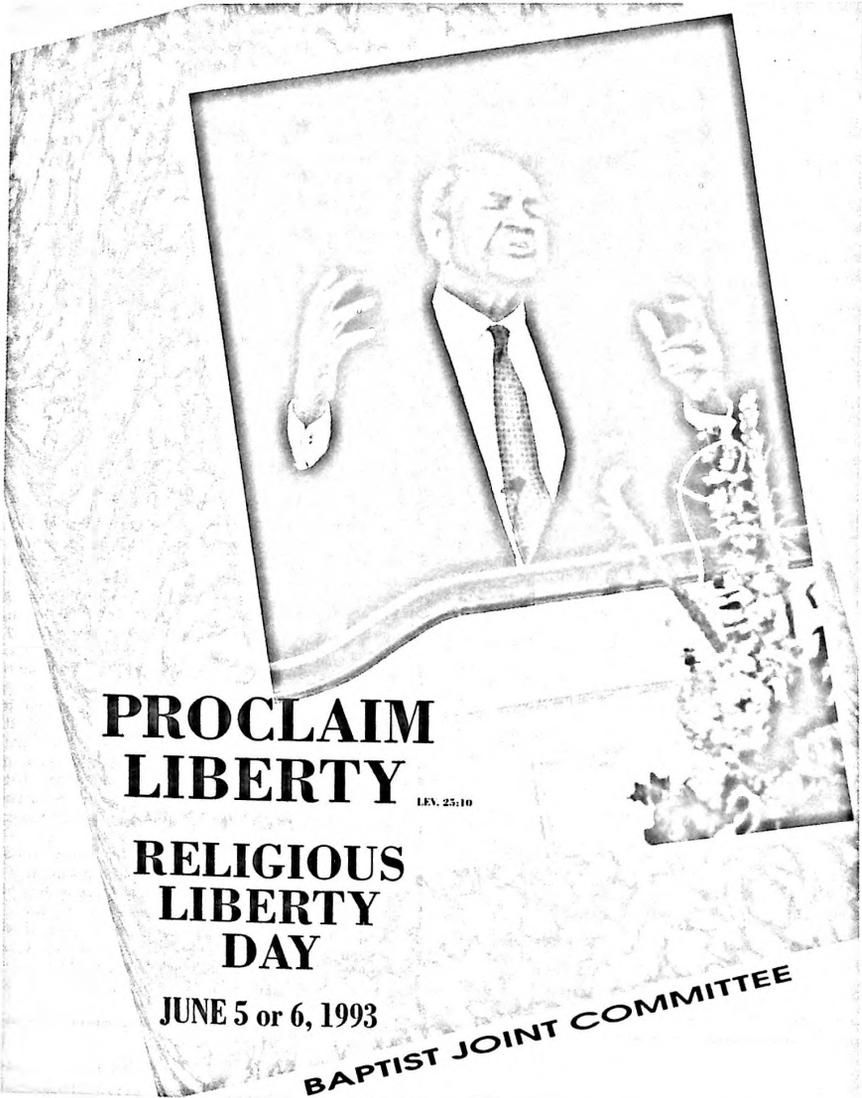


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# REPORT from the CAPITAL



**PROCLAIM  
LIBERTY**

LEV. 25:10

**RELIGIOUS  
LIBERTY  
DAY**

**JUNE 5 or 6, 1993**

**BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE**

# REPORT from the CAPITAL

"... a civil state 'with full liberty in religious concerns'"

Vol. 48, No. 5

May 1993

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**Cover:** The Baptist Joint Committee encourages the observance of Religious Liberty Day on the first day of worship each June. The poster for Religious Liberty Day 1993 was designed by Sarah Helen Shira; photo of Gardner Taylor, pastor emeritus of Concord Baptist Church, Brooklyn, N.Y., is by Gary Vogel courtesy of *Preaching* magazine.

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# Baptist traditionalism

(Editor's Note: Chris Roberts, a Baptist who works for a TV production company in New York, contributed this column. In the fall he will attend Oxford University, England.)

**T**IME magazine told us last month that the baby-boom generation is going "back to church." TIME cited Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., as one church successfully attracting boomers to the pew and congregational life. TIME says that only 30 percent of Hickory Grove's members are Baptists from birth and that the members are drawn together through close-knit support groups for substance abusers, adult children of alcoholics and people with eating disorders, as well as through small Bible-study groups that also provide advice and comfort.

New members are welcome in every Baptist church. People come for particular reasons. Some are curious about God and questions of religious significance.

Others want to regain control of their lives or find community in our factious culture. If churches do their job, new members also absorb basic Baptist beliefs, including an understanding of true faith as a voluntary and individual choice—what the late Baptist champion E.Y. Mullins called "soul competency." The idea is a pillar of the Baptist insistence on religious liberty for all, guaranteed by the separation of church from state.



In recent years, many evangelical Baptist churches have neglected this heritage of conscience and followed leaders whose commitment is more to partisanship than religious pluralism. This trend challenges Baptist identity.

The trend also has political consequences. Harvard Divinity School professor Harvey Cox recently urged his readers to "Look at Pat Robertson's new book, *The New World Order: It Will Change the Way You Live*. It's already sold 500,000 copies in cloth and paperback editions. In addition to laying out a right-wing vision of America, rhetorically it presents a vision of good and evil. It's got a view of history. It's got Satan. It's got ontology. It's got a theology. It resonates with a language that will touch many people. Those who feel differently about many of these issues tend to discuss them in language that simply doesn't have the same depth and doesn't resonate with a lot of traditional metaphorical and theological language. It seems like an unequal contest in a way."

Cox points to a tall but worthy order. Today's circumstances challenge Baptists to find a language consistent with our faith tradition, devoted to religious pluralism and appealing to our country's religious appetites. We will cede territory to fundamentalism and zealotry if we fail to welcome the baby boomers of Hickory Grove, and the people buying Pat Robertson's book, into a revival of the tradition that makes Baptists distinct in the world. □



THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM RESTORATION ACT leaped its second major hurdle May 6 when the Senate Judiciary Committee cleared the bill for floor action by the full chamber. The committee approved the measure by a 15 to 1 vote. The House Judiciary Committee previously approved its bill with a unanimous vote. RFRA (S. 578, H.R. 1308) would restore the high level of protection for religious practice virtually abandoned by the U.S. Supreme Court in its 1990 *Oregon v. Smith* decision. For three decades prior to *Smith*, the high court permitted government to interfere with religious practice only when it used the least restrictive means available to achieve a compelling interest.

While the panel's vote was overwhelming, some senators suggested there probably will be attempts to amend the bill on the floor. Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo, who put a hold on the measure during committee consideration at the end of the session last year, was the sole opponent of the bill. Simpson said he was concerned that RFRA could create problems in prisons by forcing administrators to accommodate prisoners' religious practice to the detriment of security and order. Others raised the same issue but voted for the bill, saying they might discuss the problem during floor debate. The attorney general of Florida, along with 21 other state attorney generals, sent a letter to the committee expressing concern about RFRA's impact on the administration of prisons. But U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno repeatedly has affirmed her support of RFRA. Her strongest endorsement came in a May 5 letter to committee chairman Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., urging "swift enactment" of the bill without a prison amendment.

Attorney General Reno's incisive letter hit the target. RFRA will not turn our prisons into a sectarian free-for-all. Prison officials will be able to demonstrate a compelling interest and override prisoners' claims whenever the security or discipline of the prison is threatened. And, courts will continue to defer to the expert judgment of prison officials and respect their special institutional needs. But, we should not subject even convicted criminals to a double standard when it comes to religious liberty. • (JBW)

# Proclaim liberty throughout the land

Freedom  
and fairness  
for some,  
or for all?



Hardy Clemons, Ph.D. and senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C., provided the theme interpretation for the Religious Liberty Day Observance. Clemons has been elected to become the new moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family."

*Leviticus 25:10*

*Revised Standard Version*

**D**o American Christians believe in freedom and fairness? Yes! Of course we do! Do we believe in liberty and justice for *everyone*? Of course we do! The Bible teaches it. Our Declaration of Independence declares it. Our Pledge of Allegiance affirms it. We *do* believe in "liberty and justice for all." Americans believe in being fair! We almost always pull for the underdog, don't we?

