

REPORT

from the Capital

Supporters of church-state separation need to step up efforts, Edwards says

Christians who support the separation of church and state should step up their battle against forces that are eroding that principle, said Rep. Chet Edwards.

In an Oct. 1 speech to a group of Baptists, Edwards, D-Texas, called for Christians who believe that church-state separation is good for both democracy and religion to make their voices heard in the public sphere.

"I've never been more concerned about the principle of church-state separation," Edwards said.

"If we don't ratchet up dramatically our efforts, we're going to lose this fight," he said.

Edwards spoke at the conclusion of a two-day conference titled "Reclaiming an Historic Baptist Principle: Separation of Church and State." The conference, sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee and the Center for Baptist Heritage & Studies, brought about 140 Baptists from around the country to the nation's capital.

Edwards said the religious right is winning both legal and public relations victories in its decades-old battle to erode the wall separating church and state. And the debate has become too polarized, he added, with much of the public thinking all Christians would naturally oppose church-state separation.

"We cannot afford the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State to be the only voices heard in America" supporting strict separation, Edwards said.

Listing a host of congressional and judicial efforts in recent years that he claimed threaten the First Amendment's ban on government promotion of religion, Edwards said religious people need to speak up to change the perception that only "secularists" or people who are "anti-religion" support the principle of strict church-state separation.

Edwards — whose congressional district includes President Bush's ranch outside Crawford, Texas — said Bush and his congressional allies are behind much of the onslaught against religious liberty. While he believes Bush has sincerely good motivations in his efforts to provide government funding to religious schools and charities, Edwards said he believes Bush is sincerely wrong.

"On this issue of church-state separation, I just don't think he [Bush] gets it," Edwards said. "I don't think he understands the first 16 words of the First Amendment."

Edwards said many of his colleagues in Congress tell him privately that they agree with him on important church-state issues but then do not vote with him. Sometimes it's due to ignorance on a particular issue, he said, but "it is an ignorance exacerbated by a fear ... that, as we are running for re-election, we will be perceived as anti-religion."

Edwards said Christians who agree with him on church-state issues should form both grassroots organizations and think-tanks to combat the well-funded and well-organized effort on the other side.

— Robert Marus, Associated Baptist Press



Texans Barbara Baugh and John Jarrett visit with U.S. Rep. Chet Edwards.

Newsletter of the
Baptist Joint Committee

Vol. 58 No. 15

November-December
2003

INSIDE:

- ☐ Reflections 3
- ☐ Growing threats. 4
- ☐ Hollman Report . . 6
- ☐ News 7

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Nashville, Tennessee

JAN 06 2004

BJC directors elect new officers, hear about upcoming court case

Directors of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs elected new officers, adopted a 2004 budget and heard a report on the organization's work — including its involvement with an important upcoming Supreme Court case — during the group's annual meeting Sept. 29-30.

Convening at Washington's First Baptist Church, the directors of the religious liberty watchdog organization adopted a 2004 budget of \$1,063,100 — slightly less than the 2003 budget of \$1,068,000.

Executive Director Brent Walker noted the BJC finished 2002 with a sudden upswing in contributions and significant growth in its number of individual donors. However, he said, "The bad news is that the first eight months of this year have been terrible — like [the difference between] night and day."

revoked the scholarship when officials found out Davey planned to major in theology and business management.

State officials cited a provision in Washington's constitution that prohibits the state from spending any money on religious instruction. Davey sued the state and won in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, where a three-judge panel ruled 2-1 that the Washington constitutional provision, as well as a similar state statute, violated Davey's free exercise of religion under the U.S. Constitution. Washington Gov. Gary Locke appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court.

Hollman said the BJC had joined the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee and the American Federation of Teachers in a friend-of-the-court brief, asking the justices to overturn the 9th Circuit's ruling.

Hollman said the ruling, if upheld, could set a dangerous and wide-ranging precedent for government funding of religious groups. While the Supreme Court has previously ruled that it is permissible for government organizations to provide vouchers or scholarships that can flow indirectly to religious groups, the *Locke* case has the potential to extend that into a finding that states are required to include religious groups in such programs if they already include secular groups.

Referring to the specific ban on state support for religious schools in Washington's constitution and similar provisions in other state constitutions, Hollman said, "The *Locke vs. Davey* case is really a frontal assault on these state constitutional provisions."

