



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ **Ahmad Abu-Aziz**, a Jordanian Muslim, was correctly awarded nearly \$3 million in damages after being fired by United Airlines, a California appeals court held. Abu-Aziz said co-workers at the Oakland International Airport ridiculed his religious-ethnic background and that he was fired on false charges.

◆ **Robert Warner**, an atheist convicted of driving while impaired, cannot be forced to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, a federal appeals court ruled. Warner argued that a New York county's requirement that he attend AA meetings would force him to take part in religious exercises in violation of the First Amendment.

◆ **Gary Bauer**, Republican presidential candidate, said that if elected, he would pass federal legislation to permit state facilities to post the Ten Commandments and to allow a designated time for students to pray.

◆ **Jesse Jackson and Joan Brown Campbell**, head of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., led a delegation of U.S. religious leaders and others to Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in an effort to win the release of three captive Americans despite disapproval from the White House. "This is a pilgrimage of faith, not politics," Jackson said. Δ

Clergy in the schools program ruled invalid by appeals court

A program that brings only clergy into Beaumont, Texas, public schools to act as counselors to students is unconstitutional, ruled a panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The panel voted 2-1 to overturn a 1996 ruling by a federal district court, agreeing with seven parents and students who argued that the Beaumont Independent School District program violated the separation of church and state.

Since 1996, school officials have invited clergy to provide group counseling to selected students under the supervision of school officials. Although they could decline to participate, students were selected by school officials without prior notice and without parental consent.

Beaumont school officials described the program as a means of promoting civic virtues and morality. Participating clergy were instructed not to discuss religion, quote religious materials, provide information about church services, identify their church affiliation or pray with students. They were encouraged to discuss issues such as divorce but prohibited from talking about subjects such as sex and abortion.

The appeals court said the "Clergy in the Schools" program violates both the U.S. and Texas constitutions on multiple points.

The school district's "creation of a special program that recruits only clergymen to render volunteer counseling makes a clear statement that it favors religion

over nonreligion," the panel ruled. It also said the clergy chosen were disproportionately Protestants.

"The clergy volunteers do not simply constitute a small part of a larger, nonreligious endeavor," the appeals court said. "They are, so to speak, the whole show."

The clergy program violates the Establishment Clause, the appeals court said. It has the "primary effect of advancing religion" and due to the large amount of involvement of school officials in administering the program, it creates an "excessive entanglement" between church and state.

The appeals court also said the program was coercive, noting that "although in a vacuum student counseling is not an inherently religious undertaking, when the practice under scrutiny consists of a group of counselors made up entirely of clergymen addressing a captive audience of primary and secondary public school students — at school, during school hours, under the aegis of school administrators — concerning morals and virtue, the exercise loses its secular character entirely."

J. Brent Walker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, said clergy "are entitled to participate, but failure to include secular counselors in the program is a serious shortcoming."

Walker added that inviting only clergy to participate in the counseling program "tilts the level playing field of school neutrality" and "has the impermissible effect of advancing religion." Δ



For freedom, set free

Galatians 5:1

by James M. Dunn

It is precisely for freedom that Christ has set us free, Galatians 5:1. The truth of that biblical maxim is often spiritualized. Not so with Gardner Taylor. He asks the scriptural question, "to what purpose" is this freedom that I have?

Alas, for some saints it's no more than a sweet thought about which to sing.

For America's premier preacher, Gardner Taylor, this soul freedom is "who we are." If God himself gave freedom, the exercise, protection and advancement of that gift are our marching orders. One cannot rejoice in and enjoy spiritual freedom without accepting the earthly consequences. When asked about the reason for separation of church and state, Dr. Taylor responds, "So the church will have swinging room to act upon the state." He doesn't stop there. With a keen sense of history, a clear vision of the mess we are in and a bright hope for the future, he acts. He says, "we have separation of church and state so neither can hold the other in a bear hug."

In a helpful little Judson Press book, *We Have This Ministry*, the illustrious pastor emeritus of the Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn sounds the battle cry. Dr. Taylor has never been timid about politics, nor should we be. We are free, indeed — free to fail, but not free to fail to try to extend full-blown religious liberty to all.

He writes, "I believe that blacks have a greater stake in the political process than any other group in society, because the nation's promise to the people is disproportionately unkept to the African-American community. Whether or not the pastor participates in partisan politics, the congregation expects him or her to be able to identify the failures and needs in government and politics, especially the ones that affect people's children."

Bland generality is not enough. With specificity he writes, "For example, the retrenchment of affirmative action is certainly a relevant issue for African-American Christians. It affects their communities, their homes and also the country's view of them." He who claims economic and political freedom for himself signs up at that very moment in the freedom crusade.

