

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

BJC Magazine

Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis shares
a call to fierce freedom

HOLLY HOLLMAN explores
the Supreme Court
foster care decision

AMANDA TYLER on
moving faith freedom forward



Moving faith freedom forward

BJC celebrates our 85th anniversary in 2021. We're focused on moving faith freedom forward as we continue the work set before us: standing for everyone's faith freedom and reimagining our work at new intersections, including a continued focus on the connection between religious freedom and racial justice.

These pages provide highlights of recent programs and a look at the work we're doing to expand our vision of freedom and to **LISTEN AND LEARN FROM DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES**. Join us as we move faith freedom forward, together.

Amanda Tyler invites everyone to join BJC in **MOVING FAITH FREEDOM FORWARD**, as we celebrate BJC's 85th anniversary and look forward to what BJC can be at our centennial in 2036.

The Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis is calling the church to reconsider what it could look like if we focused on anti-racism work. Read more about her **FIERCE FREEDOM** presentation on pages 6-9.

You can see highlights of BJC's past decade and how we are marking our anniversary with renewed energy on pages 10-13.

We're learning from **VOICES OF BLACK SCHOLARS**. This year's Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State featured four leaders sharing research, experiences and wisdom on how religious freedom has been white too long. Learn more on pages 14-17, including how you can access a discussion guide to lead conversations in your community.

We're listening to **VOICES OF ASIAN AMERICAN FAITH FREEDOM**. Read a few excerpts from live conversations hosted throughout the month of May on pages 19-22, and access a discussion guide for further conversation.

We're highlighting **NATIVE AMERICAN VOICES**. On page 25, Chairman Terry Rambler of the San Carlos Apache Tribe shares about sacred land that is under threat.

Join us in these pages and beyond as we find new ways to move faith freedom forward and focus on becoming the organization we want to be.

New resources in the fight against Christian nationalism

"Responding to Christian Nationalism" is a new guide for church groups looking to dive deeper into the troubling merging of Christian and American identities, complete with videos and Scripture references. You can access the resources at ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org.

Be sure you are following BJC on social media and receiving our emails (BJCOnline.org/subscribe) to be notified as we release new resources throughout the year.

And, if you are a Christian concerned about the dangers of Christian nationalism, add your name to the growing list of people across the country taking a stand against this dangerous ideology by visiting the website and sharing the statement with others in your community.



REFLECTIONS

Our next chapter

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

This summer, we at BJC celebrated Fierce Freedom with a virtual program broadcast live on June 18. We didn't read from the same script or speak from the same location. We bore witness to how there is no "one" way to talk about religious freedom. Instead, what it means to be free is intensely personal to our experience. We reveled in our diverse experiences and perspectives, and we were inspired by how fiercely all of us live out our freedom.

And as we celebrate and reflect on Baptist Joint Committee's 85 years of advocating for faith freedom for all, we confess and acknowledge that our table has not always been an inclusive place where everyone has been welcomed or made to feel at home. Nor do we claim that one program or a year's intentional focus can include every perspective. The call for inclusion is a continuous process and orientation — it's not a destination that we have reached.

Fierce Freedom is a part of a larger effort that we at BJC have undertaken to tell this bold truth: religious freedom has been white too long. We are exploring how our American conceptions of religious freedom have been limited by an understanding that centers the white experience to the exclusion of others. For much more on this topic from four scholars, I highly recommend this year's Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State (see pages 14-17).

BJC is marking our 85th anniversary by moving faith freedom forward. We sense that 2021 is a pivotal moment in our world and in our work. The past 15 months of global health pandemic and global activism to address racism and structural inequalities have changed us all. We cannot — we will not — return to a former way of doing things.

How important it is — right now, in this fragile and fleeting time — to protect freedom and to do it fiercely. Our advocacy — in Congress, in the courts, in the streets, on social media, in our houses of worship and community gathering places — must

change with our times.

