



REPORT

from the Capital

Shurden gives sobering warning on state of religious freedom

Warning “It can happen here,” Baptist historian Walter Shurden told religious liberty advocates June 23 that the principle of religious freedom is threatened as never before in American history.

“But many say, ‘It can’t happen here,’” Shurden said, speaking to many veterans of the 27-year-old fundamentalist takeover that pushed moderates out of the Southern Baptist Convention. “The last time I heard that I was in a hotel lobby in Houston, Texas, in 1979.” (For the full text of Shurden’s speech, see page 4)

Shurden is director of the Center for Baptist Studies at Mercer University in Macon, Ga. He addressed about 550 supporters of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty at a luncheon during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s General Assembly in Atlanta.

During the lunch, Shurden described a sermon at the 1992 general assembly delivered by the late Samuel Proctor, a legendary Baptist theologian and pastor. In it, Proctor listed the litany of cultural achievements that Germany produced between the Reformation and the rise of National Socialism in the 1930s.

“Germany was no hick backcountry. Germany was the theological home of Luther and Schleiermacher. Germany was the intellectual center of many of the great philosophers,” Shurden said, quoting Proctor. “And then [Proctor] kept ticking off names of all the great minds and large souls that shaped modern Germany.”

“And I think I will never forget ... he turned to the side and he raised his hands in the air, he bent his knees, and he came down and he said, ‘And along came a paper hanger!’” Shurden quoted Proctor as saying—a reference to the rise of Adolf Hitler.

Shurden noted that one reason Nazism was able to triumph in Germany was because the church largely acquiesced to it—and many, in fact, began to merge nationalistic and racist teachings with Christianity, forming a movement called the German Christians.

“All pathos and all the passion fell on the first word rather than the second word,” Shurden said. “They were Germans who happened to be Christians, rather than Christians who happened to be Germans, and they proudly flung the swastika across Christ’s altar.”

However, Shurden warned: “They were people like us. We need not demonize them; they were people like us.”

With the caveat that he does not believe any kind of Nazi-like totalitarian regime is imminent in the United States, Shurden nonetheless warned that Americans in general and Baptists in particular should not grow complacent about their freedom.

“I am suggesting ... that there are American Christians for whom the adjective is more important than the noun,” he said. “I am suggesting that some Christian churches in our country have become political temples and that some clergy have ➔



Walter B. Shurden receives the J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award from BJC Executive Director J. Brent Walker at the 2006 Religious Liberty Council luncheon in Atlanta, Ga.

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embraced willingly the title of 'patriot pastors.' I am suggesting that theocrats have an eye on the machinery of the national and state governments, and they make no apology for it."

Shurden gave examples of three reasons why "it can happen here," as he put it: Because of "religious right-wing militancy," "sincere religious ideologues" and "ignorance of our history."

"It can happen here because of Generation Joshua," he said. The name denotes "an effort by Michael Farris—founder of Patrick Henry College—to turn a generation of home-school students into foot soldiers to gain political power in order to subsume everything ... under their right-wing interpretation of the Christian faith," Shurden said.

The school, in Purcellville, Va., was founded to teach the children of home-schooled, conservative evangelical Christians and raise them to become involved in public policy while advocating a "Christian worldview."

Shurden also noted that "by 2004—two years ago—42 of the 100 senators of the United States were given a scorecard of 100 percent by the Christian Coalition," he said. "It can happen here because there are religious ideologues rampant in our country, and they mean business. They are sincere."

He further said that ignorance of American and Baptist history threatens future generations' respect for religious freedom. Shurden referred to a Knight Foundation study that surveyed a large number of U.S. high school students on their views of civil liberties.

"One in three high-school students in this republic say that the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States goes too far in the rights that it guarantees you as a citizen," he said. "Now that last sentence ought to be absolutely horrendous to your ears."

Shurden said the survey also found that one half of students thought newspapers should not be allowed to print whatever they want without first gaining governmental approval.

"This is America's tomorrow speaking, and one third of them want the freedoms of the First Amendment of the Constitution curbed, and one half of them want the government to approve of stories in the newspaper you read."

Shurden said that he has noticed a significant difference in his 50-plus years in ministry in the ways that most Baptist congregations react to a sermon on religious freedom and separation of church and state. Fifty years ago, he said, the average Baptist congregation would yawn at such an old-hat topic.

Today, Shurden said, when a Baptist preacher talks about "authentic separation of church and state" from the pulpit, "people get uneasy" and an "electricity" spreads around the sanctuary.

But, Shurden continued, if a minister climbs in the pulpit and preaches "that the First Amendment has been misinterpreted and carried too far; and if you preach that all religious groups in this country have religious freedom, but that Christianity stands in a privileged religious position because of our history; and if you preach that the

country is going to hell in a handbasket because the judiciary will not acknowledge our Christian symbols; and if you preach that there is a carefully planned 'war on Christians' in our country; and if you preach that our country has always been a Christian country and is losing its moorings ... if that's what you preach ... then sanctuary electricity becomes sanctuary applause.

"It can happen here, because Baptists, of all God's people, have lost our way on separation of church and state," he said. "And that, my friends, is why the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty is so essential to our life today."

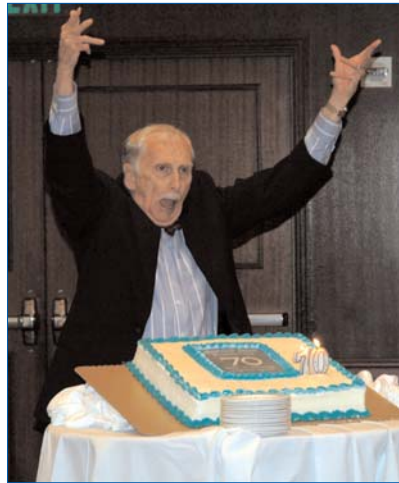
After his speech, BJC Executive Director Brent Walker presented Shurden the organization's J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award.