In other action, directors elected new BJC officers for 2003-2004.

The new board chairman is Jeffrey Haggarty, a representative from the Progressive National Baptist Convention and executive director/minister of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention. He is a member of Washington's Metropolitan Baptist Church. Haggarty succeeds Reginald McDonough of Virginia.

BJC's new vice chairman is Ray Swatkowski, a representative from the Baptist General Conference and the conference's executive vice president. He lives in Zion, Ill. Swatkowski succeeds Ed Massey of Kentucky.

The new second vice chairman is Glen Howie, who represents the North American Baptist Conference. He is an attorney and also serves as pastor of Mowata Baptist Church in Eunice, La. Howie succeeds Margaret Ann Cowden of Pennsylvania.

The BJC's new secretary is Sue Bennett, representing the Religious Liberty Council. Bennett is the president of Bennett Enterprise in Tulsa, Okla. A member of Southern Hills Baptist Church in Tulsa, Bennett succeeds Richard Bloom of Illinois.

—Robert Marus, Associated Baptist Press



Ray Swatkowski
Vice Chairman



Glen Howie
Second
Vice Chairman



Sue Bennett
Secretary



Outgoing BJC board chairman Reginald McDonough passes the torch to new board chairman Jeffrey Haggarty.

Walker noted that an anemic stock market made the situation worse for income from the organization's endowment funds.

General Counsel Holly Hollman noted several legislative and legal areas that the group was working on to promote the separation of church and state. She also announced the BJC has weighed in on a case the Supreme Court agreed to hear that deals with the use of government funds for religious instruction.

The high court agreed in May to hear arguments in *Locke vs. Davey*. Joshua Davey applied under a program in Washington state that provides college scholarships to students who meet certain academic and financial needs criteria. The scholarships may be spent at any accredited in-state colleges, including religious ones.

Davey was originally awarded the scholarship and elected to spend it at Northwest College, a Seattle-area Bible school affiliated with the Assemblies of God. However, the state

REFLECTIONS



J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

Remembering the saints and pursuing their vision for religious liberty

Joe Underwood was a one-of-a-kind Baptist who died October 15. A former SBC missionary to Brazil and New Mexico pastor, Joe spent much of his final years of retirement fighting for religious liberty – writing op-ed pieces, letters to editors, even a short book. He also encouraged our staff with countless phone calls, emails, letters and beautiful pictures – mostly of flowers. He was a wonderful photographer. During his last days, he took the time to call and say his good-byes and to charge us to keep up the good fight.

Joe's charge was on my mind as we recently mailed most of this column's readers a fund-raising letter asking you to help us make our annual budget.

Time was, the BJC received almost all of its income from denominational bodies; now about 30 percent of our budget needs comes from individuals like you. We appreciate your generous support. I hope you will dig deep this year. It's been a very lean year for us financially.

Many of you support us in other ways. Your encouraging words, your advocacy of our cause, and your prayers may be even more important.

In recent months, we lost other break-the-mold-Baptists who constantly encouraged our work. Bob Alsheimer died on August 20. He was a member of Ravensworth Baptist Church in Annandale, Va., – where BJC staffers Larry Chesser and Holly Hollman are members and Andrew Daugherty serves as part-time minister of youth. Bob and his wife, Nancy, have been avid supporters of the BJC and staunch defenders of religious liberty. They were always ready with an encouraging word on the occasions that I preached at Ravensworth, and they urged other Ravensworth members to be supportive. When adjusted for size of budget and membership, we receive more financial support from Ravensworth than any other church.

Ed McGowen passed away on August 9. Ed defended us with a passionate speech at First Baptist Church – Charleston, S.C., in 1992, when that church was considering whether to withdraw support from the Baptist Joint Committee. During his speech, he suffered a heart attack. Fortunately, he survived. After his recent death, Ed's wife, Casey, discovered his speech manuscript and gave it to her pastor Don Flowers. In his letter to me, Don observed: "Ed McGowen was one who got it. At his death, we've lost a real Baptist." Amen!

Finally, I had the honor of preaching the funeral of Hazel Pendley in my hometown of Tampa, Fla. Hazel passed away October 5, four months shy of her 100th birthday. The mother of my former law firm col-

league, Sandra Kinley, Hazel encouraged me to pursue my ministry calling and affirmed my career choices time and time again.

