

# Associated Baptist Press

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October 28, 1994

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## 'Self-censorship' plagues religious press, Brymer says

By Bob Allen

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Editor Jack Brymer, who resigned rather than accept restrictions on what type of articles he would publish in the Florida Baptist Witness, said Oct. 27 too many of his colleagues opt for silence on controversial issues.

At a ceremony honoring his convictions Oct. 27, Brymer accepted the first Associated Baptist Press Religious Freedom Reward. The ceremony was sponsored jointly by the Jacksonville, Fla.-based news service and the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center in Nashville.

The award "will be a marvelous addition to my resume, which I've been forced to pull out in recent weeks," Brymer quipped to about 90 guests at the banquet at the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center offices on the campus of Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

Turning serious, Brymer said events leading to his decision to step down led him to realize the greatest threat to political and religious freedom "is not the adversaries ... be they secular dictators or religious ayatollahs," but "good and decent people who choose silence as a defense."

"We all know it is criminal to remain silent in the face of even the slightest threat to one's freedom," Brymer said, "yet, far too many of us in the religious press are guilty of doing just that."

Brymer said even Baptist editors who are not overtly censored by superiors often resort to "self-censorship," which he described as "the most vicious form of censorship, for it destroys from within."

Editors may censor their own papers for selfish reasons, such as fear for job security, or for noble reasons, like a desire for compromise. Editors should be willing to compromise on some things, Brymer acknowledged, but "truth is not one of them."

Brymer said the "dilemma" that led to his decision to resign came after his board "suggested that the choice of news copy selected for publication be based not on which is the most truthful, but which is the most politically expedient."

Brymer's resignation came at a recent meeting of the Florida Baptist Witness Commission after a motion instructing him not to use articles provided by ABP failed to pass, deadlocking in a tie vote.

Even the "slightest" effort to restrict religious freedom "is an abomination to what God has done for us in Christ," Brymer said.

Greg Warner, ABP's executive editor, said he regarded Brymer a mentor. Warner was associate editor under Brymer at the Florida Baptist paper five years before joining ABP in 1991.

"Courageous journalism in Baptist life defies the laws of economics," Warner said. "There is little reward in modern Baptist life for costly truth-telling," he said. "The demand for courage is not in the marketplace but on the soul."

ABP honored Brymer "not for resigning, not only for surviving a decade of denominational turmoil with integrity intact," but "for helping Baptists stake out the ground of their freedom," Warner said. Brymer's "life and work are tangible demonstration that truth is sacred and the soul is free," Warner said.

R. G. Puckett, the chairman of ABP's board of directors and editor of North Carolina's Biblical Recorder ranked Brymer as "one of the 10 great Baptist state editors of this century."

Charles Overby, president and chief executive of the Freedom Forum and a member of ABP's board, said several people asked him why the Freedom Forum's organization for advocacy of First Amendment rights would concern itself with co-sponsoring the ceremony with ABP. "After hearing Jack Brymer, I think you understand why we're here tonight, in promotion of the First Amendment," he said.

Author, activist and preacher Will Campbell delivered remarks at the banquet. Baptists began to depart from their heritage of "radical, revolutionary" faith not with the 1979 takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention engineered by Houston Judge Paul Pressler and others, Campbell said, but when the convention "became institutionalized."

"The Baptist church, once a movement, is now a creedalistic institution, and it has been for a long time," Campbell said.

"Institutions by their very nature are evil," Campbell said, because their own survival tends to become more important than the vision that spawned them, he said.

While characterizing the SBC's current emphasis as a move toward "fascist theology" and "a religious heresy," Campbell said moderates should not mourn losing control of the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination. "There was never anything sacred about that institution," he said.

Despite his pessimism about institutional Baptists, Campbell said "hope abounds" in individual acts of courage, like Brymer's choice to resign rather than surrender his conscience.

Brymer received a plaque and a limited-edition print of a painting by artist Maxwell Mays featuring the historic First Baptist Church of Providence, R.I., the first Baptist church in America, founded by Roger Williams.