What changes do we want to bring about? How can we expand our understanding of faith freedom, decentering the white experience and making space for all perspectives so we can strengthen our understanding of and advocacy for faith freedom? How do we reimagine our mission at the intersection of religious freedom and racial justice? How do we expand our circle of supporters and of influence as we dismantle the myth of the United States as a so-called "Christian nation" and in its place cultivate a faith freedom nation?

These are the questions that are animating our work and our vision as we celebrate our 85th anniversary and anticipate what BJC will be when we celebrate our centennial in 2036. My dream is that our organization will be more inclusive, our understanding of faith freedom will be more expansive, and our circle will be wider than it is today. And we want you to be a part of our BJC community as we explore these topics and learn from one another to even more fiercely advocate for freedom in the years to come.

Will you join us on this exploration? This year, we are moving faith freedom forward as we have launched BJC's Project on Race and Religious Freedom, with a goal of raising \$85,000 to seed this work. You can celebrate our 85th year with a special gift of \$85 this summer. Your donation allows us to engage with and learn from experts from diverse backgrounds. Your gift will help us create and produce materials and training for churches, educators and student groups. Your support will go to developing digital resources that you can share with people in your networks to discuss the intersection of race and religious freedom.

Moving faith freedom forward over these next 15 years will take all of us working together, drawing on our personal experiences, sharing our unique perspectives, and listening to and learning from each other as equals. I hope you will join us for this next phase of our shared life as BJC.





Supreme Court rules Philadelphia cannot require Catholic Social Services to certify same-sex couples for foster placement under its contract

*The majority in *Fulton v. Philadelphia* declines to issue broader ruling*

The U.S. Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision in *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia* on June 17, siding with Catholic Social Services (CSS) in their suit over the city's requirement that as a foster care agency they must certify prospective foster families without discriminating against same-sex couples. The Court agreed with CSS that the city's requirement violates their religious liberty rights under the First Amendment by forcing them to choose between their long-standing religious mission of providing homes for foster children and violating their religious beliefs regarding marriage by certifying same-sex couples.

A unanimous decision in a case at the intersection of religious liberty and LGBT rights was entirely unexpected, but Chief Justice John Roberts, who authored the opinion, focused the Court on a specific fact in this case — namely, language in the city of Philadelphia's contract that grants the city broad discretion to issue exemptions to the nondiscrimination requirement. The government, the Court reasoned, cannot deny a religious exemption while exemptions for other reasons are available.

Here is an excerpt from the opinion:

The creation of a formal mechanism for granting exceptions renders a policy not generally applicable, regardless whether any exceptions have been given, because it “invite[s]” the government to decide which reasons for not complying with the policy are worthy of solicitude—here, at the Commissioner’s “sole discretion.” ...

That leaves the interest of the City in the equal treatment of prospective foster parents and foster children. We do not doubt that this interest is a weighty one, for “[o]ur society has come to the recognition that gay persons and gay couples cannot be treated as social outcasts or as inferior in dignity and worth.” On the facts of this case, however, this interest cannot justify denying CSS an exception for its religious exercise. The creation of a system of exceptions under the contract undermines the City’s contention that its nondiscrimination policies can brook no departures. The City offers no compelling reason why it has a particular interest in denying an exception to CSS while making them available to others.

Some justices agreed with the outcome but would have ruled more broadly. Justice Samuel Alito, joined by Justices Clarence

Thomas and Neil Gorsuch, complained about Chief Justice Roberts’ narrow focus on the contractual provision, writing that the city could get around the decision by eliminating the never-used exemption power. “If it does that, then, voilà, today’s decision will vanish—and the parties will be back where they started,” they wrote.

In a statement, BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler noted the narrow nature of the ruling.

“The majority found that the city of Philadelphia’s nondiscrimination policy was not ‘generally applicable,’ pointing to a contractual provision that allows the prospect of a government official granting exceptions,” she said, noting the surprising nature of the approach because there was no evidence that the city had ever granted an exception or that CSS asked for one.