I honor this "cloud of witnesses" by telling their stories; you can honor them by making memorial gifts in their memory. Some already have. Thanks to each of you and thanks be to God for these saints of God who showed us the way.

In memory of Bob Alsheimer

Jeff and Loretta Amacker
Adrian and Mary Ann Ashley
Sylvia and Gary Campbell
Larry and Nancy Chesser
James and Marilyn Dunn
Mary Ellen Ekblad
Stan Fendley and Melissa Rogers
Steve and Jean Hyde
Edward and Usin Marks
Don and Nancy Moore
David and Joyce Ott
Robert B. Sampson
Holly Hollman and Jay Smith
Randy and Barbara Scott
G. J. and Kay Tarazi
John and Peggy Travis
Brent and Nancy Walker

In memory of Jerry Earney

John and Janet Wilborn
In memory of Ed McGowen
James and Marilyn Dunn
Brent and Nancy Walker
In memory of Hazel Pendley
J. Milton and Betty Blount
Beverley and John Grant
William Reece Smith Jr.

In memory of Jim and Myrtle Perrin

Cliff and Sandy Perrin
In memory of Joe Underwood
Sid Reber

Brent and Nancy Walker
In honor of Walter "Buddy" Shurden
Sherry Shurden Brewer

In honor of James M. Dunn
Margaret Kolb

In honor of Katie Rhode
Robert Rhode

In honor of Melissa Rogers and James M. Dunn
Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

In honor of Mark Wiggs
Earl M. Wiggs Jr. and Patty H. Wiggs

I honor this "cloud of witnesses" by telling their stories; you can honor them by making memorial gifts in their memory. Thanks to each of you and thanks be to God for these saints of God who showed us the way.

THREATS

to religious freedom growing in U.S., speakers say

Under the watchful gaze of Baptist pioneer Roger Williams, speakers at a convocation sponsored by two Baptist organizations sounded notes of serious concern over the status of religious freedom in the United States.

Several speakers noted what they consider serious threats to religious freedom during a Sept. 30-Oct. 1 meeting in Washington, titled "Reclaiming an Historic Baptist Principle: Separation of Church and State."

Most of the convocation's sessions were held at the historic First Baptist Church of Washington, which contains two stained-glass windows devoted to Roger Williams. After getting kicked out of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Williams founded both the colony of Rhode Island and the first Baptist church in the New World.

Speaker after speaker suggested that modern American political events might make Williams wonder what happened to his vision of religious liberty for all and opposition to state enforcement of religious values.

"Events of the past three years confirm that we are in the midst of a very serious re-ordering of church-state law and policies," said Melissa Rogers, who stepped down as the director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life to become a visiting professor at Baptist-related Wake Forest Divinity School.

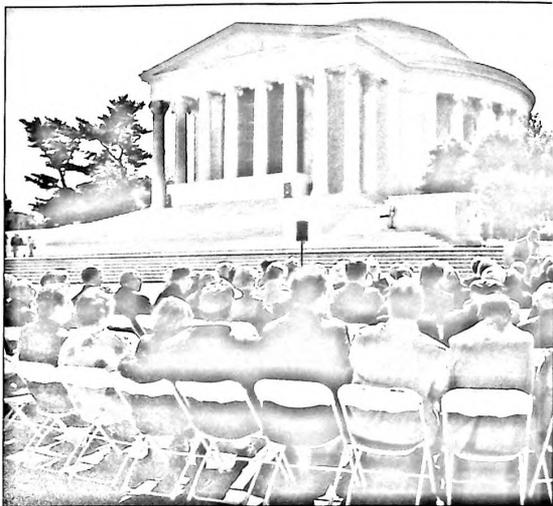
Rogers referred specifically to two cases involving government aid and religious institutions: *Zelman vs. Simmons-Harris* (2002) ruling, and *Mitchell vs. Helms* (2000).

Regarding the *Mitchell* case, she said, "Four justices on the current Supreme Court have made it clear that they would toss out one of the fundamental propositions of church-state constitutional law — the prohibition on the use of direct government subsidies for religious purposes."

Therefore, Rogers added, "We are only one justice away from a ruling Court majority that would uphold this radical departure from traditional constitutional interpretation."

Likewise, Detroit minister Charles G. Adams said the "sacred separation of church and state" is in dire need of defense.