The luncheon serves as the annual meeting of the Religious Liberty Council, the organization of individuals that donate to the BJC. The group elected two new co-chairpersons: Hal Bass, a professor at Ouachita Baptist University and member of First Baptist Church in Arkadelphia,

Ark.; and Cynthia Holmes, a St. Louis attorney and member of Overland Baptist Church in Overland, Mo. They replace outgoing co-chairpersons Sharon Felton and Reggie McDonough.

Members also elected Henry Green, pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Annapolis, Md., as RLC's secretary.

—Robert Marus, ABP

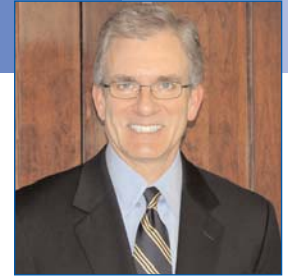


BJC Endowment President James M. Dunn leads singing of 'Happy Birthday' commemorating the BJC's 70th anniversary.



Sharon Felton and Reggie McDonough are presented gifts for their service as co-chairs of the Religious Liberty Council by BJC Executive Director J. Brent Walker.

REFLECTIONS



J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

A cause for celebration

When an editor of a national news magazine and a high ranking American politician get it right when it comes to church and state, it's a cause for celebration—and fodder for a column!

Jon Meacham, author and managing editor of *Newsweek*, has written a much-ballyhooed book titled *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation*. It's a must-read if you have not read it already. Meacham's prose is elegant and his observations trenchant. Rejecting the "tyranny of the present," he traces our history from the founding era with special emphasis on our thinking about the proper relationship between church and state and religion and politics. Although we always have had deep splits and disagreement and bouts with extremism on both sides, Meacham brings a word of good news about America—the "American Gospel"—that "religion shapes the life of the nation without strangling it." He goes on to opine: "Belief in God is central to the country's experience, yet for the broad center, faith is a matter of choice, not coercion and the legacy of the Founding is that the sensible center holds." Meacham concludes that "the balance between the *promise* of the Declaration of Independence, with its evocation of divine origins and destiny, and the *practicalities* of the Constitution, with its checks on extremism, remains perhaps the most brilliant American success." (emphasis added) For Meacham, therefore, the American Gospel tolerates what Benjamin Franklin called a "public religion," without privileging any religious tradition, including Christianity. In the final analysis, the Founders wanted to ensure religious liberty for all, not ensconce the religious views of a few.

Buddy Shurden might be right in his observation that Meacham is a little too sanguine in his confidence that the sensible center will hold (theocratic forces are formidable foes) and a bit too dualistic in his pitting religion against secularism (ignoring an awaking progressive religious agenda). However, Meacham's work, and his public interpretation of it on radio, television and newsprint, sheds much light on the contemporary playing out of our church-state heritage.

In July Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., delivered a speech in Washington, D.C., that may have been, in the estimation of columnist E.J. Dionne, "the most important pronouncement by a Democrat on faith and politics since John F. Kennedy's Houston speech in 1960 declaring his independence from the Vatican." (You may read the speech at www.obama.senate.gov/speech under "Call to Renewal" keynote address.)

Sen. Obama argued forcefully that religious ethics may inform public policy, as long as the "religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values." He calls on both sides of the debate to come together and to accept some ground rules for collaboration. He challenges leaders of the religious right "to understand the critical role that the separation of church and state has played in preserving ... the robustness of our religious practice. ... [T]hat during our founding, it wasn't the atheists ... who were the most effective champions of the First Amendment. It was the persecuted minorities, it was Baptists like John Leland ... who did not want state-sponsored religion hindering their ability to practice their faith Whatever we once were, we are no longer just a Christian nation; we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers. And even if we did have only Christians ... , whose Christianity would we teach in the schools? James Dobson's, or Al Sharpton's? Which passage of Scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus, which suggests slavery is OK and that eating shell fish is abomination? How about Deuteronomy, which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith? Or should we just stick with the Sermon on the Mount—a passage so radical that it's doubtful that our own Defense Department would survive its application?"

Sen. Obama concluded by calling for common sense in reconciling our differences, particularly on Establishment Clause matters. As I also have often argued, Obama says "a sense of proportion should guide those who police the boundaries between church and state." Along with Meacham, Sen. Obama would allow a measure "public religion" or "civil religion," noting that "not every mention of God in public is a breach of the wall of separation. Context matters."

I spend a lot of time criticizing misbegotten views of others on church and state. It feels good to be able to pat on the back two important voices in our national debate who essentially get it right. Mr. Meacham is an Episcopalian; Sen. Obama is a member of the United Church of Christ. But they think and talk in a way that shows a close kinship with Baptists in the Roger Williams-John Leland-Baptist Joint Committee tradition.

A cause for celebration, indeed.

It feels good to be able to pat on the back two important voices in our national debate who essentially get it right.



A Flaming Torch

By Walter B. Shurden

An address presented at the
Religious Liberty Council luncheon
June 23, 2006, in Atlanta, Ga.

My most memorable moment at a meeting of the general Assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship came at the Ft. Worth Convention Center in 1992. Dr. Samuel Proctor, grandson of slaves, brilliant Baptist educator and master of the pulpit was preaching. He was faithfully following the five point preaching pattern of great African American preachers: (1) start low, (2) go slow, (3) get high, (4) strike fire, (5) retire. Dr. Proctor was at the fourth stage: He was striking fire.

In that mesmerizing, rhythmical cadence where tone is so powerful that it almost obscures content, he was reminding us that the Nazi triumph occurred in one of the most enlightened, most theological, most intellectual and most cultural centers of Europe. Germany was no hick backcountry, uncivilized and uneducated. This was the theological home, said Proctor, of Luther and Schleiermacher. This was the cultural home of many of the great musicians of the modern world. This was the philosophical home and intellectual center of critical thought. And Dr. Proctor kept ticking off the names of all the great minds and large souls that had shaped modern Germany. And then Proctor turned to the side of the pulpit, raised his arms above his head, bent his knees, and brought his arms down while he screamed, "And along came a paper hanger! A paper hanger! A paper hanger!" And, as I recall, he sat down.