Really? Do we honestly believe in freedom and fairness for all? Do we really pull for the underdog—or is that just a sports myth?

The problem is: we may not tend to classify our own behaviors as "unfair" to the people we victimize. The fact is: we often oppress, exclude, discriminate—and are unaware that we do so. By whatever mechanisms, we avoid an accurate diagnosis of our own actions. We often fail to see that our unfairness is oppressive—that we deny other people opportunities and limit their freedom.

The arrogant young man on a talk show insisted, "I did *not* take unfair advantage" of the young woman who accused him of raping her on a date. "She went out with me, said she liked me, thought I was good-looking. She went willingly to my apartment after I bought her dinner." He did not consider himself an oppressor nor her a victim.

My friend Frank, who sold a hundred shares of unlisted stock to a mutual friend (not mentioning that the stock had tripled the day before and was now worth only a third of what Owen thought the true value was), pointed out that he had "finally beaten that old horse trader in a fair trade." When questioned, "Was this really fair?" he insisted:

I wasn't at all unfair. It's not my fault that he didn't know the stock had tripled. It was simply a small business deal. Owen knows that! Next time, he'll beat me in a trade. It all works out OK in the end.

Many in the Old South didn't consider even slavery oppressive: "We are humane to our slaves," many said, "and we demand that others treat them the same way. We are Christians here! We take care of our slaves and we treat them fairly."

Flash! We need a spiritual wake-up call. God the Creator has something to say! Leviticus 25:10-17 heralds the message:

And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you. ... You shall not wrong one another by dealing unfairly, but you shall live in obedient reverence. For I am the Lord your God.

This "Year of Jubilee" was mandated every 49th year—a sabbath of sabbaths. In this year, all property was restored to its original owner. Ronald Clements called this act "a practical confession that the land rightly belongs to God and that the Israelites were only 'passing guests' upon it who were allowed to make use of it by God's grace." The point is: God owns the world; we don't. God calls us to treat the world and each other out of the awareness that God is God and we are not.

# "Proclaim liberty throughout the land"

Walter Brueggeman says it well: "We can see that Moses or whoever taught this kind of law still had the Exodus story ringing in his ears." The call here is for a grace-oriented approach that remembers that God is Creator and Owner, we are creatures and guests! Furthermore, God is God to everyone. We are enjoined to treat all people with the awareness that they matter to God as much as we do. We are challenged to remember what it's like not to be the owners or the bosses but to be nomads and outcasts. We are required to have the courage and faith to treat everyone as neighbors, to grant them the freedom, respect and dignity they are offered by the grace of God.

This message about liberty, justice and dignity is everywhere in the Scriptures—the Law, the Prophets, the Wisdom Literature, the Gospels, The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles—and this message of grace includes everyone. To relate to God appropriately, we must relate in freedom and fairness to everyone. To be unfair to any other human being is to be disobedient to God. To deny someone dignity is to deny the value God has assigned to that person.

God wants freedom, fairness, liberty and justice for ALL people. Obedience to God requires freedom and fairness to and from all of us.

Yet, even religious freedom is being besieged by new onslaughts upon liberty of conscience in this country. Oppressive patterns are found not merely in fringe cults such as The Branch Davidians of David Koresh. These patterns of discrimination and oppression are much more widespread. All freedom is being jeopardized by merchants of varying forms of thought control.

Flash! "The individual freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment of our Constitution are under attack." This statement was made last Groundhog Day by Dr. James Dunn as he briefed Capitol Hill staffers. Dunn stated what historians of freedom know all too well:

If the freedom of religion suffers, freedom of the press is in danger. If the press is stifled, the pulpit will not be free. If the Arts are censored, no dissenter is safe. Full freedom of conscience is essential to the search for truth. There can be no such thing as government thought control in a free society.

Interestingly enough, the Baptist Joint Committee and the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, which have been in conflict with each other for the last decade, have joined forces on this one. A coalition of nearly 60 religious and civil liberties organizations have united to back a bill that would restore the protection of religious freedom that virtually was abandoned in the Supreme Court's *Oregon v. Smith* decision. In this case, Justice Antonin Scalia gutted the free exercise clause of the First Amendment, calling it "a legal luxury we can no longer afford in our society."

It seems that the issues Leviticus, Isaiah, Jesus and Paul were battling regarding liberty and justice are still alive and well. Dr. Dunn is right. "We need for every friend of the First Amendment to get on board" and support this bill.

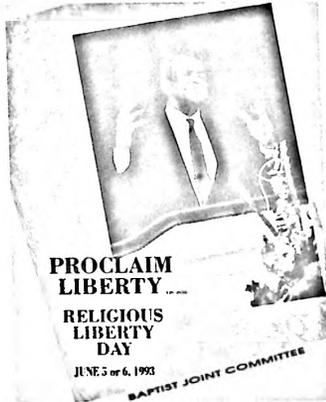
If you want to read a book that puts these issues in a bit larger historical perspective, I commend to you "The Cup of Wrath: The Story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Resistance to Hitler." My friend Mary Glazener—a free and faithful Baptist from Clemson, S.C.—has spent 15 years trying to locate and walk in the moccasins of Dietrich Bonhoeffer—the German Lutheran pastor who was imprisoned and later executed in Nazi Germany. She has toured Germany, gone to all the sites, read the voluminous materials and spent weeks with Eberhard and Renate Bethge—Bonhoeffer's niece and her husband. Dr. Bethge told my wife and I last year that Mary has done "an amazing job of recreating the history and being faithfully accurate with his family" in her historical novel. Dr. Bethge is the one to whom Bonhoeffer smuggled letters and papers from the Nazi prison where he died. He knows about oppression and discrimination.

The Old Testament lawgivers, the Prophets and Bonhoeffer were battling a similar struggle: in the midst of what was being heralded as a great revival of values and religious activity, people were being oppressed by a callous, uncaring group who saw themselves as "the chosen people." They thought that God was on their side and theirs alone (Gott mit uns!). They thought that their religious activity of sacrifices, songs, fasts and preachments endeared them to God and bound God to them as a possession. Isaiah was trying to get the people to hear the point: You have much religious activity, but your faith is barren. If you don't let God tie you to religious observance with your moral involvement in the welfare of all people, your faith will remain shallow, sterile and unsatisfying.

What does it take to be a person of true piety? "Not offerings and sacrifices," said Micah. "Nor even praising God and fasting," says Isaiah. God is announcing an indictment against phony religiosity. He indicts the people's attitudes toward their fellow human beings. He criticizes their behavior when they mingle their feast days and fast days with their oppressive "business-as-usual" approach. God is sick of their acting out the assumption that they are the privileged of God. They ignore the fact that caring for all the people for whom God cares is a prerequisite for genuine worship. They assume that the way they treat others has nothing to do with the worship and service of God.

To worship God is not just coming to church. We can come to church religiously and still miss the whole point. To worship God is not to make abundant offerings and sacrifices nor to fast rigorously. To worship God is to care actively about what God cares about—and whom God cares about. To worship God is to value what God values, to partner with God in loving the whole world, to invest in freedom and justice for ALL.

Let's return to the era of history in which our Declaration of Independence was written. Colonists fought against political oppression that stifled their creativity, bound them and denigrated their value. Colonists did battle with a political regime of privilege that overtaxed them while allowing them no representation. Isaiah is saying what American Revolutionaries said: This type of thing is ungodly! God doesn't want



people in bondage. God hates bondage. God doesn't want one of his people excluded from freedom. God hates exclusion. Look to the children! Look to the widows! Look to the orphans! Look to the disenfranchised! God wants us involved in caring for them—actively. Listen to Leviticus: "Proclaim freedom to all the inhabitants of the land. ... Do not deal unfairly, ... but have obedient reverence for the Lord your God."

In New Testament times, God appointed Paul as an apostle of inclusion to the Gentiles. Many in the church were saying: To become a Christian, one must first become a Jew. If you aren't willing to become a Jew (that is, to be circumcised) then you can't become a Christian. They were saying: All of us were Jews when we became Christians. If you won't do it our way, we will exclude you. That is the way of God.