Delivering the convocation's opening address, Adams specifically denounced President Bush's



Convocation crowd at Jefferson Memorial listens to Charles G. Adams

efforts to provide public money to religious institutions — such as parochial schools and church-based drug-treatment programs — to conduct social services. "To mingle government funds with church funds is to entangle the church with government — and control the church by government," he said, speaking on the steps of the Jefferson Memorial.

Adams is pastor of Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, an historically African-American congregation in Detroit. Although Bush has relied heavily on inner-city churches operating social ministries to push his "faith-based initiative," Adams said those churches will regret it in the long run. For instance, he said, accepting government funds inevitably opens a private organization to a whole host of legal regulations and problems.

That, according to Adams, could eventually hurt the effectiveness of the very ministries that inspired the government support in the

first place. "If you want to protect yourself against legal challenges, you're going to have to know more about the federal code than about the holy Bible," he said.

Adams, Rogers and other speakers also argued that Christians who support church-state separation have public relations challenges.

Rogers said that, in a public



Fred Anderson delivering remarks as John Leland

"Someone must be watching and waiting, listening and leading. Someone must be vigilant to maintain what your forebears secured at a

great price. Someone must sit at the front door of our halls of government to remind the people and their elected officials that religious liberty is a right inherent and not a favor granted and to exclude religious opinions from the list of objects of legislation. Someone must be there. Someone ... And my dear Brothers and Sisters, you are that someone!"



discourse on church-state issues that often pits liberal secularists against religious conservatives, the voice of Christians who support separation for theological reasons often gets drowned out.

"We're facing a constant communications battle to adequately convey these ideas to the general public," she said. "Religious liberty is best protected when the government leaves [religion] alone ... We want this freedom because it protects and respects human dignity."

Baptist Joint Committee Executive Director J. Brent Walker lamented the erosion in United States of the principle that government should not directly fund religion.

"The attitude that has accompanied this march down the primrose path of government-funded religion is the misguided notion that religion should be treated the same as, or equal to, other pursuits," he said.

"The idea of religious equality," he added, "demeans religion at every turn and undermines religious freedom. When one 'levels the playing field' for religion, no one should be surprised when, in Melissa Rogers' words, religion gets 'leveled.' Religion is special and different. Treating it as such best preserves religious liberty."

Surveying the international scene, John Sundquist, recently retired executive director of International Ministries of American Baptist Churches USA, said the issues surrounding the separation of church and state are more complex when viewed globally.

"As a mission executive, I regularly hear churches or fellow Baptists rejoice that some mission or missionary they know has been allowed to teach the Christian faith in what we would call 'the public schools' of a country dominated by official atheism or a majority religion," he said. "Yet these very churches and people are deeply bothered, if not frightened, when religious minorities seek similar privileges in our country."

"Baptists have done a great job in sending missionaries to the far corners of the world," he said. "Is it not strange how offended they become when other nations with religions other than ours send missionaries to our shores?"

In his discussion on the beginnings of church-state separation, Baylor religion professor William Brackney said that coming to conclusions about the benefits of the principle has taken many paths.

"Some people come to their convictions as a matter of education like studying a theory or reading a narrative," Brackney said. "Some are nurtured in families or traditions where certain ideas just seem to be genetic. Still others arrive at their convictions due to their experiences. That's us folks. We arrived at many of the principles that we call Baptist through

hard won human experience."

Alf Mapp, eminent scholar and professor emeritus at Old Dominion University, analyzed the meaning and importance of "history" in his presentation on understanding the principle of church-state separation.



Andrew Daugherty portrays Thomas Jefferson

"One of the most senseless expressions that has come to common use in recent years is this one, 'that's history,' Mapp said. "By which they mean it will no longer be significant. It will be in the past. Well, William Faulkner said, 'The past is not dead. It isn't even past'... By the time something has become history it has become significant to be passed down to future generations and its influence is extended from its own generation into the foreseeable ... future."

The meeting was sponsored by the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee and the Richmond, Va., -based Center for Baptist Heritage & Studies.

— Reporting by Robert Marus of Associated Baptist Press and BJC staff

So Far, They Haven't Stopped Us

First Baptist Church, Washington, D.C.
A Sermon by Jim Somerville, Oct. 1, 2003
Acts 5:27-32

Shhh. We have to be quiet. We're only a few blocks away from the White House, you know. And if they knew what we were up to they would probably try to stop us. Because right here in this room, Sunday after Sunday, we do something so radical, so revolutionary, that it threatens the very fabric of the American way of life.