Dr. Proctor sat down because he knew that we could complete the story. He knew that we knew that with the "paper hanger" came deep, dark things in Germany. These things were so deep and so dark that some would find it impossible to talk about them a half century later. I saw with my own eyes a survivor, a rabbi, go blank one night when he was asked to recall what it was like to try to survive in the concentration camp as a teenager. And these things were so deep and dark that some people in the last half of the 20th century denied that they ever happened. The deepest and the darkest of all these things we call the Holocaust, a deep, deep,

deep darkness for the Jewish people and for all the rest of us.

BLIND MIXING OF CHURCH AND STATE

But we must never forget that there was also great darkness for Christ's Church. That Body of Christ, transcending all principalities and powers, got all tangled up in what was called the "myth of blood and soil." And some, **within** the church, interpreted the myth as light. But it proved to be a very deep darkness. They called it "German Nationalism," but it was really manic patriotism, a knee-jerk devotion to a fourth-rate God, born of fear. And then many of the Christians took off and started calling themselves "**German** Christians." But all the pathos and the passion fell on the first rather than the second word. They were Germans who happened to be Christians rather than Christians who happened to be Germans. They proudly flung swastika across Christ's altar. Good people, Christian people, people like you are, got blinded by the darkness; they were fearful of the light. They no longer knew their real Fuehrer.

Let me be clear at the outset. I am not suggesting that we are on the lip of any kind of political totalitarianism in this country. I don't believe that.

I am suggesting, however, that there are "American Christians" for whom the adjective is more important than the noun.

I am suggesting that some Christian churches in our country have been transformed into political temples and some pastors have embraced the moniker of "patriot pastors."

I am suggesting that devoted theocrats have an eye on the machinery of national and state governments, and that they make no apology for it.

And I am suggesting that a skewed reading of our nation's history is sending forth armies of buck privates scurrying to wreck Jefferson's wall.

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE

But many blithely say, "It can't happen here." The last time I heard that was in a hotel lobby in Houston, Texas, in 1979, after the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention when the fundamentalists began their complete takeover of the SBC.

"But we have a Constitution that makes things clear," so it cannot happen here.

"We have a Bill of Rights and the First Amendment that make things even clearer."

"Our national pluralism will not permit it to happen here."

And in an otherwise beautiful and provocative book, *American Gospel*, Jon Meacham optimistically forecasts that it cannot happen here because of the existence of a sane middle in American life that will not permit it to happen here.¹

IT CAN HAPPEN HERE

Let me tell you why I believe it can happen here, this idolatrous mixing of church and state.

It can happen here because "Generation Joshua" is loose in our country. Have you heard of "Generation Joshua?" It is an effort by Michael Farris, founder of Patrick Henry College, to turn Christian, home-schooled students into political foot soldiers to gain political power in order to subsume everything—entertainment, law, government and education—under their right wing version of Christianity. Like Joshua of the Hebrew Bible, Generation Joshua's job is to possess the land, to conquer the land, or, in the words of the religious right, "to take back the land." And, according to Michael Farris, in the spring semester of 2004 Patrick Henry College had more interns in the White House than any other college in the nation.² **It can happen here because of a religious, right-wing militancy.**

It can happen here because by 2004 the Christian Coalition gave 42 out of 100 United States senators a rating of 100 percent. More than half of the senators received ratings of 83 percent by the militant Christian Coalition. **It can happen here because sincere religious ideologues are rampant in our country, and they mean business.**

It can happen here because a recent survey of 100,000 high school students in America concluded that one out of three students believes that the First Amendment goes TOO FAR in the rights it guarantees! That last sentence ought to be absolutely horrendous to your ears. In fact, that sentence reminds me of a phone call we got about 12:30 one night when we were living in Louisville, Ky. The call was from Wayne Dehoney, pastor of Walnut Street Baptist Church in the city. He said, "Walter, this is Wayne Dehoney, I just received a call from Cullman, Ala., and Grady Nutt was killed in a plane crash tonight. I knew that you were close friends, so I am calling to tell you so that you can go be with his wife." It was my first and only death notice in the middle of the night. I remember saying in stunned shock and disbelief, "Wayne, you are going to have to say that again." He said, "I understand." And then, with all those years of pastoral care under his belt, he slowly said once more, "I received a call from Cullman, Ala., and Grady Nutt was killed in an airplane crash tonight."

I do not trivialize my dear friend Grady Nutt's death by saying to you that, if you hear it carefully, the sentence about the high school students and the First Amendment has all the tone and sound of a death announcement in the middle of the night about someone you love. So I want to repeat it, slowly, so that it will sink in: ONE IN THREE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THIS REPUBLIC SAYS THAT THE FIRST AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITU-

TION OF THE UNITED STATES GOES TOO FAR IN THE RIGHTS IT GUARANTEES TO YOU AS A CITIZEN!

The survey did not end there, however. It contained more surprises. More shocking still, only one half of the students surveyed said that a newspaper should be allowed to publish freely without government approval of stories.³

My friends, we are talking about my grandchildren's future here! This is America's tomorrow speaking! One third of them want the freedoms of the First Amendment curbed. And one half of them want newspapers to secure government approval for their stories! These are astonishing and inconceivable attitudes for high school students in the United States of America. This survey is a terrible, scary phone call in the middle of the night about what has happened and what is happening in our nation. **It can happen here because of ignorance of our history.**

And the situation differs little among many in our Baptist denomination. I am 69 years old. I have been in the ministry since I was 18 years old. The math is easy. Eighteen from 69 is a half century plus. For a full half century now, I have been roaming the Baptist yard, mostly in the white Baptist yard of the South to be sure, loving and being loved by Baptist people, observing Baptist practices and preaching and celebrating with them the principles for which they have stood.