Paul said: I don't believe that is the way of God! God cares for ALL people, he wants us to care for ALL people. "There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus" (Gal. 5:27-28). To build walls between human beings is to sin against God. To oppress people is to violate worship and religion! To be unfair to anyone says we don't care about God!

But still, we humans continue to make all these divisions. We draw lines and erect walls upon the lines in the name of God. We try to prove that some people are more valuable or more righteous than others. We treat some with respect and some with disdain. We idolize and overvalue some, we discount and undervalue others. We have extreme, encrusted apathy about what and whom God values.

Let's go back to today's beginning: Wake up America! The point remains the same throughout the text of the Bible: God wants us to treat ALL people the same way he treats them! To do that we must wake up! We must recognize the ways in which we participate in oppressing others.

Leviticus says it. The Prophets said it. Jesus said it. Paul said it. Peter said it. When you go out to tell the story of God's love for everyone, you are to tell it to ALL people—ALL people, everywhere! God says: I want them ALL treated as though they matter. I want them ALL to be respected, heard and included and to receive freedom and fairness.

God puts his finger in Simon Peter's face in the encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10) and says in essence: Don't you dare call unclean something I have created as clean. I want the story told to everyone! I want ALL people included in my grace.

ALL people? Everywhere? Does he mean AAALLL people? Is that what God wants from us who claim to be his children? My! That's hard to hear! I am so comfortable with my sophisticated systems of exclusion that I don't even know I have some of them. I am so nervous about the risk of including everyone. Does he really mean AAALLL people? Freedom and fairness for everyone?

But our Bible says: "You alone of all the nations of the earth have I chosen." Doesn't that mean that we are special? Doesn't that mean that God wants us to be the leaders—the privileged? What does the Bible mean by "all people"?

Several years ago, I heard Dr. Fred Craddock speak about taking his wife, Nettie, back to the little church that called him as pastor after he left seminary. He said the church was in the East Tennessee hills, not too far from Oak Ridge. When Oak Ridge boomed with atomic energy—making the stuff to kill and all that—that little bitty town became an expanding city almost overnight. Every hill and valley, and every shady grove had recreation vehicles, trucks and things like that. People came in from everywhere, pitched tents, lived in wagons.

The beautiful 112-year-old church was not far away. After services one Sunday morning, Craddock asked the leaders to launch an invitational campaign to invite the newcomers to church. He met resistance and eventually lost the battle to church members who felt the newcomers would not fit in their congregation.

Years later when Craddock and his wife moved back those parts, he took her to see that little church where he'd had such a painful experience. It had changed. The parking lot was full! Motorcycles, trucks, pickups, campers — all sorts of vehicles were in the lot. They had a great big sign: BAR-B-QUE! ALL YOU CAN EAT!! It was a cafe, and all kinds of people were eating there.

He commented to his wife, "It's a good thing this is not still a church. Otherwise, these people couldn't be in here."

What does it mean to you to be religious? To be a Christian? Does it mean coming to church? Being loyal to your Sunday school class? Reading your Bible? Giving your offerings? Or being religious enough to fast on occasion? What does it truly mean?

Isaiah is saying: However important any of this is, the only reason it's important is that it helps us become inclusive of ALL people. Good religion helps us work for the same kind of freedom and justice for others that we want for ourselves and God wants for all.

With freedom and freedom of religion under attack in this country and in the Southern Baptist Convention; with people being fired, harassed and "retired early" because they won't parrot a pre-prescribed party line; with people being threatened with their jobs if they attend certain meetings or are even seen talking with certain people, with respected spiritual leaders being slandered with accusations that have no basis in fact; if people such as we don't stand for freedom and fairness, who's going to do it? If people with the rich heritage we have won't work "for liberty and justice for all," who's going to stand up and be counted? Who will say, We won't stand for censorship! We won't abide oppression! Who's going to work for what God wants done in including ALL God's creatures? To Moses, to Isaiah, to Jesus, to Paul, this was important! If people like us won't labor and risk for religious freedom, who ...? Who will?

*Prayer:* Oh God, we pray for the willingness and the ability to cut through the extraneous periphery of religiosity so as to find the heart of God that beats with reference to freedom and fairness for every human being. Help us, O God, to treat people as you treat us, and as you want them to be treated.

In Jesus' name, Amen. □

*"Good religion helps us work for the same kind of freedom and justice for others that we want for ourselves and God wants for all."*

— Hardy Clemons

# Activities for Religious Liberty Day

## Worship

### A Litany in Celebration of Religious Liberty

**Leader:** As Baptists we have a heritage steeped in religious freedom. From Roger Williams to Brooks Hays, Baptists have struggled and sacrificed to maintain God's gift of personal liberty.

**Congregation:** We acknowledge this gift from God and the responsibilities that it includes, remembering the rock from which we were hewn.

**Leader:** Just as God freed the Israelites from the tyranny of the Egyptians; with his Son he delivered us from the tyranny of our own sin. Freely salvation was offered and freely we have accepted.

**Congregation:** We remember those who still labor under the yoke of political and spiritual oppression and we pray and work for their freedom, so that they may experience God's grace in accordance with their conscience and without fear of reprisal.

**Leader:** For you were called to freedom, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

**All:** In that spirit we seek to extend to all people the love and salvation of Jesus Christ; worshipping, teaching and working in such a manner that our lives will "proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants."

*(Based on Isaiah 51:1, Galatians 5:13-14 and Leviticus 25:10)*

## Learning Activities for Adults and Youths

Assign each individual in the group a different religion. Making up religions will not only add a little humor, it will allow more people to participate. After reminding each individual of his or her devotion to a particular religion, have the group attempt to write a prayer that is acceptable to everyone and respects each member's individual beliefs. After five or 10 minutes have the group read the prayer.

Discuss with the class why this prayer is or is not a good prayer. Have the individuals look at Jesus' instructions about how to pray. Ask them if this non-denominational prayer meets Jesus' criteria for prayer.

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These suggestions on ways to observe Religious Liberty Day were prepared by Quentin Lockwood III, an intern at the Baptist Joint Committee.

Were individuals offended or made to feel uncomfortable by certain statements in the prayer? Did this prayer become a sincere time for worship for the individuals? As the discussion progresses ask people how they would respond if this prayer were to be prayed in their schools. Furthermore, ask group members how they would feel if their religion became a minority religion, and they were repeatedly exposed in public settings to prayers to Allah, Vishnu, Buddha or one of the group's imaginary religions? Have the group then reread Leviticus 25:10 and Isaiah 58:1-12. Look at the issue in light of the theme interpretation and discussing the importance of freedom and the role that it plays in our lives as Christians and Americans.

## Children's Activity

Have the children try to memorize Leviticus 25:10. Afterward, allow the children to describe in their own terms what freedoms they believe they have and then let them draw or paint these freedoms. Discuss with them the importance of their freedom, particularly religious freedom, and let them discuss why they think freedom is important.

## Bulletin Insert

It has been said that the key to our future lies in the past.

As we observe Religious Liberty Day we are compelled to look back at Baptists such as Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland and John Clarke who fought for religious freedom in the United States. Roger Williams is perhaps one of the most significant contributors to early American religious freedom.

Born in 1603, Williams grew up in London, England, the son of a middle-class merchant tailor. After attaining his undergraduate degree at Cambridge University, Williams became part of the Anglican clergy. Unable to support the teachings of the Church of England and facing possible criminal charges, Williams fled to America in December of 1630.

On reaching the "New World" in 1631, Roger Williams became the pastor at the Salem church in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Dissatisfied with the Puritan theocracy, Williams resigned from the Salem church after less than six months and moved to Plymouth. While in Plymouth Williams reportedly "preached, farmed, and traded with Indians," learning several native languages and maintaining a significant missionary ministry, according to historian H. Leon McBeth in *The Baptist Heritage* (p. 127). During this time, he further developed many of the main tenets of his religious beliefs: democracy, total separation of church and state and the freedom of the individual conscience under God.

