

U.S. Isolated in Military Stance on Gays

Great Britain has joined other major world powers in ending discrimination against homosexuals who serve in the military, leaving the United States alone in its stance of retribution for sexuality.

The change in British policy follows a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, which reviewed the cases of four service men and women who were dismissed because of their homosexuality. The Strasbourg, France, court operates like the Supreme Court in the U.S. on cases of human rights violations in Europe.

Ending the ban brings Britain into line with other North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries like France, Canada, and Germany and other major military powers such as Israel. And there are signs that the United States might soon follow suit.

President Clinton has recently acknowledged that his "Don't ask, don't tell, policy may be a failure, and has ordered a study of military bases around the country to determine whether gay service members are being harassed. The review was prompted by last summer's murder of a gay soldier.

Democratic presidential front-runners Al Gore and Bill Bradley have called for a policy change that would allow homosexuals to serve openly in the military.

—Andrea Szalanski



Kentucky Legislation Overrides Veto of "Camp Quest" Religious Discrimination Bill

On the last day of its session, the Kentucky legislature voted to override Governor Paul E. Patton's veto of H.B. 70, the previously reported bill that would have amended the state's antidiscrimination statutes so religious organizations could refuse to do business with persons or organizations that do not believe in God. When he vetoed the bill in March, Governor Patton blasted the law on grounds that it "violates both the spirit and meaning of the Kentucky Civil Rights Act by permitting discrimination on the basis of religion. . . . [State civil rights] laws do not require a religious organization to open its facilities to the general public, but they do require that, if a religious organization opens its facilities and activities to the general public, they must obey the same laws that non-religious entities are required to obey." Observers did not expect legislators to challenge the veto, in part because of the nationwide torrent of media criticism when the bill first passed and the similar torrent of praise for Patton's veto. But conservative legislators organized and on Friday, April 14, with minimal notice, override votes were held in both houses. The override resolution passed the Kentucky House 82-16, the Senate 26-8. The law becomes effective July 15 of this year, at which point Kentucky will be the first state in which discrimination against atheists (other than bars to public office-holding of dubious enforceability) is legal.

H.B. 70 was inspired by Camp Quest, a secular humanist summer camp operated by an autonomous local humanist group associated with the Council for Secular Humanism. During its first two years Camp Quest had rented campgrounds from a Baptist consortium; the Baptists claimed to find it repellent to rent their campgrounds to unbelievers, but felt compelled to do so by anti-discrimination statutes. At the Baptists' request, legislators crafted and passed a law that would have allowed religious groups to refuse to transact secular business with atheists. Whatever its consequences for religious freedom in Kentucky, the affair is moot where Camp Quest is concerned; in 1998 camp organizers switched to a better-quality campground in the neighboring state of Ohio.

—Tom Flynn

Government Money for Christian Science “Nursing” Upheld in Court

On May 1, in a 2–1 ruling, the Eighth Circuit, U.S. Court of Appeals, upheld summary judgment for the federal government in a suit brought by Children’s Healthcare Is a Legal Duty (CHILD) and two Minnesota taxpayers. CHILD, a national membership organization headquartered in Sioux City, Iowa, argues that laws mandating Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements for “religious non-medical health care” are unconstitutional and encourage practices that harm children and adults.

The court ruled that Christian Science nursing is a subset of medical care and pointed out that patients in Christian Science sanatoria whose care is covered by the federal programs must have “a condition” that would qualify them for in-patient care in a medical hospital. The federal money, according to the court, is simply a fraction of normal medical benefits for these patients rather than special benefits for religion.

CHILD argued that Christian Science nursing cannot be a subset of medical

care because it is done by unlicensed persons with no medical training and no supervision by physicians. Christian Scientists believe that disease is an illusion, yet the court has ruled them competent to determine admissions to a medical hospital. (The government is prohibited from requiring medical diagnoses of their patients.)

The plaintiffs plan to petition the Eighth Circuit for en banc review.

—Rita Swan

Why did you oppose the bill that would have stopped the execution of the profoundly retarded, even though it has wide public approval in your pro-death penalty state?

—Columnist Molly Ivins, asking presidential candidate Texas Governor George W. Bush about his actions and policies in his home state in light of his public declarations for Jesus Christ

A Letter from Falwell

Jerry Falwell Ministries wants 10 million Christian voters to register to make a total of 35 million Christian conservative voters in the fall presidential elections—the “People of Faith 2000.” The missive launching the drive claimed, among other things:

- Al Gore is “openly courting the radical homosexual movement and pledging allegiance to the most extreme parts of the gay agenda.”
- “If Christian voters fail to vote in record-breaking numbers in 2000 . . . the anti-Christian Left will very likely end up taking control of all three branches of our federal government.”

Americans United for Separation of Church and State has filed a complaint with the Internal Revenue Service, charging that Falwell’s group has violated its tax-exempt status with this foray into partisan politics.

Matt Cherry

SHOUT IT OUT LOUD—Muslims have demanded the right to broadcast the call to prayer five times a day from 18 minarets in Oslo, Norway. When the Norwegian Heathen Society objected, the City Council gave the Society permission to do likewise, by proclaiming “God does not exist” once every Friday for three minutes. A representative of the Heathen Society told FREE INQUIRY that they broadcast their message by loudspeakers once, and then decided that in today’s world there were ways to alert the public to meetings without the noise pollution of loudspeakers, Muslim calls to prayer, or church bells. Churches and mosques seem unlikely to heed the heathens’ advice.