“The Court’s decision does not require religious exemptions in all future cases involving government contracts and nondiscrimination policies. That is a good thing because nondiscrimination provisions often protect religious liberty in government services. It is disappointing that the Court rejected the city’s compelling interest in the equal treatment of prospective foster parents and foster children, particularly in the context of government contracts voluntarily entered into by religious contractors,” Tyler said.

A majority of the *Fulton* Court also declined to overrule *Employment Division v. Smith*. That controversial 30-year-old decision held that government action that burdens religious exercise does not have to clear the high standard of strict scrutiny under the First Amendment so long as it is does not target religion and is generally applicable to all. The majority here said that *Smith* is not relevant in this case because the system of possible exemptions in the city’s contract renders it not generally applicable. Accordingly, they explained, this is not an appropriate case for considering the question of whether *Smith* was correctly decided.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett, in a separate concurrence joined by Justice Brett Kavanaugh and (mostly) by Justice Stephen Breyer, wrote that she questions *Smith* but warned of the thorny question that will remain if *Smith* is overruled: What should replace it?

Visit [BJCOnline.org/Fulton](https://bjconline.org/Fulton) for more, including BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman’s [analysis for the SCOTUSblog symposium](#) on the case and BJC’s brief, which was joined by The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

By Don Byrd

What is going on in the fight over LGBTQ nondiscrimination and foster care?

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



A few days after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, the BJC staff discussed what the Court held and how the public interprets it. Several of us heard from friends and family who were interested in the case but didn't quite understand it. Depending on one's sources, the case seemed to be about who can be a foster parent, the religious beliefs of faith-based service providers, LGBTQ nondiscrimination laws and/or the administration of government contracts.

Some reports emphasized the unanimous result in favor of Catholic Social Services (CSS), while others emphasized the fact-specific context that doomed the city's effort to apply its nondiscrimination rules to government contractors without providing a religious exemption for CSS. The significance and likely impact of the decision on religious liberty are debatable, but here are a few observations.

The unanimity of the result does not mean the Court is unified in its approach to deciding free exercise cases or the conflicts between religious objections to same-sex marriage and nondiscrimination protections for the LGBTQ community. The majority opinion emphasized a particular contract provision to find the city had violated CSS's rights (see article on page 4). Two concurring opinions lamented the limited scope of the majority opinion, indicating significant differences on the Court. By signing onto the opinion of Chief Justice John Roberts, five members of the Court avoided a far more sweeping opinion. The unanimous result, however, does mean that this Court is favorably inclined toward the claims of religious organizations, even in contexts where the competing government interests are substantial.

In our friend-of-the-court brief, BJC argued that the valuable role religious organizations play in partnering with government entities to deliver services are often enhanced by nondiscrimination rules. We agreed with Philadelphia that maximizing the pool of potential foster parents — regardless of factors such as race, religion and sexual orientation — and ensuring equal treatment of prospective foster parents and foster children could be compelling interests that justified applying nondiscrimination rules to contractors. In *Fulton*, the Court recognized these interests as substantial and even "weighty." But because the contract between the parties contained

a provision allowing a city official to make exceptions, the Court held the city's interests were not so compelling as to justify denying CSS's claim to an exception to avoid certifying same-sex couples.

Fulton is the latest — but certainly not the last — word on conflicts between LGBTQ protections and religious objections. These conflicts will continue. While the Court upheld a constitutional right to marry for same-sex couples and interpreted federal employment laws against sex discrimination to prohibit LGBTQ discrimination in the workplace, there is no uniform federal policy on nondiscrimination against LGBTQ people. Whether an LGBTQ person may be legally subjected to discrimination in many situations depends on a patchwork of state and local laws that vary in scope from place to place.

The free exercise of religion is protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and by other federal and state laws, but it is not absolute. BJC has long supported a demanding test to justify any government intrusion into religious affairs or substantial burden on the exercise of religion. For us, protecting religious liberty also means ensuring that government-funded programs are administered without regard to religion. Nondiscrimination policies that apply to government contractors prevent discrimination based upon religion, as well as other protected categories like sexual orientation.