# Nothing new

## Jefferson and the 'old' Religious Right

The Federalists were in a deep funk as winter turned into the spring of 1800. Their man, John Adams, had served two terms as vice president under the revered father of the country and had succeeded him in 1796. But Adams was no George Washington and had suffered an alarming drop in popularity.

Faced with almost certain defeat, the Federalist leaders—Alexander Hamilton, George Cabot, Fisher Ames and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney—decided on a high-risk strategy. They would deflect attention from their own weak candidate by concentrating public opinion on the sins of their opponent—Thomas Jefferson.

"Angry, humiliated, desperate, they set out quite deliberately to terrorize the American public with the monster of their imagination," historian Merrill Peterson has written. "[T]he thing to do, Fisher Ames advised, was to 'sound the tocsin about Jefferson.'"

As the campaign proceeded, Jefferson would be accused of many things—cowardice, adultery, sympathy for the French Revolution, "want of personal firmness" and—most devastating of all—that he was an atheist. Yet, Jefferson kept his silence, refusing to discuss the attacks on him by individuals who epitomized "this loathsome combination of church and state."

As the nation observes the 250th anniversary of Jefferson's birth on April 13, with that "combination" as powerful and undaunted as ever, we can appreciate anew his determination and his legacy. "If Jefferson responded to questions about his religion," historian E.S. Gaustad had observed, "soon the public might deem itself to have the right to question and receive answers. Public opinion itself could become an inquisition, thus making the constitutional prohibition against a religious test of no effect."

Many historians have called the election of 1800—establishing a precedent

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*"Federalist leaders did not have much of a campaigner to work with. But they did have another potent weapon at hand: ministers from the Religious Right, supported by sympathetic newspaper editors."*

—Tim Hackler

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for the peaceful transition of power—the most important in American history. It was certainly among the dirtiest. Federalist leaders did not have much of a campaigner to work with. But they did have another potent weapon at hand: ministers from the Religious Right, supported by sympathetic newspaper editors.

"In 1798," wrote Peterson, "New England religionists set up a hue and cry on the worldwide conspiracy against Christianity masterminded by a secret order, the Illuminati, which had overspread Europe under the aegis of the French revolution and infiltrated seditious societies in the United States. This absurdity was exploded by 1800, but the notion of atheistical democracy seemed peculiarly congenial to many Federalists, and Jefferson offered an inviting target."

The New England clergy launched the vilification of Jefferson, denouncing his "disbelief in the Deluge and his opposition to Bible-reading in the schools."

The Gazette of the United States delicately framed the issue this way:

### The Grand Question Stated

At the present solemn moment the only question to be asked by every American, laying his hand on his heart, is "Shall I continue in allegiance to GOD—AND A RELIGIOUS PRESIDENT; or impiously declare for JEFFERSON—AND NO GOD!!!"

The president of Yale University, Timothy Dwight, warned that if Jefferson's party were to be elected to office, "We may see the Bible cast into a bonfire, the vessels of the sacramental supper borne by an ass in public procession, and our children, either wheedled or terrified,

uniting in chanting mockeries against God."

The Rev. William Linn of New York proclaimed that "the election of any man avowing the principles of Mr. Jefferson would ... destroy religion, introduce immorality and loosen all bonds of society."

The Connecticut Courant predicted: "Murder, robbery, rape, adultery and incest will be openly taught and practiced."

After the campaign, Jefferson wrote a friend that some of the clergy had opposed him because they "had got a smell of union between church and state." But Jefferson never responded publicly.

Partly this reflected his intense psychological need for privacy. Partly it reflected a matter of principle: "I have considered religion as a matter between every man and his Maker, in which no other, and far less the public, had a right to intermeddle."

Partly it reflected the fact that his religious beliefs were too richly textured for reduction to trivial political discourse. He wrestled with religious and spiritual questions all his life but never arrived at pat answers. He was a Christian, but was not a practicing member of any denomination: "I am a sect by myself, as far as I know."

Was Jefferson an atheist? A rationalist his whole life, Jefferson doubted stories of miracles. But that a "creator of the world" existed he had no doubt: "I hold (without appeal to revelation) that when we take a view of the universe, in all its parts, general or particular, it is impossible for the human mind not to perceive and feel a conviction of design, consum-

See Jefferson, Page 14

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Tim Hackler is a senior associate at Powell Tate—a Washington, D.C. public relations firm. This article appeared in the March 28 edition of the *Washington Post* and is reprinted with permission from the author.

The First Amendment built a wall of separation between Church and State."—Thomas Jefferson

## VIEWS OF THE WALL

Oliver S. Thomas  
General Counsel



George Will is wrong. Baseball isn't the national pastime. Litigation is. Last year, 100 million lawsuits of various kinds were pending in the nation's courts.

Nervous? You should be.

The target in an increasing number of cases is the local church. Churches maintain buildings and parking lots, provide counseling services and child care, operate nurseries and soup kitchens, employ multiple staff members and sponsor choir trips and youth retreats—all of which give rise to lawsuits. The risk of litigation should not paralyze a church or deter its work and witness, but it should cause us to pay closer attention to our policies and practices to minimize the risks. Good stewardship requires no less.

Recent court decisions are instructive on some ways churches can reduce if not eliminate certain liability claims. Your insurance company or local attorney may have additional suggestions.

The first two cases involve what lawyers call "premises" liability. These are the standard "slip-and-fall" cases that occur on church property. The first concerns the liability property owners may incur for accidents that occur on their parking lots. A waitress sued for injuries sustained when she was abducted and sexually assaulted in the parking lot next to her place of employment. The area of the parking lot where the assault occurred was the farthest from the restaurant. It partially was obscured by bushes and not easily visible from the street. Other waitresses had complained about the parking lot's inadequate lighting. One expert testified that the lighting was far below minimum industry standards. There was also a history of criminal activity in the area. The jury's award in this case was \$600,000.

The lesson for churches is simple. Reasonable steps should be taken to ensure the safety of their premises, including parking lots. This should include adequate lighting and possibly security guards or escorts if problems persist (*Koutoufaris v. Dick*).

While the first case creates a duty for those on the premises at the invitation of the property owner, the second extends the duty even to trespassers. A motorcyclist was injured when he mistook a church driveway as a public street and drove into an unmarked dirt barricade.

The evidence showed there were no illuminated signs indicating that the road was a private drive. To the contrary, testimony showed it had the appearance of a public street. At least two similar motorcycle accidents had occurred in the past when drivers had missed a sharp, unmarked turn in the driveway and struck the barricade. In fact the church's minutes indicated that the congregation knew the unmarked curve and dirt berm were "unlikely to cause death or serious bodily harm." Again, the victims received a substantial jury verdict.

The decision is instructive for all church properties that are regularly used by uninvited guests. Church playgrounds, basketball courts and driveways are good examples. If there are hidden dangers, they should be indicated by clearly visible warning signs or eliminated altogether. Since children who use church property are often too young to read, warning signs may be insufficient for some hazards. (*Reider v. City of Spring Lake Park*).

The next case involved a defamation action brought by a job applicant against her former employer. While former employers have a "qualified privilege" to publish information about former employees to prospective employers, the privilege is lost when the former employer is found to have acted with malice or in bad faith. In this case, the jury found malice on the part of the former employer and awarded \$1 million in actual and punitive damages. The case was reversed on appeal, however, due to a waiver the former employee signed when applying for the new job. That waiver authorized former employers to release information to the prospective employer and released the former employer from any liability resulting from the disclosure.

The case is instructive in at least two ways. First, churches should exercise extreme caution when discussing a former employee's work performance. Such information generally should be treated as confidential. Second, in cases where a prospective employer has requested such information, the church should require the former employee to authorize in writing the release of such information and to release the church from claims for damages resulting from its attempt to comply with the authorization. Such consent by the former employee, said the court, shields the former employer from

liability even though the information shared may be defamatory (*Smith v. Holley*).

