

March 2002

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Jesus Censured in State House

... He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. —John 5:23 NIV

We received a call from former State Representative Jim McCune, informing us that honorary chaplains are being subtly pressured to “norm” their prayers when officiating in the Chamber of the State House of Representatives. The retired Solon says a new effort to purge public prayer of reference to a particular deity, seems decidedly directed at those who pray *in Jesus’ name*.

Not doubting the authenticity of the report, but holding to our long-standing policy to let a matter be established out of the mouths of two or three witnesses, we asked our trusted friend to have any pastor who has been subject to such pressure contact us. Within a day, the report was confirmed to our satisfaction. One of the first to call our office was Rev. W. Dale Gore, Senior Pastor at Orting Community Baptist Church.

On February 6th, Pastor **GORE** traveled to Olympia to open a floor session in the House with prayer. He was the guest of (who else?) Rep. Roger **BUSH** (R-Spanaway). While checking in with the office of the Chief Clerk, Pastor Gore discovered that the guidelines he had received in the mail were outdated. A revised version with a new instruction read:

“Conclusion of the prayer should embrace the collective prayerful thoughts of all present in an ecumenical manner, rather than ‘in the name of...’ a particular deity.”

When Pastor Gore asked for clarification, he was advised it would be inappropriate to invoke the name of Jesus in his prayer—precisely what he didn’t want to hear. Not interested in constructing a *to whom it may concern* prayer, Pastor Gore deferred to Rep. Bush who assured him, saying, “pray as your momma taught you.”

Dr. Robert L. Nordlie, Senior Pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Tacoma, was also shocked at the new guidelines which apply to the House but not to the Senate. After receiving them in the mail, Dr. Nordlie wrote to Cindy Zehnder, Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives, advising her that he felt he must decline to participate in the morning proceedings scheduled for Monday, February 25th. His letter stated in part:

“Unfortunately, I cannot abide by this guideline. I am a Christian pastor, and as such I am compelled by my beliefs to pray in Jesus’ name. I do not believe your office would tell a Muslim cleric that he should not pray to Allah, and if you were to do so I am certain that he would object. So, too, I cannot pray in a manner which generalizes my faith to the point of non-existence. I hope you can respect my position, and will understand why [I] am forced to decline your invitation.”

Last week, our staff made inquiries to determine who is behind the new “gag-rule” in the House of Representatives. Preliminary indicators point to two Seattle area Democrat legislators. On Friday afternoon, we talked briefly with a spokesman in each of the two offices, but neither could confirm or deny our findings.

When asked if either representative belonged to a particular faith community (wondering if that might explain the hyper-sensitivity to the name of Jesus), we were told that both have Jewish backgrounds. Pressing further, we asked if either representative regularly attends a Synagogue or is otherwise active in their faith. Neither assistant knew.

We do know that one of them recently held an informal morning reception for several local Sikh worshippers. In a February 18th memo sent by email, House members and staff of both parties were informed that . . . Tuesday will be a very special day here in the legislature. In addition to being the cut-off, it will also be the first time in recent memory that the Morning Prayer will be offered by a Sikh Priest-Giani Kuldeep Singh, from the Gurudwara Singh Sabha.

Quietly disturbed by the revelry over the "Sikhs from Seattle" and the new ecumenism on campus, evangelicals in the House say they are even more concerned that some Christian pastors are so easily intimidated. Although there was much hopeful anticipation recently when a widely-known charismatic minister came to the Capitol to pray, he was a great disappointment to some when he obliquely omitted the name of our blessed "Savior" in his prayer.

But, many others are standing their ground. Dr. Nordlie, who we mentioned had declined an invitation to pray in the House Chamber, was contacted by the Chief Clerk of the House and asked to reconsider. He was assured that he could pray according to the dictates of his conscience. Although we did not contact Dr. Nordlie, we were able to obtain a copy of his recent prayer before the Washington State House of Representatives. He prayed:

"Gracious Heavenly Father, you are our Creator, who rules over all. We give you praise and thanks for all your good gifts, including the gifts of godly and faithful rulers, good government; as well as peace and order in our society. All authority has been established by you, and so we come to you this day seeking your blessing on the House of Representatives of the State of Washington and all its members. You are the fountain and source of all true wisdom, and in your Word you have told us that it is through your wisdom that 'kings reign and rulers make laws that are just.' Grant us your wisdom, O Lord!"

"We know that you are a just and holy God, and therefore, you demanded just payment for the sins of mankind. Nevertheless, you are also a God of mercy, and so you graciously sacrificed your Son, Jesus Christ on the cross, to pay for the sins of all people. Therefore we pray, dear Father, that you would grant justice tempered by mercy to the Legislators of this state as they seek to serve you and the citizens of Washington. In your Word you have warned us that 'By justice a ruler gives a country stability, but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down.' Grant our legislators integrity and strength that they may serve you faithfully. Give our governor and legislators firmness with equity as they seek to protect the citizens of Washington in this season of terror, for your Word has promised that, 'When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers.'"

"Pour out your Holy Spirit on the hearts and minds of our representatives, so that they may be open to your guidance, for your Word declares that, 'For lack of guidance a nation falls.' And we pray also dear Father, for the citizens of our state, that you would enable us all to live upright and Godly lives, working together in harmony, for justice and peace, for you have promised that 'Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted.'"

"Graciously shower us with all these blessings dear Father, not because we are worthy, but for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen." --Pastor Bob Nordlie, 2/25/02

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. --Matt 10:32

Rick Forcier

Executive Director