And here's the truth if I have ever told it: When I entered the Baptist ministry as a youngster in 1955, and for at least 30 years afterward, if you preached a sermon in a Baptist church on the separation of church and state and religious liberty or freedom of conscience, you would have them snoring in their pews in a matter of minutes! The benediction became wake-up time. All of that "freedom stuff" enshrined in the First Amendment was old hat to Baptist folk who had been to Baptist Training Union and studied just a tad of the Baptist heritage.

But not today! Today you preach a sermon on absolute religious liberty for **all** people ... preach a sermon on the real implications of genuine separation of church and state ... preach a sermon on freedom of conscience and freedom of the press, and you will begin to feel "sanctuary electricity." "Sanctuary electricity" is when the preacher viscerally knows that the right button has just been hit. Negative energy begins to flow in the room, and it showers the pulpit.

But to the contrary,

- if you preach a sermon in many Baptist churches today and say, so as to reinforce their prejudices, that the phrase "separation of church and state" is not in the Constitution, and
- if you preach that the First Amendment has been misinterpreted and taken too far, and
- if you preach that all religious groups may have freedom in this country but Christianity stands in an historically privileged position in the eyes of the government, and
- if you preach that our nation is going to hell in a handbasket because of a judiciary that does not acknowledge our Christian values and symbols, and
- if you say that there is a methodical and carefully designed war on Christians in American society, and
- if you preach that this country has always been a Christian nation but is now losing its moorings, . . .
- if that's what you tell them at 11 on Sunday morning, sanctuary electricity will become sanctuary applause!

It can happen here because many Baptists, of all God's people, have lost their way. ⇨

WHY WE MUST HAVE THE BJC

And that, my friends, is why the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty is essential to our life together. The BJC is one year older than I.

So all of my life, the BJC has been telling us that one of the ways in which we love God is to “do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” One of the ways we love God is to defend fair play and equality in American religious life, says the BJC.

All of my life the BJC has been helping the Kingdom of God to gain ground by trying to convince churches that they are stronger on their own than when leaning on Caesar.

All of my life the BJC has passionately reminded Baptists of a noble heritage that celebrates rather than emasculates separation of church and state.

All of my life the BJC has been preaching what Baptists have preached from their beginning: **freedom of conscience is God’s will for creation!**

A FLAMING TORCH

The biblical image that comes to me when I think of the BJC is that Flaming Sword that God fixed on that wall in Genesis 3. I like to think of the BJC, not as a sword, a weapon of war, but as a kind of Flaming Torch, a Flaming Torch for Freedom and Liberty. This Flaming Torch is positioned on the Wall of Separation, guarding the way to the garden of religious freedom and to the tree of separation of church and state. I am willing even to allegorize the cherubim, those heavenly messengers who helped keep an eye on those who would chip away at the wall. I’ve named the cherubs! I call them J.M. Dawson; Emmanuel Carlson; James E. Wood, Jr.; James M. Dunn; and J. Brent Walker. And other cherubim, staff members of the BJC, worked the wall with them, keeping an eye out for transgressors.

I MEASURE MY WORDS WHEN I SAY THAT I believe with all my heart and soul that one of the most important religious organizations in this republic is the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. One of the reasons I have always admired the BJC is its ecumenical nature. The BJC is not simply a Baptist thing. The BJC is a human thing. It does not matter whether you are Baptist or Buddhist, Methodist or Muslim, Assembly of God or atheist, the BJC is a flaming torch guarding God-given freedoms for your children and grandchildren. I wish you could have heard Rabbi David Saperstein this past spring at Mercer University talk about what the BJC has meant to the Jewish people in this country.

And I sincerely believe that the BJC is needed more today than at any time in its history. MORE THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE ITS FOUNDING! It started in 1936, but it is needed more today than in 1936 or 1946 or 1956 or 1966 or any other decade!

No battle stays won! If we don’t keep a sickle in our hands the garden of freedom will be overtaken by the weeds of religious discrimination. The BJC is our sickle for beating back the weeds of encroachment of church on state and state on church.

I think of the BJC this way. Every time Brent Walker answers the phone at the BJC and helps someone understand the arcane issues of church and state, he has just answered the phone for me—and you!

Every time Holly Hollman or Brent Walker or any other staff member writes an article to clarify the weighty issues of politics and piety, they have just written that article for me—and for you!

Every time I have watched James Dunn and Brent Walker testify on television before a congressional hearing on issues of separation

of church and state, I have thought that they testified for me—and you!

And now the BJC is in a campaign to build a Center for Religious Liberty in Washington, D.C., on Capitol Hill. Candidly, I have come today, out of a deep belief in the ministry of the BJC, to ask you to help to do two things to help build this needed Center.

First, make a personal gift. Every one of us in this room has a church or an educational institution or a ministry of some kind that demands our full attention and most of our money. I understand our loyalties to those ministries. But my friends, we have only one Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. I implore you to rededicate yourselves to religious freedom and the separation of religion and government and the mission of the BJC. I ask you to join Kay and me in helping to build a Center for Religious Liberty in the most powerful political city on the planet. Do something great big for your children and grandchildren! Leave part of your money to the BJC!

Second, each of us here knows people who need a place to park their money for the the Kingdom of God. Make a contact on behalf of the BJC. Give Brent Walker their names. The BJC needs what you can do, but it also needs you to put it in touch with people who can do more than you can do.

Back several years ago, when “Honk if you love Jesus” was on every other car bumper in North America, I saw a beat up ole car with several different colors of paint on it huffing and puffing down the interstate. It appeared to be a wreckaholic! But on the bumper was a bright, shiny sticker that said, “If you love Jesus, push!”

Would you, please? PUSH for the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty!

¹ Jon Meacham, *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2006). This is an inspiring book that may be the key to countering the religious right-wing on issues of church and state. But I am uneasy with Meacham at two points. One, he fails to understand that the argument is not simply between the religious right and the secular left. Many religious people and religious organizations oppose the strategies and goals of the religious right. Two, basing his argument on “it has never happened here,” he appears a bit too optimistic that the center will hold for the future.