Finally, a non-profit organization lost its property tax exemption for leasing its property for commercial purposes. Like this case, many state property tax exemptions exempt properties only if they are used *exclusively* for religious, educational or charitable purposes. The organization defended its use, pointing out that all of the income derived from the lease agreement was used for charitable purposes. Irrelevant, said the court. It is the use of the *property*, not the rent proceeds, that determines its status. The court stated "When a property owner allows another party to use his property for religious, educational or charitable purposes, and the owner derives no income or benefit from the property, then the property is entitled to an exemption. However, if the owner receives any income or benefit from the property, the property is not entitled to an exemption.

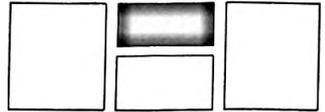
For those states whose property tax exemptions are worded similarly, there seems to be a double-barreled message. The exemption can be lost if (1) the property is used for commercial purposes, or (2) if a lease agreement with another religious or charitable organization generates income for the owner. The Alabama court seems to be saying that even if the lease is for non-commercial activities, it may not generate income for the church. Charging a reasonable maintenance fee that covers the church's expenses obviously would not be considered net income.

Again, the lesson is simple. Before agreeing to allow outside groups to use church facilities, be sure to consult an attorney about the potential effect on the church's property tax exemption.

A final word. Even the best risk management program cannot foresee or guard against every lawsuit. For that reason, a good comprehensive insurance policy is a must. Make sure that the scope of coverage includes everything from fire and theft to sexual misconduct of employees or church volunteers. Also, don't forget to insure the church vehicles. Finally, make certain the policy limits are \$1 million or more.

Life is complicated. Gone are the days when we could count on the good will

See Views, Page 14



## Students' rights protected: Walker

Students may pray, read their Bibles and sing hymns in public schools, according to a Baptist church-state specialist.

J. Brent Walker, associate general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, said the religion clauses in the First Amendment prevent the state from advancing or impeding religion, but they say nothing about private citizens.

"Students are generally free to exercise their religion according to the dictates of their conscience even while at school," he said.

"As a matter of individual free exercise, they may pray whenever and to whomever they like—whether in the classroom, the lunch room or the playing field—provided they don't interfere with the educational process or infringe on other students' rights to be left alone."

Walker led a workshop on the relationship between religion and the public schools as part of the Children & the Church Conference April 21-23. The conference was sponsored by the Gheens Center for Christian Family Ministry at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Walker told participants the Equal Access Act of 1984 allows religious groups to meet before and after school—just like other non-curriculum groups. The act protects all student groups against discrimination on the basis of "religious, political, philosophical or other content of speech," he said.

If the Young Republicans can meet, so can the Young Baptists, he added.

While the nation's high court has ruled that public schools cannot indoctrinate, they can teach about religion, he said.

"Religion should be taught within its natural historical, cultural and pedagogical context," Walker said. "Courses in art, music, literature and history will offer opportunities to include discussion about religious influences."

Walker pointed to guidelines, produced by the Public Education Religious Studies Center at Wright State University, that differentiate between permissible teaching about religion and unlawful indoctrination. The school may:

—approach religion from an academic viewpoint but not a devotional one;

—strive for student awareness of religion but should not press for accept-

*"Students are generally free to exercise their religion according to the dictates of their conscience even while at school."*

—J. Brent Walker

ance of any one religion;

—sponsor study about religion but may not sponsor the practice of religion;

—expose students to a diversity of religious views but may not impose any particular view;

—educate about all religions but may not promote or denigrate any religion;

—inform the student about various beliefs but should not seek to force conformity to any particular belief.

The Supreme Court has not ruled on the permissibility of observing religious holidays in public schools; however, it did let stand a lower court decision upholding the constitutionality of a school district's guidelines.

Those guidelines allow several holidays that have a "religious and secular basis" to be observed, Walker said. The guidelines also permit historical and contemporary values and the origin of the religious holidays to be taught in an objective manner.

Religious symbols may be used as teaching aids. Music, art and literature with religious themes are permissible if presented in a "prudent and objective manner and as a traditional part of the cultural and religious heritage of the particular holiday," the guidelines say.

The school calendar should be arranged to minimize conflicts with religious holidays, he added. □

### BJC's Thomas honored for RFRA leadership

Oliver S. Thomas, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, was honored April 27 as a "champion of religious freedom" by the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism.

Thomas, an ordained minister and member of the Supreme Court bar, was the only non-member of Congress hon-

ored by the group for leadership in the effort to pass the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

On behalf of the BJC, Thomas chairs the diverse coalition of 58 civil liberties and religious organizations backing the bill to restore a high level of protection for the free exercise of religion. Thomas has led the coalition's fight to pass the legislation for three years and helped write the bill.

The bill (S. 578, H.R. 1308) would restore the compelling interest test the Supreme Court formerly required government to meet before restricting religious practice. RFRA was unanimously approved by the House Judiciary Committee for consideration by the full chamber; the Senate Judiciary Committee has not yet voted on the measure.

Other honorees include bill co-sponsors: Reps. Don Edwards, D-Calif., and Charles Schumer, D-N.Y.; and Sens. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, and Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass. □

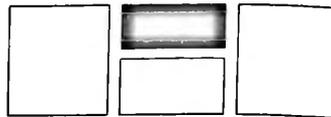
### AU argues ineligibility of school for vouchers

The state of Wisconsin should deny an "independent" Roman Catholic high school entry into Milwaukee's Parental Choice Program, according to Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The legal brief, written by Americans United Legal Counsel Steven K. Green, argues that Messmer High School is ineligible to participate in the program because the school is sectarian and government aid to religious institutions violates the constitutional separation of church and state. The choice plan, which allows up to 1,000 Milwaukee parents to enroll their children in private schools at state expense, is limited to "non-sectarian" institutions.

Many observers think the legal dispute over Messmer's participation may become a major court test of the constitutionality of voucher aid to religious schools. At present, the Milwaukee school choice experiment is the only operational voucher program in the country.

Officials at Messmer argue that the school should be permitted to take part in the program because it is no longer



owned by the Catholic archdiocese. But Americans United contends that for legal purposes the school remains "pervasively sectarian"—that is, thoroughly religious in its purpose and operations.

The Americans United brief, filed March 16 with administrative hearing examiner Thomas Grogan, argues that Messmer policies requiring students to take religion courses and attend church services prove that the school is subsumed in religious doctrine.

The legal document cites court decisions by both the U.S. and Wisconsin supreme courts that struck down tax aid to parochial schools in urging the hearing examiner to uphold a June 1992 finding by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction that Messmer is not qualified to take part in the plan. Messmer appealed the decision and the matter was referred to the hearing officer for review. □

## Court again orders tithe back to bankrupt couple

In what is shaping up as a major religious liberty case, a suburban Minneapolis church again has been ordered to return a \$13,450 tithe that a member couple gave before filing for bankruptcy.

U.S. District Court Judge Harry MacLaughlin ruled that Bruce and Nancy Young of St. Louis Park, Minn., did not have the right to donate the money, nor did the Crystal Evangelical Free Church of New Hope, Minn., have a constitutional right to keep the money.

MacLaughlin's decision, handed down in mid-April, affirmed an earlier ruling by a federal bankruptcy court judge that the tithe constituted a "fraudulent transfer" because the couple lacked the funds and did not receive services or goods from the church in exchange.

In its appeal, the church argued that the court violated the constitutional rights of separation of church and state and freedom of religious expression.

The MacLaughlin decision is "wrong, completely wrong," the Rev. Stephen Goold, Crystal Free's senior pastor, said in a statement. "There can hardly be a greater violation of the Constitution's protection of freedom of religion than for the state to reach into the church collection plate."

The statement noted that the case arose when the Youngs' electrical contracting business failed, forcing the cou-

ple to deplete personal assets to pay business creditors. At the same time, they continued their practice of tithing personal income to the church.

"Even though it is expensive, Crystal Free will appeal the MacLaughlin decision," said the Rev. William Sisterson, executive pastor of the church.

"This decision," he said, "affects every church and charitable organization. It gives the court the ability to demand that any donations made the entire year before bankruptcy be returned to the church or charity."

According to John Whitehead, president of the Rutherford Institute, a non-profit legal organization that defends religious liberty, the court orders "create a real church-state issue."