Brymer is the first recipient of the ABP award, which was established by ABP directors last year to honor significant contributions to religious and journalistic freedom.

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## **Israel and Jordan sign peace accord**

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- As Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty to end more than four decades of strife, President Clinton quoted Jesus' words that peacemakers will inherit the earth.

More than 4,500 people -- including Baptist leaders -- witnessed the Oct. 26 signing -- the first treaty between Israel and an Arab state since the 1979 treaty with Egypt.

Among the Baptists who witnessed the historic ceremony were Southern Baptist Convention President Jim Henry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla.; Charles Adams, pastor of Hartford Memorial Church, Detroit, and former president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention; and Otis Moss Jr., pastor of Olivet International Baptist Church, Cleveland. They were part of a 58-member delegation invited by the White House to join President Clinton on his trip to the Middle East. They were scheduled to return Oct. 28.

"(With today's signing) we break the chains of the past that for too long have kept you shackled in the shadows of strife and suffering," Clinton told the audience, which included, Muslims, Jews and Christians. "You will take the hatred out of hearts, and you will pass along to your children the peace of a generation."

He urged the people of Israel and Jordan to make "this peace real -- to turn no-man's-land into everyman's home, to take down the barbed wire, to remove the deadly mines, to help wounds of war to heal, open your borders, open you hearts.

"Peace is more than an agreement on paper; it is feeling; it is activity; it is devotion."

The forces of terror and extremism will try to hold peace back, Clinton said, promising that the United States "stands with you" in the pursuit of peace.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said: "For nearly two generations, desolation pervaded the heart of our two peoples. The time has now come not merely to dream of a better future but to realize it."

Jordan's King Hussein heralded the day like no other in terms of the hopes, promise and determination of the people.

"God willing, and with God's blessing of us all to remember this day as long as we live and for future generations -- Jordanians, Israelis, Arabs, Palestinians -- all children of Abraham to remember it is the dawning of the new era of peace," Hussein said.

Israel and Jordan have agreed that each will provide freedom of access to places of religious significance. In accordance with the declaration signed in Washington in July, Israel agreed to respect Jordan's role in Muslim holy shrines in Jerusalem. Both parties also have agreed to act together to promote inter-faith understanding among the three monotheistic religions that claim the region as significant to their faith and to promote religious freedom.

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## **Laws on workplace harassment to be enforced, EEOC chief says**

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- With or without interpretative guidelines, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission will enforce the federal ban against religious and other types of harassment in the workplace, the commission's new chairman said Oct. 26.

In his first press conference, Gilbert Casellas emphasized that the commission's decision last month to withdraw controversial workplace-harassment guidelines does not mean the agency will retreat from its mission to combat discrimination.

EEOC is charged with enforcing the 1964 Civil Rights Act's ban against employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. Last year, the commission drafted guidelines designed to help employers and employees understand what types of behavior constitute harassment ruled unlawful under the 1964 act.

The agency eventually withdrew the entire package of guidelines over pressure from Congress not to implement guidelines dealing with religious harassment. The proposed religious harassment guidelines had drawn heavy criticism, largely from conservative religious groups that charged they would lead to "religion-free" workplaces. Other religious groups urged EEOC to keep religion in the guidelines but to clarify them to make sure religious expression was not muffled.

"Guidelines or no guidelines, we're going to enforce the law," Casellas said.

Claire Gonzales, EEOC communications and legislative affairs director, told Associated Baptist Press the agency has no immediate plans to revisit the guidelines. The EEOC has other priorities, she said.

Casellas outlined some of his priorities in prepared remarks at the press conference.

Casellas said EEOC is the keeper of "a fundamental part of the American dream -- the promise that every American have the opportunity to advance to the limits of his or her ability without regard to race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin or disability."

He said EEOC must develop and advocate civil-rights policy and also assure reasonable and effective enforcement procedures.