In this case, the Court was likely influenced by the many decades of service by CSS in Philadelphia. In addition, there was no evidence that CSS had ever been asked to certify a same-sex couple or that any same-sex couple had been denied the opportunity to serve as foster parents because of CSS's policy. While most contractors would readily comply with the city's nondiscrimination policy, conflicts over same-sex marriage are not the only concern. In other cases, religious providers have sought government contracts while refusing to work with people of other denominations and religions. The Court left those concerns unanswered.

The *Fulton* decision was not as sweeping a victory for religious objectors to same-sex marriage as CSS and many of its allies hoped. Nor was the decision as fatal to protections for LGBTQ people as Philadelphia and some of its allies feared. Instead, the Court resolved the case before it, giving little guidance for future religious freedom conflicts.

A fierce call to freedom: Dismantle racism

Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis asks us to imagine a world with new essential ways of doing church

By Cherilyn Crowe

Fierce freedom, according to the Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, is the freedom to use our faith and our politics “to create on earth as it is in heaven the reign of God,” a vision that includes wholeness for all and a disruption of white supremacy.

Dr. Lewis provided this view during “Fierce Freedom,” a live event hosted by BJC on June 18. Broadcasting from the studios of the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., the program brought together religious liberty supporters from across the country to hear from Lewis and members of the BJC community.

An author, activist and public theologian, Lewis serves as the Senior Minister of Middle Collegiate Church in New York City — a 1,400-member multiracial, welcoming and inclusive congregation.

Lewis shared her personal experiences and called out those who treat Black grief as a threat and white rage as a sacrament.

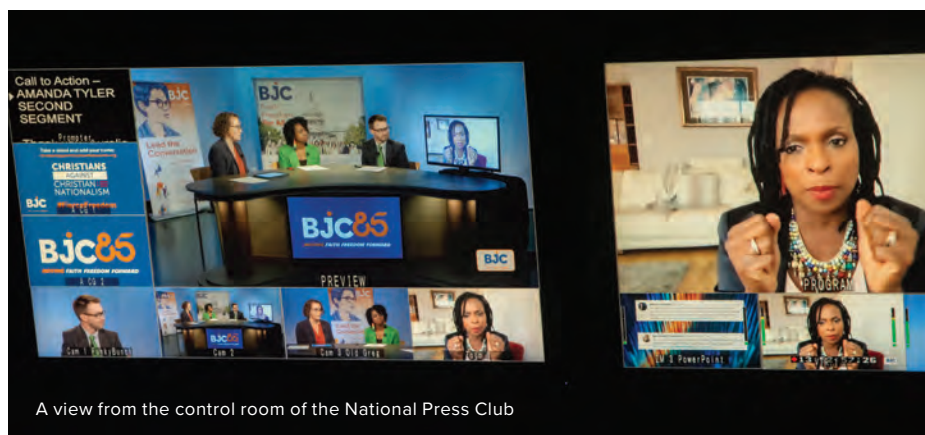
The event took place the week the United States declared Juneteenth a national holiday, and Lewis pointed out that the symbolism of doing so doesn’t take away the struggles our coun-

try faces. Noting that rates of Black incarceration, mortality and poverty eclipse white numbers by large margins, she said those who voted for the holiday will often still vote against changing policies to respect the rights of others, which undercuts freedom.

“Not any of us is free, as long as Black folks are not free. The sad thing about white supremacy is that it actually shackles all of us. To fear. To inequality. To shame. To injustice. White rage is what put the knee on George Floyd’s neck. White rage is what puts white supremacy on the necks of all people of color,” she said.

Lewis noted that in the immediate aftermath of the January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, both conservative and progressive commentators said “this is not who we are.” Lewis said that’s not true.

“It is precisely who we are. We are a nation built on violence. We are a nation built on stolen land by stolen bodies. We are a nation in which racism is so woven in the fabric of our democracy, it’s hard to pull them apart,” she said.