In a January interview with the Twin Cities Christian newspaper, Whitehead asked, "How far can the state go in determining what donations were made? This is tithe money. Does the state have an actual claim to the tithe money? This money that's been given to God. Can the government just go in and look at church records? That's going to create entanglement. It would set a bad precedent." □

## Yale scholars push for religion, history link

Two Yale historians, echoing an increasingly common complaint, say religion has been woefully ignored in the writing of U.S. history. But the historians hope to end that with a new Yale-based program that will encourage young scholars to explore religion's impact on American society.

Jon Butler, a professor of American history at Yale, and Harry Stout, professor of American Christianity, will have \$1.5 million from the Pew Charitable Trusts to accomplish the task. They plan to use the funds to underwrite fellowships and grants for the study of religion in American culture.

In a recent interview, Butler accused historians of removing a "major element" in the American drama that gives a stilted view of the nation's history.

Butler, who will direct the program with the assistance of Stout, said, "We hope it will have an impact on how scholarship in American history emerges in the 20th century." The idea, he said, is to influence young scholars early, at the most critical stage in their careers, in hopes of encouraging a lifelong pursuit

of religion's role in American history.

"Religion's role in American life, past and present, has been considerable, yet most American history textbooks are silent about religion, especially after the age of the Puritans," Butler said in an announcement of the Yale-Pew program.

"Without some concerted attention to the relationship between religion and American historical development, we will continue to misunderstand major facets of where we have been, who we are, and what we are becoming as a people," he said.

Ultimately, Butler hopes, the program will "make religion as common to the discussion of American history as politics and economics.

"Historians like to deal with concrete facts, but religion brings an ambiguous element to scholarship that tends to make historians a bit, well, embarrassed. It seems to stress the personal and 'otherworldly,' as opposed to the intellectual and rational," he said.

While the Yale-Pew program is geared toward scholarly research at the university level, Butler believes the fruits of that research is likely to trickle down to the elementary and secondary school level also—a point of view shared by some educators who have been at the forefront of efforts in recent years to bring the study of religion into the public schools.

Plenty of church history has been written by scholars of religion, according to Butler, but not enough focusing on the "relationship between religion and the development of American society"—the role religion played, for example, in the anti-slavery movement or in the nuclear arms debate.

More recently, dramatic shifts in the American landscape have come about due to the growth of Islam and because of Christian influences in the anti-abortion movement.

Even so, Butler noted little academic discourse is under way in those areas. The problem is that "religious" history is seen as a discipline distinct from "secular" history—as "a kind of special field 'over there,'" in effect removing it from the fabric of American life.

Only in the case of Puritans, the English settlers who helped found America, has the impact of religion been given its due, according to Butler. □

Compiled from staff and news service reports, including American Baptist News Service, Religious News Service and Associated Baptist Press.

# INTERNATIONAL DATELINE



## Indians in Peru receive Bibles through project

Larry Baker doesn't like to start something he can't finish.

That's why the former missionary recently returned to Peru. The Quechua-speaking Indians there were dedicating the first Quechua translation of the New Testament April 4, and Baker said he didn't want to miss the event.

Actually, there isn't much of the five-year translation project Baker has missed.

In 1985, when he and his wife, Lou Anne, became the first Southern Baptist missionaries to work among the 11 million Quechua (KECH-wa) Indians in Peru, they immediately discovered the overwhelming need for a Quechua translation of the Bible.

"How could (the Quechuas) hear the Word if they didn't even have the Word?" Baker asked.

The biggest challenge in providing a translation in that culture, Baker said, was that "there was no literature of any kind in their language at that time."

Despite these odds, the Bakers' desire to provide Quechua Indians with their own New Testament became one of the biggest priorities in their ministry.

Receiving endorsement from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, which later was coupled with technical assistance from the United Bible Society, the Bakers launched into their project.

For the first phase of the work, Baker secured a team of Quechuas to serve as translators. Of the 16 chosen, he said, five were Baptists and 11 represented other evangelical groups.

The team spent two years immersed in intensive and tedious translation, working eight hours or more a day.

Baker, who previously had worked in theological education in Ecuador, began each morning by leading the team in a two-hour study of two New Testament Scripture passages. Then the team, divided into two groups, would spend that day on those texts.

Baker taught from the Greek text; the team translated from Spanish.

The groups worked independently on two New Testament books. When they completed a book, they switched texts and back-translated the work to check for accuracy.

Baker also checked the work by having passages read to people in the

villages and over the local radio station. This ensured that the final work would be understandable.

Lou Anne Baker also was involved at every stage of the process, Baker said. She kept the translators' work on a computer and made necessary changes during the revision stage.

In all, seven revisions were required before the New Testament was completed last summer for printing.

The FMB and the United Bible Society together provided funding for 30,000 copies to be printed in Peru.

However, last August, before the copies were available for distribution, medical problems forced the Bakers to resign their position and return indefinitely to the United States.

Since then they have redirected their mission efforts to Kentucky's Christian County Baptist Association, where he is director of missions. Baker said they have no plans to return to Peru except for short-term volunteer work.

Baker predicted the new Bible will enhance evangelistic efforts in Peru in several ways. First, evangelical work among the Quechua Indians should accelerate.

Second, the door has been opened for more literature to be written and translated for the Quechuas. Baker said the translators' excitement about their work has resulted in some feeling called to write Sunday school materials and other literature in their language.

Another benefit from the biblical translation is that Baker expects it to increase the literacy rate among the Indians.

Part of the distribution plan for the Bibles is to take them to churches and hold weekend literacy workshops, he explained.

All Southern Baptists should be proud of the Quechua's 13 organized churches and the New Testament now available in Peru, Baker said. □

## Parks offers mission vision to state group

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship wants to provide all Southern Baptists with a way to do missions, Keith Parks, missions coordinator for the national Fellowship, told the group's Mississippi chapter.

Parks spoke on two occasions to the

Mississippi chapter during that group's semi-annual meeting April 2-3 in Jackson.

Parks, former president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, retired last October—three years earlier than planned—because of philosophical differences with trustees. Parks told the Mississippians that he retired because FMB trustees would not accept his leadership—a charge FMB trustees deny.

Parks' impasse with trustees was one byproduct of the 14-year struggle for control of the Southern Baptist Convention and its agencies.

Despite his retirement, Parks noted, "The Lord said, 'You're not through.'" Earlier this year he was named to the Fellowship post.

"The Lord is moving among Southern Baptists in a remarkable way," Parks continued. "People are saying that the Fellowship is striking a responsive chord."

He said the Fellowship now has 20 missionaries under appointment and hopes to double that number by the end of the year. The Fellowship will concentrate on the 25 percent of the world's population that has not had a chance to respond to the gospel, he noted.

"The first strategy should be praying," he added. "If we could ever discover intercessory prayer and if we could discover the power of it, it would change the direction of the world." □

## Religious pluralism moves slowly in Israel

Shimon Peres, Israeli foreign minister, told a gathering of liberal Jews in Jerusalem recently that it is unlikely the government of Israel will begin soon to recognize Reform and Conservative Judaism, despite a recent legal victory for those non-Orthodox branches of the faith.

To affirm religious pluralism—that is, to grant legitimacy to all three major branches of Judaism—would seriously antagonize Orthodox members of the country's fragile governing coalition, he said, leaving the Labor government without the backing it needs to pursue the Middle East peace process.