Casellas said he was part of the generation that felt the last vestiges of segregation, noting that he attended a segregated elementary school, attended segregated movie theaters and drank from "colored" water fountains.

"I saw and experienced the effects that those indignities had on individuals and their self-esteem," he said. "I also saw how much talent we as a society did without because of it."

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## **Education Secretary emphasizes value of families to improve education**

By Mark Wingfield

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The family is the "essential building block for learning" and a key to improving the education of America's children, according to Secretary of Education Richard Riley.

Riley released this fall a new report on American education titled "Strong Families, Strong Schools." In it, he says parents who become more involved with their children's education will ensure their children learn more.

He calls on all parents to turn off the television, read with their children and get involved in school affairs. And he calls on businesses to find creative ways to help parents gain more quality time with their children.

The education secretary further calls for schools to be more inviting of parental input and participation.

"Parents -- including those who have strong religious values -- must be at the table when it comes to public education," he said in a recent speech at the National Press Club. "But they must also be willing to build bridges and not see public education as the enemy.

"I assure you that nothing will be gained by tearing down public education and making the public school classroom the Bosnia of America's competing factions. When a community is divided, the children always suffer."

In formulating the report, Riley said he and his staff met with 125 groups, including some religious groups. These meetings revealed a common desire among all the groups to strengthen families, he said.

"There is no more important place to begin putting our house in order than by recognizing that our children's expectations about the future are rooted in the day-to-day family activities that help children learn and develop good character," Riley said. "America needs to give up its get-it-now, live-for-today mentality and start looking down the road to make sure that we give all our children the America they deserve."

Riley called the family "the rock on which a solid education can and must be built." He said he had been inspired by examples of two-parent families, single-parent families, stepparents, grandparents, aunts and uncles providing support for children to learn.

Parents and other family members are "the most important teachers of their children," he declared. This is true regardless of a family's social status, income or educational background, he said.

"Three factors over which parents exercise authority -- daily attendance in school, reading material and literature in the home and the amount of television a young person watches -- are some of the strongest indicators we have that home life makes a difference when it comes to learning."

Reading to children, encouraging them to read and listening to them read are essential tasks of parenting,

Riley asserted. But for this to happen, Americans must change their lifestyles, he continued. "I, for one, want to suggest that the teenager who is perpetually glued to the tube is well on the way to having a very dull mind and a very dull -- and perhaps risky -- future."

Television is an undeniable part of American culture, he admitted, and can serve a good purpose. But research clearly shows that children fall into a "red zone" of educational danger if they consistently watch more than six hours of television on a weekday, he said.

Americans need to get their priorities straight, Riley said. "Without a good education, a young person can grow up to be a tragic and unhappy figure."

One of the most important single changes necessary to improve American education is to help parents slow down their lives, he said. "We are letting our children grow up, at times, almost alone -- and disconnected."

Riley said businesses will reap long-term benefits in the workforce by enacting family-friendly policies and work hours. "We must see the value in job-sharing, flextime and release time for families -- to give attention to the children. ... We need to find new ways to connect families to their children in these hectic times."

Riley asked for all Americans to "please tune in" and recognize that anything done to help parents connect with children in learning is "good for our children and good for our country."

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## **Riley asks parents to take inventory of how they spend their time**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- It's time for every American family to take inventory of how they use their time and what impact those decisions have on children, according to Education Secretary Richard Riley.

In his newly released report on American education, Riley suggests seven practices for families to find more time for learning:

- Take a time inventory to find the extra time necessary for the family to learn together.

- Commit yourself to high standards and set high expectations for your children, challenging them in every way to reach their full potential.

- Limit television viewing on a school night to a maximum of two hours.

- Read together.

- Make sure your children take the tough courses at school, and schedule daily time to check homework.

- Make sure your child goes to school every day, and support community efforts to keep children safe and off the street late at night.

- Set a good example and talk directly to your children, especially teenagers, about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and about the values you want your children to have. "Such personal talks, however uncomfortable they make you feel, may save their lives," he said.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

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