We worship Jesus Christ.

That's right. Week after week we proclaim that Jesus is Lord, which means of course that Caesar is not, that George W. Bush is not, that the U. S. Government is not. You'd think they would shut us down for that kind of insurgent behavior but so far they haven't. Maybe we have them fooled. We come together on Sunday morning dressed like respectable citizens (for the most part). We don't violate the parking regulations (for the most part). We are polite, well-groomed and well-mannered (for the most part). If they sent any of their spies to check up on us they would find us sitting in orderly rows, following a neatly-printed program. There is nothing that smacks of anarchy here. No smell of gunpowder in the air, no talk of insurrection. We are, most of us, citizens of the United States of America, but above that and forever beyond it we are citizens of the Kingdom of God. It's not a secret. We haven't tried to hide it. But they don't seem to take our words and actions as seriously as we do, and for that reason they don't perceive us as a threat, and so far ... they haven't stopped us.

They might if they knew we were actively recruiting for our cause, that we are forever searching for those human hearts where we might plant the flag of the kingdom. But we do our work so slowly, so stealthily,

(continued on page 8)





K. Hollyn Hollman
General Counsel

A bad idea, rolling along

Last Congress Rep. Walter Jones, R-N.C., proposed legislation to create a special right for houses of worship among nonprofit organizations. Under the so-called "Houses of Worship Political Speech Protection Act," houses of worship, despite receiving the favorable tax treatment offered under Section 501(c)(3) of the tax code, would be able to endorse or oppose political candidates in an election. Moreover, such entities could make some financial contributions to campaigns without risking their tax-exempt status.

Among the various flaws in the proposed legislation, opponents noted its conflict with recently passed bipartisan campaign finance reforms, its potential for creating political controversy within congregations and the negative impact electioneering would have on the integrity and independence of churches.

Fortunately, reason prevailed and the bill failed by a vote of 178-239.

While there were several reasons for the failure, I like to think that one of the main reasons was that houses of worship, the ostensible beneficiaries of the bill, did not support it. A number of denominations actively opposed the measure,

working in coalition to correct the misinformation being spread by the bill's proponents.

Unfortunately, defeat did not deter Rep. Jones and others determined to politicize the nation's pulpits. In January, they introduced the revised and renamed "Houses of Worship Free Speech Restoration Act" (H.R. 235). Despite its simpler design, its half-hearted attempt to avoid the money issue, and the new moniker, the bill is still just a bad idea. Its sponsors continue to publicize misleading claims about the "need" for this legislation, saying that current law "muzzles" pastors from talking about moral issues, when in fact current law simply prohibits participation or intervention in a political campaign by tax-exempt organizations.

Moreover, they overstate the support the measure has received from religious entities. Specifically, they continuously publish the claim that the bill "is supported by all Americans across all faiths, regardless of their political or religious affiliations." A quick look at letters signed by religious entities, groups that actually represent houses of worship, discredits that claim. Other

denominational organizations have conspicuously avoided endorsing the Jones bill. A more accurate claim about the bill is that several well-financed, communications-savvy religious right organizations, such as the American Center for Law and Justice, Focus on the Family, and Wall Builders are supporting the bill. With a glossy brochure and a website dedicated to promoting the measure, the proponents show no sign of retreating.

For those waiting to engage in this issue until the threat of passage seems more serious, the time to act is now. The number of co-sponsors of H.R. 235 is steadily growing, inching toward the number of those who voted for the measure in the last Congress. In a marked contrast to proposals that respond to the demands of the grass roots, this bill is being aggressively pushed from the top down as co-sponsors of the measure are targeting pastors to lobby for their support of the bill.

Wait a minute, you say; aren't Members supposed to do the work of the people, answering constituent demands? While that is the way the system usually works, this bill is demonstrating the opposite dynamic. A "Dear Pastor" letter from one of the bill's co-sponsors, enclosing a brochure and asking support for the bill is just a precursor of things to come if the bill passes. Members will have an open invitation and obvious political incentive to seek endorsements from congregations every election cycle.

It is crucial that ministers and church members who value autonomous houses of worship let Members of Congress know that H.R. 235 is not needed, not wanted and not worthy of their vote.