For Dr. Taylor, freedom is not license to run from issues. "The world is our parish in terms of what we may talk



Gardner Taylor

about and what we ought to talk about. Thus every part of life is brought under the scrutiny of the Word of God," he says.

"As someone who tried to see the relation between the 'then' of Scriptures and the 'now,'" Dr. Taylor sees the exercise of his freedom as a matter of faithfulness to his calling. He says that he and former *Christian Century* editor Kyle Haselden "spent a night talking about this." Haselden "talked about the relation between the 'revelant and the relevant,' the revelation of the Scriptures and the relevance to our time."

There's the rub.

"Above all," Taylor says, "a pastor has to deal with the issues of life." That is never easy. The problem with this freedom stuff is that we're always facing hard decisions.

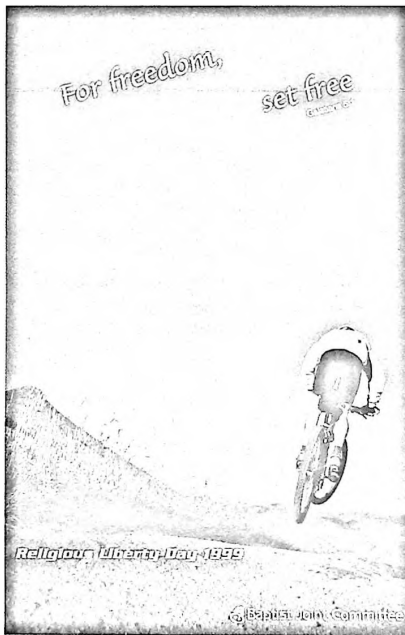
Gardner Taylor has always been a "learner." That's what "disciple" means. He gained insight from Marney about the profound burden of freedom.

"I was quoting Carlyle Marney recently. He was perhaps the most perceptive Southern Baptist preacher of my time. . . . He said that there is an 'essential anxiety' that is part of the human experience. Anyone who breathes is affected by it, and it stems in part from continually having to choose between right and wrong, when many situations are ambiguous and the choices are difficult to make. God does not force us."

Right! God, even God, does not force us. Considerable evidence exists that it is God's intent that we be free. May the good Lord have mercy on any who would deny that freedom to others or themselves. We are wired for it.

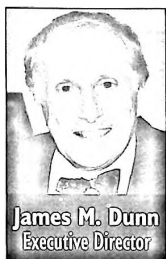
We live with that "essential anxiety." We can't avoid it. So, we confess that we don't know it all, fall back on faith, rely on what George Buttrick called "reverent agnosticism." Believe even when we do not understand. Accept that we "see through a glass darkly." Face with humility our humanity.

We accept the joy and the pain of human freedom. Set free to suffer. It is indeed for freedom that we are set free.



Note: Many Baptists celebrate Religious Liberty Day on the first day of worship in June, while others select alternative dates. Contact the Baptist Joint Committee for a copy of the 1999 Religious Liberty Day poster.

For Christians, it's *whom* we believe, not *what*, that counts



James M. Dunn
Executive Director

"I know **whom** I have believed." That's the scripture (II Timothy 1:12). That's the 1883 gospel song by Daniel W. Whittle, not "I know what I believe."

J. M. Dawson, first executive of the Baptist Joint Committee, told me that he and George W.

Truett considered themselves "Christian personalists." That terminology seems odd today, but the need for that brand of believer is great.

In fact, one cannot comprehend BJC backers' passion for religious liberty without catching the intensely personal fever of their faith. It's not so much whether their beliefs are literal or liberal as that they are personal that counts.

A University of Tennessee professor of philosophy and religious studies, Frank Louis Mauldin, is trying to help us catch on. He has written *The Classic Baptist Heritage of Personal Truth* (Providence House Publishers, 1999, \$18.95.) *The truth as it is in Jesus* is the subtitle. The book contributes significantly to understanding Baptists and our hot-eyed, narrow-minded, loud-mouthed defense of religious liberty.

We have no book quite like this one. It examines and celebrates the biblical and the historic Baptist understanding of personal truth. We have books that explain Baptist faith and practice, others that consider Baptist history, and still more that examine a particular theological or denominational issue. But no other book undertakes the avowed fourfold purpose (1) of identifying and analyzing the distinctive notion of personal truth, (2) of demonstrating the existence of a classic Baptist heritage of truth, (3) of understanding what it means for Baptists in the classic heritage to equate truth with "the truth that is in Jesus," and (4) of making the case that the story of personal truth (along with the stories of faith and freedom) constitutes the soul — the essential core and the common ground — of Baptist identity and integrity.