A view from the control room of the National Press Club



Rev. Robin Anderson, Rev. Keisha I. Patrick, and Dr. Andrew Gardner

Lewis also lamented the way progressive Christianity and conservative Christianity are often pitted against each other but not allied on disrupting racism.

“Don’t you want our children to think it’s just normal stuff as Christians to dismantle racism everywhere we see it?”

—Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis

“I’m grieving as a Black person how many white clergy colleagues say sincerely that they don’t believe Jesus was for justice,” she said, noting that Jesus was political himself in feeding people on the mountainside, healing the sick, centering women and children in his culture and offering health care to the lepers and the blind and the lame.

“Fierce freedom is to follow in the way of the Afro-Semitic *pobrecito* — the poor one — born in Bethlehem where the cows eat, raised in Nazareth — which is Palestine — where ‘nothing good comes from,’” she said, noting that Jesus was an outsider to the empire and was both homeless and a refugee at different points in his life.

“To follow in the way of that one is to follow in the narrow place — through the narrow place, through the eye of the needle, through the gate — that slogs off for us any sense of privilege and power, except the kind that comes from being last. Except the kind that comes from standing in solidarity with the people who Jesus stood in solidarity with: the outsiders, the disenfranchised, the tax collectors, the women, the sinners,” she said.

“True religious freedom — fierce freedom — is the freedom to speak that kind of truth to power,” Lewis said. She noted that some of what the church has constructed looks more like the institutions church people are called to critique than the loving institutions Jesus would create.

“I’m dreaming of freedom to imagine that we are the ones we’ve been waiting for — we’re the ones to write a new story together. That we disrupt anti-Semitism because Jesus was a Jew. That we disrupt anti-Islamic sentiment because God speaks more than one language. That we disrupt racism because God is on the side of all of us — including Black lives. That God sent a mixed race brown Black person in flesh in the world to teach the world about love.”

Lewis asked viewers to consider what would happen if they made those ideals an essential way of doing church.

“What happens if we grow fierce courage so that telling the story of anti-racism from our pulpits and in our classrooms and in our small groups is rewarded by increase in pay and increase in offering and growth of church?” she asked.

“Don’t you want our children to think it’s just normal stuff as Christians to dismantle racism everywhere we see it? That’s what I think fierce freedom looks like: the freedom to — in our lives of faith — put faith and politics together to create on earth as it is in heaven the reign of God, in which everyone is loved,

Amanda Tyler



Rev. Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie



Holly Hollman





Dr. Andrew Gardner and Rev. Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie



Rev. Meg Thomas

everyone is well, everyone is whole, everyone has enough, all bodies matter, and in which the matter of Black lives becomes such a priority that it disrupts white supremacy — all of its tentacles. And all of us, thereby, are more free.”

After her presentation, Lewis joined a panel discussion for further conversation with the Rev. Robin Anderson, co-pastor of Commonwealth Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia; the Rev. Keisha I. Patrick, a 2019 BJC Fellow; and Dr. Andrew Gardner, a BJC Board member who is a visiting faculty associate in American Religious History at Hartford Seminary.

Gardner noted that Lewis’ presentation was a powerful reminder to BJC supporters and congregations about the need to combine faith with taking action.

“So many of BJC’s supporting congregations are white and have had the option to put faith and politics together when it’s convenient and keep faith and politics apart when it’s inconve-

nient,” he said, reminding viewers that faith is always political as Lewis illustrated.

“As a pastor, what struck me so much was this beautiful image of what could happen if churches would disrupt theology that crushes souls,” Anderson said.

Patrick noted that Lewis’ whole message beckons a viewer to take a look at Luke 4 when Jesus announced his mission.

“If we think about justice, we cannot say that Jesus wasn’t about justice because Jesus stood in the synagogue and he said that he was there to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to set at liberty those who are oppressed,” she said.

Patrick also noted Lewis’ focus on freedom and the idea that nobody is free until Black people are free.