“It was a king size.” Assistant district attorney Jodi Brown, justifying a Texas jury’s 16-year prison sentence on a man who stole a Snickers bar.

SINNER, STONE THYSELF!—According to published reports, Randall Terry, founder of the fundamentalist anti-abortion group “Operation Rescue” and a former Republican congressional candidate, has been censured by his church for leaving his family. Reverend Daniel Little of the Landmark Church has admonished Terry for a “pattern of repeated sinful relationships . . . with both single and married women. . . .”

The theocratic Reverend Terry is notorious for his belief that Old Testament law should be imposed on the U.S. If his own advice were followed, American law would require that adulterers be stoned to death. As someone once said, let he who is without sin cast the first stone.

“These are atheists. They don’t believe in God.” Miami Mayor Joe Carollo criticizing the government officers who seized Elian Gonzalez over the Easter weekend.

MORE TO COME?—When Pope John Paul II dies, one likely successor will be conservative Cardinal Giacomo Biffi. He recently gave a glimpse of how his mind works when he was asked about the Anti-Christ. Biffi responded that the Anti-Christ is a prominent philanthropist who espouses vegetarianism, pacifism, environmentalism, and animal rights, and promotes trendy spiritual values. He is a proponent of ecumenicism. Whew. We were expecting the seven-headed beast from the Book of Revelations.

Help on the Way for Neglected Central American AIDS Patients

The Interamerican Human Rights Commission in Washington, D.C., has ordered the government of El Salvador to begin supplying anti-retroviral medications to 26 Salvadorans who filed a petition last fall. The directive calls for the government to “provide medical attention necessary to protect the life and health” and “anti-retroviral medications necessary to avoid the death” ... “as well as hospital attention, other medications and nutritional support which strengthen the immune system and impede the development of illnesses and infections.”

Thirty-six Salvadorans originally filed a petition with the Salvadoran Supreme Court in April 1999. The Court failed to act, and 10 AIDS patients in the group died. The case was then presented to the International Human Rights Commission, which can act when delays can lead to death and whose decisions are legally binding in El Salvador, a signer of the Interamerican Human Rights Convention.

Observers say anti-homosexual sentiment in Central America is the root cause of government inattention to AIDS victims. According to AIDS expert Ruben Mayorga, “The machista culture in Central America forces most gays to remain underground, and they are too repressed to report their actual sexual preference to anyone.”

There are more than 2,700 Salvadorans

with AIDS, of which 25% are officially reported to be gay or bisexual. AIDS experts are hoping what happened in Costa Rica in 1997, when a court ordered the government to give out AIDS medications and the country’s National Health Care system gave them to everyone, will repeat in El Salvador.

“The hope is that the Salvadoran government will simply adopt procedures to provide medications to all people who need them and not continue to delay compliance

You can say Daniel has gone to a better place. I want him here.

—Tom Mauser, speaking to an AP reporter about the death of his son in last spring’s shooting at Columbine High School.

the face of the very strong action taken by the commission, says activist Richard Stern.

—Andrea Szalanski

U.S.A. Called on to End Torture

The United Nations Committee Against Torture has criticized the United States penal system. In its May 2000 report, the Committee highlighted areas of concern, including the “excessively harsh regime” of supermaximum security prisons, sexual abuse of female prisoners by guards, prisoner chain gangs, and torture and ill-treatment by police and prison guards—much of it racially motivated.

The Committee also urged the United States to abolish electro-shock stun belts and restraint chairs, stating that their use “almost invariably” leads to breaches of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The

U.N. has repeatedly criticized the U.S. government for its limited recognition of international human rights, especially in regard to the U.S. criminal-justice system. For example, American government’s policies on incarcerating children with adults and executing juvenile offenders contravene both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Convention against Torture.

—Matt Cherry

SIDE

LINES

UNDER A REST—In February, Japanese police arrested Koji Takahashi, the leader of the “Life Space” cult, after discovering a corpse that had been kept in an airport hotel for several months. Takahashi claimed the dead man was undergoing treatment for an illness and required “complete rest.” Japanese authorities judged the “rest” to be a little too complete, and are charging Takahashi with failure to seek proper medical care.

Pope John Paul II’s recent apology for the transgressions of the Catholic Church inspired this condensed version: “Bless us, Father, for we have sinned. It has been 2,000 years since our last confession.”

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE PROGRAM AILS—Dr. Andrew Weil, one of the most famous and wealthiest proponents of “alternative medicine,” is experiencing severe problems with his pioneering university program. The program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona—founded and directed by Weil—is reportedly \$1 million short of its \$1.6 annual operating budget. Weil has even cut his own salary of \$160,000. The program claims to be the first alternative medicine program to be based at a U.S. medical school.

Commenting on the University of Arizona’s plans to request \$1 million in state funding for the program, a local senator commented, “Maybe that it’s for ‘alternative’ medicine will help. I know many legislators will be responsive to that.”

“I like to think we’re laughing with God, not at him.” Matthew Carlson, creator and executive producer of “God, the Devil, and Bob,” a cartoon show that NBC cancelled following a campaign by the American Family Association and other Conservative Christian groups. In the show Bob frequently chastised God for His failures, even calling Him a “deadbeat dad.”

FLYING BUDDHA—San Francisco “Animal Communicator” Jane Hallander claims that her pet parrot is a reincarnated Buddhist monk. She knows this because the bird telepathically told her so. On one occasion, Hallander claims, the parrot consoled a woman whose dog had just died by telling her the dead pooch had asked a finch in the neighborhood to “keep an eye on my human.”