I heard a propositionalist testify: "I just cannot believe anything that I cannot understand." Mauldin in this book offers an antidote for that faith-threatening poison. The book and its biblical concept of incarnational truth also saves us from the ditches on either side of the Christian way: *sola scriptura* on one side and *sola fide* on the other.

Mauldin documents and demonstrates that Baptists have always majored on experiential religion informed by the "Holy Word of God" and quickened by God's Spirit. The author says it all when he affirms that "Baptists . . . defend the thesis that truth is someone real, not something true." Jesus said "I am the way, the truth and the life." One who reads this book may discover what a Baptist is.

Baptists are not alone in this dogged focus on personal faith. In 1972, Richard R. Niebuhr probed and provided a theoretical basis for belief, for affection rooted in religious experience. In the afterword of his book, *Experiential Religion*, he writes, "human faith is not so much a sum of answers as it is a way of seeing and acting, and books about faith have first of all to describe what faithful men see and believe to be real."

Mauldin brings us one of those "books about faith" which does just that. John P. Newport in his foreword to the book calls it "a unique and important book." Newport acknowledges that Professor Mauldin's "emphasis on the fact that biblical truth is relational is very important."

In a current journal article Walter B. Shurden hits the same note, but denies that Baptist personalism is privatism or Lone Ranger religion. "To insist," says Shurden "that saving faith is personal not impersonal, relational not ritualistic, direct not indirect, private not corporate has never meant for Baptists that the Christian life is a privatized disengagement from either the church or society." Even Walter Rauschenbush, father of the Social Gospel . . . gave 'experimental religion' as his first reason for being Baptist.

It's *whom* not *what* we believe that makes us Christian. Δ

Clinton condemns jail terms for Iranian Baha'is

President Bill Clinton has condemned Iran's reported sentencing of four Baha'i teachers to prison for instructing other Baha'is about their faith.

In an April 20 statement, Clinton said he is "deeply concerned" by Iran's action. "Imprisoning people for the practice of their religious faith is contrary to the most fundamental international human rights principles," he added.

The four teachers were arrested last fall as part of a crackdown against the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education, an organization that provides college-level instruction to Baha'i youths barred from Iranian schools because of their faith.

Iran's fundamentalist Muslim government considers the Baha'i faith, which grew out of Islam, to be heretical because of its claim of post-Koranic divine revelation and living prophets. Δ

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REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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Book Reviews

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The nation endured utter agony in the wake of the carnage at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo. We are stunned not only by the violence but also by the care with which it was planned. Our hearts are heavy for the victims of the crime and for the families of those who are the alleged perpetrators.



**James
L.
Williamson**

In the aftermath, it is easy to look for simplistic answers to why it occurred and how to make sure it does not happen again. Some would have us answer by forsaking public education and declaring it unsafe for Americans. There are also those who would have us believe that if school-sponsored prayer had not been banned from schools this would not have occurred. So, the argument goes, let's put God back in schools or take our kids out. To do either is not the right answer.

First of all, God has never left those who seek Him in public schools or anywhere else. He has always been there and can be prayed to anytime by those who wish to. A forced, officially sanctioned prayer is still not the antidote to dysfunctional families or the nation's other ills. State-sponsored prayers in public schools still raise the question of to whose God shall we pray? We are a diverse nation religiously, and religious teachings are still best done in homes, churches, synagogues and temples.

To forsake public schools because of violence in society is also the wrong answer. Public education has not created the nation's propensity for violence. Millions of dedicated public school teach-

ers and administrators continue daily to teach children academic knowledge and skills, as well as core values that for many are taught nowhere else. The teacher who was killed at Columbine trying to save others is a good example of the best among America's public school teachers.

While not wishing to diminish at all the tragedy of Littleton, it behooves us to remember that on that same day and at that same time there were thousands of good things going on in America's public schools. There is work for public educators and people of various faiths to do together in the common cause of improving the lot of all children and youth. I doubt that any one institution, whether it be family, school, church or other, can do it alone in our complex world. Clergy, secular counselors, parents, teachers and community leaders are all fulfilling a healing role in Littleton as they did in Jonesboro, Ark., Paducah, Ky., and Pearl, Miss.

Now is the time for people of all faiths to reinvest in public education and in the lives of the 90 percent of America's children and youth who attend them.

They are the real guarantee that incidents like Littleton and Jonesboro will not happen again. We can make this reinvestment requiring personal and community commitments without scaling the wall of separation between church and state. Δ

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