² See Michael Farris, *The Joshua Generation* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005) 158. I was introduced to “Generation Joshua” by Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006). Goldberg’s book is packed with information about the massive network of the religious right. In addition to Goldberg, I also recommend Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values: America’s Moral Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), especially chapter six, “The Entwinning of Church and State,” and Rabbi James Rubin, *The Baptizing of America: The Religious Right’s Plans for the Rest of Us* (New York: Thunder Mouth Press, 2006).

³ See “First Amendment No Big Deal, Students Say,” accessed on 15 June 2006 at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6888837/>.



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Karen Wood
Waco, Texas

A confession: Summer Vacation Bible Schools led me to a life of crime

When I was a little girl, I went every summer to Southern Baptist Vacation Bible Schools across the Texas South. There, I first learned to pledge allegiance to the American and Christian flags. The pledges came during opening assemblies before we broke up into groups to do whatever it was little ones do during Vacation Bible Schools.

Truthfully, I don't recall much about the "whatever it was" part. I'm sure it was helpful, meaningful and developmental with regard to leading me down the path to eternal salvation of my sinful soul. I suppose I didn't master "whatever it was" very well. Because every year, I had to go again.

But I do remember some things about those opening assemblies. We started out offering up allegiances—holding our hands over our hearts and reciting pledges to both flags. I never did get the words straight to the pledge for the Christian flag. I got flabbergasted by that flag.

I seem to recall pledging allegiance to the Bible, too, but for the life of me (or maybe the soul of me), I can't remember. But it seems the Bible made it in there somewhere, either before, after, or in between the flags.

I didn't think much about all that pledging at the time. It was just something one did if one were to play along and follow the leader. But since then, times have changed. And along with them, my attitude. If they handed out grades today, I'm pretty sure I'd flunk Baptist Vacation Bible School.

Because I don't do it any more.

I don't hold my hand over my heart. I don't recite. I don't pledge. And I even cringe when I hear the "under God" part.

Handcuff me now. I'm awaitin' the pledge-watching Flag Police. I have my affairs in order. I'm ready to face my fate.

If they'd allow me, first, my day in court, here's what I'd say:

- "They" taught me to pledge allegiance to the U.S. Flag, propped right up there in church, and then the same people taught me how critical it is to keep the state separate from the church.

- "They" taught me to "render unto Caesar" what is Caesar's, and to "render unto God" what is God's, but they also told me stories about how

Jesus got really mad about "money changers" doing their business in the church house. So it seems to me that when you render unto Caesar, you're supposed to do it at Caesar's place, and when you render unto God, you're supposed to do it at God's place.

- "They" taught me my sole allegiance should be to God, so I got mixed up trying to figure out how "sole" could mean anything other than that. If "sole" stretched out to include flags and the Bible, then next thing I know, I might be asked to include the U.S.

Constitution or the Ten Commandments or the National Anthem or "God Bless America" or "Just as I Am" in the definition. The word "sole" kept creeping back and poking me in the heart, right where my hand was supposed to be.

- I really do like flags and feel privileged and humbled to fly one on special days like Memorial Day, or Flag Day, or the Fourth of July. It gives me chills with pride. But I put it on a flagpole slot on my porch column—not in my church. I appreciate what it symbolizes, and I respect and honor and grieve for those who gave their lives for the sake of our republic. But appreciation, respect, honor and grief, to me, don't equal allegiance.

Better stop with my self-defense. If I go further, I'll find myself citing other stuff like prayers at secular sports and other secular events; Ten Commandments on courthouse lawns; governors signing abortion-related legislation into law inside a church building; and other such examples that'll earn me additional punishments by the Flag Police and admonishments from my former Vacation Bible School leaders.

And those are all red flags (pardon the pun) that truly don't deserve my allegiance.

So it seems to me that when you render unto Caesar, you're supposed to do it at Caesar's place, and when you render unto God, you're supposed to do it at God's place.

Karen Wood is a freelance writer from Waco, Texas. A former newspaper writer, she has worked for Baptist institutions in Texas and Alabama as a public relations professional and lobbyist. This article first appeared in the Waco Tribune-Herald.

Bible curriculum in the public schools

By K. Hollyn Hollman

In 1963 the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional a Pennsylvania law requiring public schools to have daily devotional Bible readings and recitation of the Lord's Prayer. The Court noted, however, that "it might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization." *Abington School Dist. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 225 (1963).

Since then there have been many attempts to teach about the Bible or about religion in the public schools, some that have resulted in litigation. There have also been collaborative efforts to produce consensus guidelines for a constitutional approach to teaching about religion in the public schools. Visit the Resources section of the BJC Web site to view "Religion in the Public Schools: A Joint Statement of Current Law," which was endorsed by 30 religious, civil liberties, and educational organizations and largely incorporated into Department of Education guidelines.

A number of debates over Bible curriculum in public schools have been reported in the national media recently. Following a story in April 2005 about the issue in Ector County I.S.D. in Odessa, Texas, the Texas Freedom Network Education Fund (TFN) commissioned a study of a frequently used and aggressively promoted curriculum. TFN's report made headlines, including an August 1 article in the *New York Times*, when it found the curriculum "advocates a narrow sectarian perspective taught with materials plagued by shoddy research, blatant errors and discredited or poorly cited sources." Last fall, a new textbook was released by the Bible Literacy Project entitled *The Bible and Its Influence*. The book takes a very different approach and has expanded the interest in the topic.

The following is a summary of the interest groups and products. Included are the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools and its curriculum, *The Bible in History and Literature*; the Texas Freedom Network; and the Bible Literacy Project, with its curriculum, *The Bible and Its Influence*.