But others in Israel feel that the power of the Orthodox rabbinate in Israel must be addressed; that movement in the



## NEWS SCAN

Eastern European Baptists need to be mindful of a plethora of "lone ranger" evangelists who have inundated their countries since the fall of communism. That warning from Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, charged those individuals with having a "view of the church, evangelism and doctrine that we cannot cooperate with" because they often represent "sub-Christian, non-Christian or heretical" ideologies. Lotz, addressing a gathering of 250 Baptist leaders in Berlin late last month, urged the leaders to avoid "unnecessary entanglement with para-church organizations and even sometimes other Baptist groups." ... Southern Baptist missionaries in Russia have been given the legal right to operate as a non-profit organization. The new status clears the way for missionaries to buy and sell property, hire people and bring whatever they need into the country. Legal status was granted just weeks after 20 Southern Baptist missionaries assigned to the republics of the former Soviet Union met for the first time and formed the Commonwealth of Independent States Mission. ... The Anglican Church in Wales has taken a step toward ordaining women as priests, approving a bill that will open pulpits to women if it is approved at another reading next year. The bill, which needed a simple majority to pass, was approved by a vote of 199-97 with three abstentions at a meeting of the church's governing body in Lampeter, Wales. The bill will be sent to a select committee before returning to the governing body next year for a final vote. ... U.S. Roman Catholic officials formally have expressed concern to Israeli officials over Israel's closing of its occupied territories during Holy Week and the Easter season. The closing of the West Bank and Gaza prevented Palestinian Christians from visiting some of the most sacred shrines in Christian history. Officials from the U.S. Catholic Conference, the social policy action arm of the nation's Catholic bishops, met with Avi Granot, church affairs counselor at the Israeli embassy in Washington. The West Bank and Gaza were closed in response to rising violence against Israelis. □

*Compiled from staff and news service reports, including the American Baptist News Service, Associated Baptist Press, Religious News Service and European News Service.*

direction of religious pluralism is critical in a country that professes to be a haven for the world's Jews.

Presently in Israel, Orthodox rabbis are the only ones with legal authority to oversee such religious matters as marriage, divorce or conversion. Actions of Reform or Conservative rabbis on such matters have no legal validity. Furthermore, those who want to reform the system argue that the Orthodox rabbinic system enjoys a disproportionate level of influence over the government in a country where most of the citizens are not Orthodox Jews.

Peres made his remarks in Jerusalem March 22 to the World Union for Progressive Judaism, a little more than a month after a court decision that marked a step toward giving non-Orthodox Jews the right to more legal authority.

The Jerusalem District Court ruled on Feb. 14 that an Israeli citizen and an Israeli resident converted under Reform auspices in the Netherlands had to be recognized as Jewish by the government of Israel. That ruling—greeted as a victory by Reform and Conservative Jews in the United States and as a "horror" by a leader of American Orthodoxy—means that people in Israel who want to be converted by Reform or Conservative rabbis may do so, but only if they leave the country.

"If Reform conversions performed abroad are recognized as legitimate," said Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch of New York, "why not those that are done in Israel?" Hirsch is executive director of the Association of Reform Zionists in America.

People heartened by the two decisions say they clear the way for the Reform movement to seek the same recognition for conversions conducted inside Israel. The Reform movement's Jerusalem-based Religious Action Center filed suit in the High Court urging that non-Orthodox conversions within Israel be declared valid. □

## Letters call for healing after Salvadoran war

Two Baptist pastors in El Salvador have written a letter to Mennonite churches in the United States calling for reconciliation between the Salvadoran and American people.

The letter was written soon after the

U.N. Truth Commission released its report on atrocities committed during the 12-year civil war that raged in the Central American nation. The commission found that the vast majority of the crimes were committed by U.S. government-backed military and paramilitary forces.

"We believe that in this moment of truth and reconciliation, we must make efforts to reconcile our two peoples and work for the discovery of the truth in the shameful acts that occurred during the war, a war that caused so much death and destruction in our country," said the letter signed by pastors Miguel Tomas and Benjamin Retina.

In response, Mennonite Central Committee Executive Secretary John Lapp and its chairman Ron Mathis wrote that American society "needs to understand the truth in order to seek reconciliation and a more just way of relating between nations."

"We deeply regret our nation's participation in the war which caused so much death and destruction in your country," the two pacifist church leaders said. □

## Church refugee group disbands in South Africa

A church-supported committee established three years ago to assist in the return of refugees to South Africa has disbanded amid charges of fraud and corruption.

Meeting recently in Johannesburg, officials of the National Coordinating Committee for the Repatriation of South African Exiles decided to dissolve the group and ask the U.N. High Commission for Refugees to assume responsibility for returning refugees.

According to a report of the April 1 meeting issued by the South African Council of Churches, the committee agreed to continue plans for an independent investigation of the charges.

The six organizations represented by the committee included the South African Council of Churches, the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and three leading secular anti-apartheid groups—the African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress and the Azanian People's Organization. □

## Views

Continued from Page 9

of citizens or the courts to protect churches from serious liability. Jesus said to be as innocent as doves but as wise as serpents.

It's good advice. □

*Editor's Note: This article is designed to provide accurate information concerning the subject of church liability. It is provided with the understanding that the author is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional services. If the reader has specific legal questions, the services of a qualified attorney should be sought.*

## Jefferson

Continued from Page 8

mate skill and indefinite power in every atom of its composition."

Further evidence of the hand of God was found in a moral sense deeply ingrained in humankind: "Nature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short."

It was true, as the New England clergy charged, that Jefferson was a deist. To the deists, belief in God derived from reason, not miracles, and while God had created the world, humans must make it work.

This, in fact, was the religious outlook of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Franklin and most of the founding fathers—including Adams himself. Historian Charles O. Lerche Jr. has observed: "One is struck by the astonishing cynicism displayed by the Federalists in assailing Jefferson as an atheist when his religious opinions differed only imperceptibly, if at all, from their own."

The Religious Right was also accurate in accusing Jefferson of opposition to Bible-reading in schools. Jefferson opposed any measure that might breach the wall between church and state, a phrase he invented.

But it would be a mistake to infer from Jefferson's rationalism and deism that he minimized the importance of religion in the life of a nation. Historian Gaustad concluded his work Jefferson with these words: "Despite repeated protestations to the contrary, Jefferson wished that his private understandings could somehow become public ones. ... For the nation that he had helped bring into being, Jefferson continued to seek, not the lowest common denominator in religion, but the highest standard that

the faculty of reason and the moral instinct could possibly attain."

The scurrilous campaign waged by the Federalists and the Religious Right ultimately failed. But ironically it inspired one of Jefferson's most celebrated statements, words chiseled into the rotunda of the Jefferson Memorial. In a letter to his close friend Dr. Benjamin Rush, Jefferson said the clergy of New England had opposed him because they feared he would fight a closer link between church and state. He added:

"And they believe rightly. For I have sworn on the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." □

## Activities

Continued from Page 7

Continued harassment by the Massachusetts Bay government over his "separationist" teachings forced Williams to move to what would later become Providence, R.I. There, he bought a parcel of land from the Indians and formed the Plymouth Plantation, a new community that "provided for democracy, religious liberty, and separation of church and state" (McBeth, p.131). From that colony in 1639, Roger Williams help to found the first Baptist church in America. □

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For all the difficulties, conflicts, confusions that result, the Baptist spirit is the spirit of freedom. Free and faithful Baptists are found with an open Bible and an open mind.

## REFLECTIONS

James M. Dunn  
Executive Director



What do they have in common? President Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Bill Moyers, Marian Wright Edelman, Martin Luther King Jr. and Marian Anderson?

Other than being in the news, other than their own ways having instructed America, they are all identified as Baptists. For the first time in history the U.S. president and vice president are Baptists. Who are these people?

Names that dominate the best-seller lists, Moyers and Edelman claim the same faith name. What's a Baptist? Inquiring minds want to know.

History focuses this year on Martin Luther King Jr. with the 30th anniversary of his march on Washington and on Marian Anderson as her death deprived our nation of one of its greatest voices. Does their Baptist label mean anything?

As amorphous as Baptists may be, there are some ties that bind this body of believers together. Baptists are not identical but we do possess an identity.

Further, the aforementioned Baptists are all among the ilk that understands and claims that identity. Maybe more important than understanding, they are among those infected with and engaged in Baptistness.

The widespread interest in these people called Baptists is more than curiosity. There is legitimate reason to investigate their common convictions. I contend that the six persons listed above are among the *real* Baptists in contrast to the many *faux* Baptists that regularly muddy the media.

That contention suggests some standard for measuring the B.Q. (Baptist Quotient). I hereby nominate a marvelous new book released this month by Walter B. Shurden as a useful Baptist-tester. It is *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms*, (Smyth and Helwys, \$9.95).