It is crucial that ministers and church members who value autonomous houses of worship let Members of Congress know that H.R. 235 is not needed, not wanted and not worthy of their vote.

Supreme Court agrees to hear Pledge of Allegiance case

In a move that surprised some observers, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed Oct. 14 to hear a case involving the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The court will review a ruling by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, but will do so without the participation of one of the court's most conservative members.

In announcing its intention to hear the case, the Supreme Court noted that it will be considered and decided without the participation of Justice Antonin Scalia. Scalia recused himself presumably

because of questions about his impartiality, stemming from public comments he made in January.

Last year, a three-judge panel of the 9th Circuit declared a

California school district's policy of teacher-led recitation of the pledge a violation of the Constitution's ban on government establishment of religion.

Michael Newdow, an atheist, argued that his rights to raise his then-8-year-old daughter were violated by her suburban Sacramento school district's policy of teacher-led pledge recitation.

In accepting the case Oct. 14, the high court declined to review Newdow's argument that the addition of "under God" is unconstitutional and that the words should be removed from the pledge. However, justices did agree to hear arguments on two other aspects of the case: Whether teacher-led recitation of the pledge was constitutional and whether Newdow had legal standing as a non-custodial parent to file the case.

The case is *Elk Grove Unified School District vs. Newdow*. The court will hear oral arguments in the case in early 2004 and likely will render a decision by the time it ends its 2003-2004 term next summer.

Bush mildly rebukes general over comments about Islam

Ending several days of official silence about the matter, President Bush on Oct. 22 offered a mild rebuke of a high-ranking Pentagon official whose comments on Islam have angered many in Washington and elsewhere.

Army Lt. Gen. William Boykin became a subject of national controversy after news stories released Oct. 15 and 16 revealed he had made a series of comments casting America's struggle against terrorism as a Muslim-versus-Christian holy war.

Boykin, recently named the Pentagon's deputy undersec-

retary for intelligence, made the comments over a two-year period to various evangelical Christian audiences.

Appearing in uniform, he repeatedly described the war against terrorism to these groups as a conflict between a "Christian nation" and radical Islamists.

Boykin's job requires him to work closely with intelligence officers from Muslim countries. His comments resulted in calls from several prominent newspapers, commentators and civil-rights organizations for his removal.

Boykin issued an apology for his statements Oct. 17 and called Oct. 21 for an investigation into the propriety of his comments.

Bush was asked by reporters about Boykin's comments Oct. 22 during his trip to Asia. The president said the subject had come up during his meeting with Muslim leaders from Asian countries. "I said, he [Boykin] didn't reflect my opinion," Bush said. "Look, it just doesn't reflect what the government thinks."

Supreme Court refuses to hear Roy Moore's appeal on monument

The U.S. Supreme Court has dealt what would appear to be the death blow to Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore's legal crusade to display a Ten Commandments monument in a state building.

On Nov. 3 the justices declined, without comment, to hear Moore's appeal of a federal court's ruling against the monument. On Nov. 13, the Alabama Court of the Judiciary voted unanimously to remove Moore from his office as chief justice for violating judicial ethics by openly flouting a higher court's order.

The 5,280-pound granite monument — engraved with a translation of the biblical commandments — was removed from its spot at the center of the Alabama State Judicial Building's rotunda in August, over Moore's objections. Moore had attempted to defy earlier federal court orders to remove the monument, but was overruled by his fellow justices on the Alabama Supreme Court.

In November 2002, U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson declared the monument a violation of the Constitution's ban on government endorsement of religion.

"If the administration's war is really not against Islam, Boykin should be asked to pack his bags. Mr. Bush cannot afford to have people like him playing the final battle between the forces of 'good and evil.' Isn't that [Osama] Bin Laden's job?"

— *Editors of the Daily Times, a Pakistani news outlet in an Oct. 21 editorial.*

"As both lower court decisions clearly and forcefully held, the facts presented an unmistakable constitutional violation. Judge Moore's actions made a mockery of religious freedom. All of us owe a debt to those Alabamians, including clergy and religious leaders, who were unwilling to let a politically popular judge co-opt the Ten Commandments and trivialize faith."

