.

Students at Bogan were required to participate in "Quiet Time," a Hindu-based religious program with transcendental meditation. The students were involved in a Puja initiation rite, and were required to recite verses about the power of Hindu deities, as well as invitations to channel that power.

Failure to participate was threatened with poor grades and disqualification from graduation ceremonies.

West Virginia

The district of Huntington High School in West Virginia has been mandated to receive religious liberty training following a lawsuit. The school hosted an evangelical preacher during the school day, and required the attendance of numerous students.

Students were escorted to the assembly, told to close their eyes and raise their arms in prayer, and encouraged to seek baptism at a nearby church. A Jewish student asked to leave, but was not allowed to. The students were also told that those who did not follow the Bible would "face eternal torment."

A walkout of more than 100 students chanting "Separate the church and state" and "My faith, my choice"

Religion is more safely kept in the hands and homes of parents than in school systems.

was followed by a lawsuit filed by four families.

Louisiana

Louisiana's "In God We Trust" law, passed in August, will further test the limits of religion in public schools. Every classroom in the state must post the statement. However, this may violate the establishment clause of the First Amendment, despite the state promoting it as history and patriotism. Historically, "In God We Trust" did not become the national motto until 1956, Cold War years heavy with fear of communism and atheism.

The state's law would have been deemed unconstitutional two years ago, but there will likely be division in the Supreme Court and the populace as lawsuits arise.

Reconstructing Religious Liberty, *cont. from cover*

Pursuing Justice

The Friday session began with attorney and *New York Times* columnist David French. French described how the current "vicious culture war" is undermining basic Christian principles such as those found in Micah 6:8. During the question-and-answer session, French addressed questions from the audience, such as, "How can we find truth in a time where misinformation is rampant?" His answer was to broaden our media diet and seek the best voices from both sides before forming an opinion.

Christian Nationalism: A Dangerous Path

Samuel Perry, professor of sociology at the University of Oklahoma, presented his research on Christian nationalism. Perry, an author and award-winning scholar, defined Christian nationalism as "the belief that the American republic is defined by Christianity — and that the government should take active steps to keep it that way."

Christian nationalism amplifies polarization and division, leading to an "us versus them" mentality, Perry

said. Human beings' natural inclination of finding groups of like-minded individuals and staying within the confines of that group is a major cause for the current polarization Americans face. He warned against assuming we know exactly what people believe based on labels such as conservative, liberal, or moderate conservative. Perry acknowledged that encouraging open discussions and listening to people who believe differently is essential to healing the divide between political parties, as well as exercising modera-

tion in the language we use, not moderation in values we believe in.

Prophecy and Religious Freedom

The Sabbath morning service at Collegedale Church of Seventh-day Adventists featured Leslie Pollard, author, minister, and president of Oakwood University.

"Let's not get sucked into the whole political warfare that characterizes and polarizes our country," Pollard admonished. "We have our own agenda, and it's a Kingdom agenda."

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