Shurden, a distinguished scholar, is chairman of the Department of Christianity at Mercer University in Macon, Ga. He has written six other books, all helpful in defining "Baptists." This latest effort, however, is particularly succinct and reader friendly. I plan to buy a batch of them.

It will help practitioners of the faith figure out who they are at the same time that it surprises and enlightens non-Baptists. It's about time for those who think they know what a Baptist is to do their homework. After all, a good many movers and shakers of our day share this sometimes peculiar perspective but few outside the fold have bothered to study them.

As Shurden suggests, "Baptists are not perceived as freedom-lovers and freedom-givers by many persons outside the Baptist community." He cites Walker Percy, who has a character in one of his novels say, "If heaven is full of Southern Baptists, I'd rather rot in hell with Saladin and Achilles." One can understand Percy's point, but there is another way of seeing Baptists.

Baptists on our good days, Baptists at our best affirm the freedoms Shurden suggests: Bible freedom, soul freedom, church freedom and religious freedom.

By "Bible freedom" the writer insists that individuals have the right of private interpretation of Scripture and the responsibility of personal obedience. Baptists began and begin today with a dynamic, not merely a propositional, understanding of the Bible. "Jesus ... constitutes

the norm by which the Bible is to be interpreted."

Shurden focuses on the "openness" to the "ongoing study of the Bible" in Baptist life. He highlights a certain humility in any authentic Baptist approach to Scripture. For while "the Bible is the final authority, human understanding of the Bible is never final or complete or finished."

"Soul freedom" affirms the sacredness of individual choice. Since every human being is made in the image of God, faith is personal and conversion comes freely or not truly. It is the right and responsibility of every person to deal with God himself or herself.

As Shurden puts it the "voluntary nature of faith is crucial to the Baptist identity. ... We must make up our own minds about God. The final choice of belief and practice must be made in the secret of the soul's naked presence before God alone."

"Church freedom" allows Shurden to set out a view of congregational democracy so thorough that it is sometimes seen as "mobocracy." The freedoms above do make for diversity. Baptists differ. Perhaps the most honest thing about Baptists is our acceptance of differences as a given. That is not all bad. At least we are smart enough to see these differences and stubborn enough to cling to them. If only we can be spiritual enough to allow them in mutual respect, appropriate them as strength and accept the contributions of our diverse brothers and sisters as growth points.

Freedom of religion, freedom for religion and freedom from religion are all included in Shurden's fourth freedom. He lifts up the Baptist principle of a free church in a free state as one of those distinctives held by all true Baptists.

Thomas Helwys wrote in 1612 "the King is a mortal Man and not God" and "therefore has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects." From that first Baptist to his 1993 counterparts, Baptists worthy of the name have claimed religious liberty for themselves and everyone else, even Branch Davidians.

Dr. Shurden has hit the heart of what makes a Baptist a Baptist. He has touched the spiritual and theological marks, the distinctives, the convictions, the ideals. These are beliefs shared by President Clinton and countless citizens who resonate to the rhetoric born of his faith. Shurden has exposed the essence, "the defining difference that constitutes being a Baptist." Grasping this helps one comprehend the motives, the methods and the special spin that Bill Moyers puts on his analyses of events and ideas. We see what fuels Marian Wright Edelman in her crusade for children. We have an insight into Martin Luther King's struggle for soul freedom. We sense anew the source of Marian Anderson's song of faith.

This is not all off the top of Shurden's head. The style of faith described is not empty opinion, a subjective judgment call. The posture of faith set out here is documented in the last half of the book with the text of eight "Documents on the Baptist Identity."

For all the difficulties, conflicts, confusions that result, the Baptist spirit is the spirit of freedom. Free and faithful Baptists are found with an open Bible and an open mind. That's what real Baptists have in common. □

# REVIEWS



## The Transformation of the Christian Right

Matthew C. Moen, Tuscaloosa:  
The University of Alabama Press,  
1992, 160 pp.

In his book *The Transformation of the Christian Right*, Matthew Moen's objective is "to chronicle and assess the panoply of changes that occurred in the Christian Right during the 1980s." With his pen guided by a scholar's eye, Moen accomplishes his goal while skillfully advancing two themes: (1) "the Christian Right has gradually become more politically sophisticated," and (2) "the movement has grown more secular in character." After laying this foundation in the first chapter, Moen offers a detailed and systematic study of the movement and its metamorphosis. His assessment leads the reader to conclude that the Christian Right, having experienced dramatic changes during the 1980s, will play a new but significant role in the politics of the 1990s.

Moen begins by considering the changes that have occurred within Christian Right organizations formed at different time periods during the last decade. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, which exerted influence in the early '80s, and Gary Bauer's Family Research Counsel (FRC), formed later in the decade as the political arm of James Dobson's Focus on the Family, are two of the groups Moen evaluates.

He argues that as the decade progressed the objectives, structure and focus of the newer organizations such as the FRC changed dramatically from those born in the early '80s. Groups modified their broad religious objectives to narrow, more secular goals. Also, rather than a fundamentalist Christian constituency with little personal investment funding the efforts of an elite few, newer organizations shifted their structure to work through people at the grass roots level. This shift redirected the organizations' focus from Congress to local and state governments with grass-roots activism.

Moen asserts that this complex evolution has created a loss of distinctiveness for the Christian Right that has hindered its abilities in the public arena. He argues that mistakes of early organizations—such as offering opinions on issues not germane to their objectives for the Reagan administration and participating in unethical behavior—began the erosion process.

Distinctiveness continued to decay as newer groups incorporated the rhetoric of the left into their agendas. Moderation in policy opened the doors to a more diverse group of participants. An obvious example of this incorporation can be seen by comparing the names of old and new Christian Right organizations. Instead of religiously toned titles of early '80s groups like the Religious Roundtable, newer groups chose more liberal titles like the American Freedom Coalition. Also, over time the leadership of the Christian Right softened their views on issues in an effort to gain support for their agenda. Jerry Falwell's shift from condemning abortion in all circumstances to making exceptions in cases of rape, incest and mother's life endangerment exemplified this moderation. These tactics allowed for broader support, but the perception of the unwavering Christian Right was tarnished.

Moen's book contributes uniquely to the academic study of this controversial movement. The author, himself, asserts that one reason for writing *The Transformation of the Christian Right* was to fill the void created by the lack of scholarly attention given to understanding its reorganization over the past decade. Many have theorized about the Christian Right's influence in past and future political scenarios, but few have attempted to chronicle its interworkings and restructuring. For that reason, Moen's thorough account makes a significant contribution to the study of this movement.

Perhaps the two greatest strengths of this work come in its trenchant analysis and meticulous research.

Moen resists the temptation to assess the value of the Christian Right. Instead, he presents the facts in an objective

manner and draws his conclusions from them. His account is all the more credible considering much of the book is written from interviews with the leadership of Christian Right organizations and those organizations that work against it.

The organized method by which Moen advances his arguments maximizes the strengths of his style. In presenting his thesis and outlining the entire book in the first chapter, Moen allows the reader to grasp the many facets of the Christian Right's transformation while still focusing on the main themes of increased political sophistication and the trend toward secularism. Moen's communication of his ideas is even more impressive considering the numerous pieces of information he weaves together to produce a full and clear picture of the Christian Right.

Although political groups as controversial as the Christian Right often evoke the need for colorful and descriptive language (the nature of which depends upon one's political persuasion) Moen's study sacrifices these in order to maintain objectivity and lucidity. While this systematic style provides clarity, this is still an academic work and at times reads a little slowly.

Moen concludes his analysis by predicting the future of this transformed movement. He argues that those who have written the Christian Right into the pages of history are acting prematurely. Because of its grassroots strength, secular appeal and increased political sophistication, the Christian Right is anything but an artifact of history. Although Moen foresees a lessened role, he maintains that the Christian Right will periodically enter the political arena in the 1990s and find some measure of success.

While Matthew Moen's prediction differs from conventional wisdom about the vitality of this movement, his detailed analysis is credible. The brash strong-arm tactics employed in the early '80s are over. However, to think that the Christian Right in now dead or ineffective would be a great miscalculation. □

—Michael L. Hance  
Legislative Intern

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