National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools: (www.bibleinschools.net) NCBCPS of Greensboro, N.C., was founded in 1993 by Elizabeth Ridenour, a former commercial real estate broker and paralegal. The group advances a goal of "bringing back Bible curriculum as an educational tool to public schools in all 50 states." Its purpose is to study the Bible as a foundational document of society. NCBCPS claims that 346 U.S. school districts in 37 states have educated 175,000 of their students using the Bible curriculum as a public high school elective. *The Bible in History and Literature* is a teacher's guide. Students use the King James Version of the Bible as their textbook. The 300 page curriculum includes a CD-ROM, student lesson plans and activity ideas. The NCBCPS Board of Directors and the group's advisory board include many prominent religious right figures (many who

work tirelessly to undermine church-state separation), including Steven Crampton, chief counsel for American Family Association's Center for Law and Policy; Dr. D. James Kennedy, head of Coral Ridge Ministries and the Dominionists; and David Barton, head of WallBuilders. It has been endorsed by such organizations as the Christian Coalition, Liberty Counsel, Center For Reclaiming America, Eagle Forum, Concerned Women for America, Family Research Council and Liberty Legal Institute.

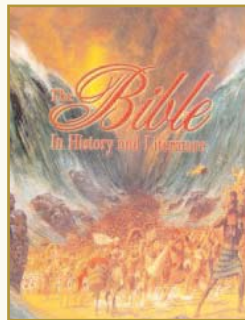
The Texas Freedom Network Report: The Texas Freedom Network is a religious and civil liberties advocacy organization in Austin, Texas, that commissioned a report of the NCBCPS product described above. (www.tfn.org/religious-freedom/biblecurriculum/) Dr. Mark A. Chancey, a Biblical scholar at Southern Methodist University, reviewed the curriculum, and in August 2005, TFN released the report finding the curriculum advances a sectarian perspective and that it "improperly endorses the Bible as the 'Word of God.'" It

found the curriculum "attempts to persuade teachers and students to adopt views of the Bible that are common in some conservative Protestant circles but rejected by most scholars." According to the report, the curriculum also contains shoddy research that distorts history and science, as well as many factual errors. The report found the curriculum did not properly credit sources and includes several pages taken word for word from the Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2001.

The NCBCPS dismissed its critics as a "small group of far left, anti-religion extremists ... desperate to ban the Bible from public schools." And yet,

in September 2005 following the publication and media coverage surrounding the Texas Freedom Network's report, NCBCPS released a revised edition which made many of the recommended changes. In October 2005, Dr. Chancey reviewed these changes and issued another report based on the new version (www.bibleinterpret.com). He concluded that while the new curriculum had been improved, especially regarding editing and citation corrections, the overall tone continues to reflect a right-wing political agenda. The curriculum tends to "Christianize America and Americanize the Bible."

The Bible Literacy Project: (www.bibleliteracy.org) The Bible Literacy Project, Inc. is a "non-partisan, non-profit endeavor to encourage and facilitate the academic study of the Bible in public schools." The Bible Literacy Project believes "that failure to teach about the Bible leaves students in ignorance and cultural illiteracy." The project was founded by Chuck Stetson, a venture capitalist. Stetson, along with Cullen Schippe, a retired vice president at textbook publisher Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, co-edited *The Bible and Its Influence*, a textbook released September 22, 2005. It is an attempt to follow the guidelines set out in "The Bible and Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide," a project that began in 1999 by the Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center to broker an agreement among various diverse educational and religious



organizations regarding the proper way to teach the Bible in public schools.

(www.firstamendmentcenter.org/rel_liberty/public-schools/topic.aspx?topic=bible_in_school)

The Bible and Its Influence has been endorsed by: Robert Alter, Hebrew professor at the University of California, Berkeley; Harold Bloom, Yale University literary critic; Charles Colson, prison evangelist; Ted Haggard, president, National Association of Evangelicals; Marc Stern, attorney with the American Jewish Congress; Dr. Leland Ryken, professor of English, Wheaton College, Ill.; Dr. Charles C. Haynes, The First Amendment Center; and Dr. Amy A. Kass, senior lecturer, University of Chicago.

While *The Bible and Its Influence* has also been criticized, it does not suffer from the same defects as the other textbook. Criticism of the Bible Literacy Project has focused on Stetson's strong ties to the religious right

(Chuck Colson) and the apparent evangelical motives for producing the textbook. Reviewers have found the textbook appeals to a broad religious and political spectrum but goes too far in promoting an entirely positive view of scripture. While it demonstrates religious motivations and use of the Bible in positive social movements, it fails to recognize them against important social advances.

The Bible Literacy Project's product is a very welcome development in the discussion about what can be taught. It directly and tangibly illustrates one approach that would likely be found constitutional. The product is new and will benefit from revisions in response to criticism. Note that any product can be used in an unconstitutional or otherwise improper manner. Teacher training is very important. Some discussion about these texts may lead districts to a more thoughtful approach to religion in the public schools.

Book Review

The Bible and Its Influence

The Bible Literacy Project, 2005, 388 pp.

At the heart of *The Bible and Its Influence*, a new textbook designed for public high school courses in biblical literacy, is a desire to demonstrate the biblical origins inscribed in virtually all of Western culture. The result is a dazzling array of Scriptural reference, from Medieval poetry to contemporary Russian painting to everyday words and phrases (ever wonder where the saying "see the writing on the wall" gets its meaning?). But this goal also determines the textbook's failures, both as an educational tool and in its efforts to avoid religious indoctrination.

The argument for the existence of such a religious text in a public school setting rests on a simple and undeniable truth: reference to biblical themes, characters and phrases are everywhere in culture. How can our students understand the world around them then, the logic goes, without first having a "basic knowledge" of the Bible, a requirement of "every well-educated person?"

Organized essentially in biblical order, the book sets out on two simultaneous tracks: the primary text traces the narrative of Scripture, its characters, themes and stories, while the margins are peppered with inserts and illustrations that introduce some reference to that section of the biblical narrative in culture, history, art or language. In the chapter on "Exodus and the Promised Land," for example, is a page devoted to the obscure Judge Jephthah. In one corner is a Degas painting ("The Daughter of Jephthah"); in another, brief dialogue from *Hamlet* in which Polonius is compared to the Judge.