— *K. Hollyn Hollman, BJC general counsel.*

- ☐ Alliance of Baptists
- ☐ American Baptist Churches USA
- ☐ Baptist General Association of Virginia
- ☐ Baptist General Conference
- ☐ Baptist General Convention of Texas
- ☐ Baptist State Convention of North Carolina
- ☐ Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
- ☐ National Baptist Convention of America
- ☐ National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc.
- ☐ National Missionary Baptist Convention
- ☐ North American Baptist Conference
- ☐ Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.
- ☐ Religious Liberty Council
- ☐ Seventh Day Baptist General Conference

... They haven't stopped us (continued from page 5)



Jim Somerville

it's hard to perceive. It takes place through simple acts of love, and long conversations, and steadfast witness, one cup of coffee at a time. It's like a tiny mustard seed growing into a tree or yeast working its way through a lump of dough. If you weren't paying attention you might miss it.

But when a new convert is made we go public. We fill the baptistry with water, dress the candidate in a clean white robe, and then we pull back the red curtain over the altar so that everyone can see. I say a few words about what baptism means, I say a few words about the one who has come, and then — in a solemn moment from which there can be no turning back — I say to her, "Will you confess your faith?" Just as we have rehearsed she takes a deep breath and says, in a voice loud enough to be heard in the back of the room, "Jesus is Lord!" I always cringe at that moment. I almost expect to hear the sound of doors being kicked open, of heavy boots thudding down the center aisle, of rifle bolts being slammed into place. But so far they haven't stopped us. And here — *right here!* — in the nation's capital, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I dip that candidate under the waters of baptism and bring up a brand new citizen of the Kingdom.

We claim this citizenship through baptism; we sustain it through communion. Once a month, sometimes more, we gather around the Lord's table like a family gathering for a meal. We begin by reciting our covenant together, by pledging to live by the truth of this book, to reject the false gods of money, sex, and power, to worship God and have no other, to love our neighbors as ourselves. And then I lift up a loaf of bread and talk about one whose body was broken. I raise a chalice and speak of one whose blood was shed. And then we share those elements among all the believers who are present. We acknowledge our common union and anticipate the heavenly feast. We chew the body of Christ between our teeth, we taste his blood on our tongues, we acknowledge the heart-rending truth that

someone has died for us, and that we needed to be died for. In such moments we remind ourselves that we will not be saved by the Republican Party or the Democratic Party, but only by Jesus Christ. And again, I almost expect to hear the sound of helicopters hovering overhead, the rumble of tanks on 16th Street, the sound of a voice shouting through a loudspeaker, "Come out with your hands up!" But so far they haven't stopped us. And month after month we "do this" in remembrance of him. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 11 whenever we eat that bread and drink that cup we remember the Lord's death "until he comes."

Until he comes.

Which is to say we haven't put our faith in the United States government. As Eugene Peterson says, we believe "the American way of life is doomed to destruction, and that another kingdom is being formed right now in secret to take its place,"¹ that someday "the kingdom of the world" really will become "the kingdom of our Lord and Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." Which makes it all the more miraculous that they haven't stopped us. At least, they haven't stopped us yet. But it can't last, can it? Our worship is public. Anyone can walk in here and see what we're up to. Someone could walk in right now! Someday they might. But until they do, until they stop us, we will keep on doing what we were made to do:

We will worship Jesus Christ.

— Jim Somerville, ©2003

¹ *The Contemplative Pastor*, p. 28. Peterson is joined in this kind of "subversive" thinking by Walter Bruggemann, Anthony Robinson, Martin Copenhaver, William Wilmon, and Stanley Hauerwas, whose writings have contributed to this conversation.

REPORT from the Capital

J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

Larry Chesser
Editor

Jeff Huett
Associate Editor

Lindsay Bergstrom
Design Editor

Report from the Capital (ISSN-0346-6661) is published 10 times each year by the Baptist Joint Committee. For subscription information, please contact the Baptist Joint Committee



Baptist
Joint
Committee

200 Maryland Ave N.E.
Washington, DC 20002-5797

Phone: 202.544.4226
Fax: 202.544.2094
E-mail: bjcpa@bjcpa.org
Website: www.bjcpa.org

*****3-DIGIT 372 S18 P4
BILL SUMNERS
SOUTHERN BAPTIST HIST. LIBRARY & ARCHIVES
901 COMMERCE STREET #400
NASHVILLE TN 37203-3628

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Riverdale, MD
Permit No. 5061