

[home](#) | [news](#)

Law Professor Gets Religion Award

By [Mithu Maheswaranathan](#)

Posted: 01/21/2008

PRINT COMMENT EMAIL

BOOKMARK

Emory's John Witte, Jonas Robitscher Professor of Law and director of the Center for the Study of Law and Religion, received the 2008 National First Freedom Award last week for his contributions to religious freedom in the United States.

The awards ceremony was held Wednesday in Richmond, Va., by the Council for America's First Freedom, an organization that seeks to increase respect for religious freedom in diverse communities. Previous First Freedom Award recipients include Madeleine Albright and Tony Blair.

Robert Seiple, president of the Council for First Freedom, wrote in an e-mail to the Wheel that selecting Witte was an easy decision.

"His scholarship is impeccable, his writing prolific, his insights profound, and his articulation unique. What's not to like?" Seiple wrote.

Witte was chosen for writings that contributed to the understanding of religious freedom and for his role at the Center for the Study of Law and Religion, Seiple added.

After accepting his award, Witte delivered a speech titled "Superstition of Church and State in America." In the speech, Witte said that many people believe "separation of church and state" is written in the Constitution, when in reality, the metaphor was coined by Thomas Jefferson in 1802.

"This metaphor has held popular imagination so firmly that many have not noticed that separation of church and state is no longer the law of the land in America," Witte said. In an interview, Witte said separation of church and state is important but is overemphasized, causing people to ignore other important principles of religious freedom, such as religious nondiscrimination.

The Supreme Court has recently granted new religious liberties not previously permitted under "separation." For example, the court has upheld policies that give religious student groups access to public classrooms as long as participation is voluntary and non-religious groups are treated the same way.

Christian prayers and broadcast Bible readings are banned in public schools because students are required to be there. But Witte said, "it is quite another thing to ban moments of silence and private religious speech in these same public schools."

Law Professor Frank Alexander, the founding director of the Center for the Study of Law and Religion, called Witte a "premier scholar in the world today on the points of intersection of law and religion."

Witte has been selected 10 times by the students of Emory's Law School as the Most Outstanding Professor.

"These gifts the students have given me are happy vindications that I am doing the job I should be doing," Witte said. "I just love doing it — teaching is my highest calling."

— Contact [Mithu Maheswaranathan](#).

Reader Discussion

Username

[click here to login](#)

Comments

Recent Comments

total comments: 0

[disclaimer](#) | [privacy policy](#)

Text input area for comments

Submit Comments

Top Stories

A Firsthand Look at the Holy Land

Shuttle Drivers to Vote on Union

Code of Conduct Revised on Frats

Shuttle Service Accused of Violating Labor Laws

Emory Receives Alice Walker Papers

More Emory Shuttles to Run at Night

Related Stories

Library Cataloguing Alice Walker Papers

Nursing Dean to Leave in June

Professor Explores Decline of Humanism

Students' House Destroyed in Fire

Emergency Testing Reveals Problems

Research Awards Created

Most Read Latest Most Commented

Code of Conduct Revised on Frats

A Firsthand Look at the Holy Land

Shuttle Drivers to Vote on Union

Eagles Drop 2 in Conference Play to Wash U. and Chicago

Starting a New Business? We help Startups Build Their Brands. Logos Biz Cards Brand Programs SchemmelDesign.com

OLIVIA Todd Salon 404-321-4247 10% Discount With Emory ID loehmann's plaza 2484 briscliff rd n.e. atlanta, ga 30329 www.salonolivatodd.com

The Emory Wheel

[Archives of Past Issues](#)

[About The Emory Wheel](#)

[The Emory Wheel Staff](#)

[Advertising](#)

[Place a Classified Ad](#)

[RSS Feeds](#)

Helpful Links

[Emory University](#)