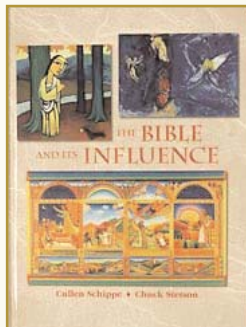
What's missing is any connective tissue. Remarkably, *The Bible and Its Influence* is almost devoid of any discussion of the Bible's influence. The text tells the Bible's story with virtually no reference to the cultural allusions that

punctuate its margins. Proof of the Bible's influence seems, at best, without context (When did Degas paint? Why might he have chosen that scene of sacrifice as a subject? Who is Polonius?); and at worst, trivial. The ubiquity of biblical influence is in evidence everywhere but almost nowhere is it explained or discussed, with certainly no reference to any of the negative, even horrific events in our history that also found influence in Scripture.

The cumulative effect of this approach is also its most unfortunate effect: the entirety of Western culture and history is rendered a mere footnote to the Bible, whose frame is presented as a perspective from which students can best understand anything and everything. While there may be little direct religious instruction, the indirect message is clear and most certainly religious: the Bible is the provider of meaning to all things, and the originating force behind all significant culture. Students who have not yet heard of Degas, and may not yet have read *Hamlet*, after this course would be predisposed to read all cultural text first and foremost for its biblical content. In many ways, spending an entire school year teaching students that interpretive frame might be a more powerful religious indoctrination than any sermon.

For me, the profound positive influence of the Bible is in its message of spiritual deliverance and hope, sacrifice and redemption, and its call to compassionate, just action. Those are things I would prefer to learn in homes and churches, where its significance can be discussed openly, not danced around in the margins.

—Reviewed by Don Byrd, Blog from the Capital
www.BJOnline.org/blog





K. Hollyn Hollman
General Counsel

Graduation prayers should not do indirectly what is prohibited directly

One of my best early professional experiences was working on a successful arbitration in a contract dispute. My client was seeking to enforce a provision that prohibited the other party from taking some business action unless he paid my client. I'll spare you the document-reviewing, witness-interviewing, hours-billing details. The case was fun because it turned on a very satisfying rule of contract law: You

cannot do indirectly what the contract forbids you to do directly. It is a rule that protects fairness by protecting the essence of the agreement.

That rule came to mind with this year's crop of graduation questions. I was repeatedly asked if graduation prayer was OK, so long as students do the praying. Most callers know the Supreme Court's holding that the

Establishment Clause was violated by the clergy-led graduation prayer in *Lee v. Weisman* (1992). The Court has not decided a case involving student-led prayer at graduation, but the *Santa Fe v. Doe* (2000) decision on prayer at football games by an elected student chaplain dispelled the notion that if a prayer comes from a student, there is no problem. Where, for example, the school provides the microphone, invites the audience and defines a selection procedure that ensures a majoritarian outcome on a matter of religious expression, the constitutional problem remains. Still, as the Court itself has noted, its jurisprudence in this area "is of necessity one of line-drawing."

The two widely publicized graduation incidents this year involved religious speech by students. While factually and legally distinct, both appear to miss the essence of the rule prohibiting graduation prayer. In one Kentucky town, a crowd of students upset by a court order requiring the removal of prayer from scheduled graduation exercises stood during the ceremony and recited the Lord's Prayer. While the school may have had a sticky disciplinary issue on its hands, it probably avoided any constitutional violation. The students ably, though perhaps not wisely, demonstrated they could pray voluntarily, without the school scheduling it or directing them.

In a Nevada school district, school officials cut short an address by a valedictorian who veered from her school-approved text to give a more elaborate Christian testimony. On review of the student's draft speech, school officials had reportedly deleted six of

her 12 references to God. The student had agreed to comply. On graduation day, however, she attempted to use her time in the spotlight to give the original version of her speech. While the speech ended abruptly, the story received extended attention in the news and Internet chat rooms.

No doubt the students involved in these cases would claim free speech rights and discount the impact on those who don't share their perspective. They would argue, quite persuasively, that they did not coerce participation in religious exercises the same way a formal invocation might. Appeals to free speech, however, only go so far. A graduation stage is not what the law regards as a traditional free speech forum. School officials will typically set the agenda and control the content of graduation ceremonies. In any event, these incidents disregard significant religious rights and values that lie at the essence of the graduation prayer ruling. At a highly regulated school event—this one marking an achievement of singular importance to students and their families—no student should be made to feel like an outsider. Protecting religious freedom requires guarding rights of conscience and avoiding the use of government to promote religion.

By design, the First Amendment protects speech and religion differently. As Justice Anthony Kennedy noted in *Lee*, speech is protected by insuring its full expression, but religion is protected by "a specific prohibition on forms of state intervention in religious affairs, with no precise counterpart in the speech provisions." The explanation for this difference lies in the lessons of history that inspired the Establishment Clause—lessons that protect freedom of conscience and ensure religious faith is real, not imposed.

It is quite likely that boundary-testing graduation cases will continue to emerge; one may eventually reach the Supreme Court. Fortunately, the law reaches beyond formalism, and schools will not be allowed to simply substitute a student for a school official—doing indirectly what is prohibited directly. Many school districts recognize that a moment of silence or private baccalaureate service is a better vehicle for those who want to mark graduation with prayer. During graduation ceremonies, communities are better served when schools and students promote the essence, and not just the letter, of the religion clauses. After all, the rule protects not only the objector or dissenting nonbeliever, but religion itself.

During graduation ceremonies, communities are better served when schools and students promote the essence, and not just the letter, of the religion clauses.

Fewer Americans think government should promote 'moral values'

The number of Americans who believe the federal government should promote "moral values" has dropped significantly in the past 10 years, according to a recent Gallup poll.

In 1996, 60 percent of Americans thought the government should promote moral values, but that number fell to 48 percent in 2006.

"Moral values" are not defined in the poll. So-called "values voters" emerged after the 2004 elections when exit polls found that "moral values" ranked highest among voters' concerns.

The change appears to be a "fairly recent phenomenon," according to the Gallup News Service. In September 2005, half of Americans said the government should promote "traditional values" and 47 percent said it should not favor any values.

Prior to that, there had been roughly a 10-point margin in favor of promoting "traditional values," according to Gallup.

The poll was conducted by telephone interviews of a national sample of 1,002 adults. The maximum sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

—RNS

House passes bill to strip courts of ability to hear pledge cases

Angering civil libertarians and supporters of church-state separation, the House of Representatives voted July 19 to strip the federal courts of the ability to decide cases involving the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools.

The so-called "Pledge Protection Act" passed on a vote of 260-167. It echoed a similar bill the House passed by a similar margin in 2004 -- the last national election year.

The measure is one of many "court-stripping" bills that House Republicans have pushed in recent years. The Senate did not consider the 2004 bill and is not expected to consider the latest version.

Religious right groups have claimed the bill is necessary to keep the words "under God" from being removed from the pledge. Although they were not part of the original 1892 version of the oath, Congress added them in 1954 as an act of anti-communism.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals originally ordered the words removed from the pledge in 2002 and said their recitation in public schools violates the First Amendment's guarantees for religious freedom. After a public backlash, the appeals later backtracked on the removal of the words but maintained their ruling that public-school teachers should not lead students in reciting the oath.

The Supreme Court overturned that decision.

But conservatives have said the pledge is still at risk from lawsuits like the one that inspired the 9th Circuit decision. The bill relies on a hotly debated section of the Constitution that supporters say allows Congress to remove federal courts' jurisdiction over any matter it

chooses.

Many legal experts have debated that conclusion, saying a removal of the federal courts' power to adjudicate civil-rights cases would violate the Constitution's equal-protection and due-process provisions.

Civil liberties groups blasted the House for passing the bill. The head of Americans United for Separation of Church and State called it "a disgraceful measure that jeopardizes the rights of religious minorities."

Meanwhile, the head of the conservative Family Research Council said "the threat from crusading atheists and activist judges will not cease until the Pledge Protection Act is signed into law."

The bill is H.R. 2389.

—ABP

Controversial San Diego cross gets reprieve from Supreme Court

A controversial cross will stay high atop a hill in a San Diego park at least until a federal appeals panel determines its fate, thanks to a Supreme Court justice.

With a special order on the evening July 7, Justice Anthony Kennedy halted enforcement of a lower court's edict that the Mount Soledad cross be removed from the spot where it has stood since 1954. Earlier in the week he had temporarily granted cross supporters' request to delay the upcoming deadline while he considered the application's merits.

The 29-foot-high monument, located prominently at the crest of an 800-foot hill in a city-owned park, has been at the center of a legal dispute for more than 15 years.

In May, U.S. District Judge Gordon Thompson issued the latest in a string of rulings against the cross, claiming it violates the California Constitution's ban on government endorsement of religion. He gave the city 90 days to remove the monument—or begin facing daily \$5,000 fines.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals will consider the case in October, but had denied cross supporters' request to delay enforcement of Thompson's order until then.

Kennedy issued the ruling because he is the justice assigned to hear emergency requests from the 9th Circuit's boundaries while the Supreme Court, which ended its 2005-2006 term June 29, is in recess.

In an opinion explaining his ruling—rare in such cases—Kennedy said the case's circumstances "support preserving the status quo while the city's appeal proceeds. Compared to the irreparable harm of altering the memorial and removing the cross, the harm in a brief delay pending the court of appeals' expedited consideration of the case seems slight."

Kennedy also noted recent actions—a move by Congress to designate the monument a federal memorial and a 2005 decision by San Diego voters to transfer the property to the federal government—as making it "substantially more likely" that the federal Supreme Court would eventually agree to consider the issues in the case. The high court has denied appeals to hear the litigation at previous stages.

—ABP

Baptist Joint Committee
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- Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
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- 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

BJC announces essay contest winners

The Baptist Joint Committee has announced the winners of the 2006 Religious Liberty Essay Contest, sponsored by the Religious Liberty Council.

The essay contest was established to engage Baptist high school juniors and seniors in church-state issues and to generate student interest from a diverse cross-section of the BJC's supporting bodies.

This year's topic was "Why the separation of church and state is necessary to ensure religious liberty for all."

Seventeen students from 14 different states submitted essays. They hail from churches affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Alliance of Baptists, American Baptist Churches U.S.A., National Baptist Convention U.S.A., and the Southern Baptist Convention.

A panel of judges issued scores based on essay content and writing skills. One judge commented that it is "heartening to read so many essays by young persons who are knowledgeable and articulate about religious liberty and so passionate about its importance." Another judge wrote that "it is encouraging to see that young adults understand the importance of the separation of church and state and that its historic position is being challenged by several of our current administration's initiatives."

The third-place winner, with a \$100 cash

prize, is Collin Kent of Tulsa, Okla. His essay is titled "With Religious Liberty and Justice for All." Kent is a junior at Booker T. Washington High School and is a member of Southern Hills Baptist Church.

Katherine Thompson of Ames, Iowa, is the second-place winner. She will receive a \$500 cash prize for her essay titled "Preserving the 'Hedge of Separation.'" Thompson recently graduated from Ames High School and will begin attending Harvard University in the fall to study history and political science. She is a member of First Baptist Church of Ames and is the daughter of Michael and Jan Thompson.

The grand prize winner is James Gorsuch of Arden, N.C., with an essay titled "The Wall of Separation: Its Distinguished Past and Questionable Future." Gorsuch will receive a \$1,000 cash prize and a trip to Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the BJC board meeting on Oct. 2. Gorsuch graduated in June from West Henderson High School in Hendersonville, N.C. He will attend Elon University in the fall as the recipient of the Kenan Honors Fellow Scholarship. He is a member of First Baptist Church of Asheville and is the son of Jeff and Brenda Gorsuch.

Gorsuch's essay will be printed in a forthcoming issue of *Report from the Capital*.



REPORT from the Capital

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