“In this country, Black folks have always been at the bottom,”



“Not any of us is free, as long as Black folks are not free. The sad thing about white supremacy is that it actually shackles all of us. To fear. To inequality. To shame. To injustice. White rage is what put the knee on George Floyd’s neck. White rage is what puts white supremacy on the necks of all people of color.”

Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis



Patrick said. “When other ethnic groups have come and been able to assimilate, we have not. And, so no one is free still until Black people are free, and I’ll say until Black women are free.”

Later in the program, BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler noted how this event illustrates how all of us can embody fierce freedom: “passionately, honestly, lovingly, boldly and bravely advocating for everyone’s equal claim to faith freedom.”

Tyler said this broadcast is part of BJC’s larger effort to explore how many religious freedom conversations have been limited by an understanding that centers the white experience. She noted that BJC’s work is being animated by exploring new questions and a reimagining of our mission at the intersection of religious freedom and racial justice.

Earlier in the program, the Rev. Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie, Social Justice Church Engagement Consultant at SOJOURNERS who is also the immediate past General Secretary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, talked about BJC’s 85th anniversary and the organization’s anticipation of our centennial in 15 more years. “Our theme for the 85th anniversary is ‘Moving Faith Freedom Forward,’ as we seek to be a more inclusive organization that truly focuses on extending and protecting religious liberty for all,” he said.

The program included a video featuring members of the BJC community from across the country, sharing how they stand for faith freedom in their communities. BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman provided an introduction of the Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis during the program, the Rev. Aurelia Dávila Pratt offered her reflection on standing with BJC in the face of growing Christian nationalism, and the Rev. Meg Thomas provided the closing benediction.

The event was broadcast live and available for free, thanks to the generosity of many BJC supporters. You can see their names on page 26 of this magazine.

A video of the event is available on BJC’s YouTube channel and at BJCOnline.org/FierceFreedom.

#FierceFreedom on social media



“So many theologies have been created to discipline us rather than disciple us. How do we free ourselves from soul crushing theology?”— ooooo that’s a word for the ages!
@RevJacquiLewis #fiercefrees

Rev. Darrell Hamilton II
@RevDHamilton



THANK YOU @RevJacquiLewis for your candid, unapologetic keynote about exercising #FierceFreedom in lives. We cannot be afraid to speak out about the issues that impact the human dignity of any person. For people of faith, it’s a moral imperative.

Dr. Sabrina Dent
@PROVERBSKIDS



Thanks Rev. Dr. @RevJacquiLewis, for naming “strong” aspects of white heteronormative rage as well as the “softer” side of that totalizing, vacuous, othering sensibility-regime pretending unto supreme universality, a legion of overt and covert sins.

Rev. Christopher The
@thechristhe



We have much to learn from observing how Black Baptist women born in the early 20th century in the South survived in a world that was not built to sustain them. Thank you, Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, for sharing what you learned while watching your mother.
#fiercefrees

Rev. Jaimie D. Crumley
@jdcrumley

Thank you to our sponsors!
See page 26 for some of the names who helped us make this program free to everyone.

BJC85

MOVING FAITH FREEDOM FORWARD

In 2021, BJC celebrates where we have been and the many people all along the way who have supported, cared for and challenged us to advocate for religious freedom during our 85 years of service. We view our past in a posture of gratitude, openness and repentance — holding these values together as we come to understand and tell the truth about our organizational history.

In our 85th year, advocating for everyone's religious liberty in an increasingly diverse and polarized society is both an urgent and difficult mission. Thanks to the active and generous involvement of our broad coalition of supporters, we are up to that challenge! We are ready to move faith freedom forward, as we look forward to celebrating our centennial in 2036.

What will it take to move faith freedom forward, to advocate vigorously for everyone's faith freedom, now and into the future?

Join us as we



Host an inclusive table
where all religious and spiritual perspectives are not only welcomed but feel at home.



Expand our circle
of supporters and of influence as we build a faith freedom nation.



Reimagine our mission
at the intersection of race and religious liberty and launch the Project on Race and Religious Freedom.

*We want you to be part of BJC.
Together, we are moving
faith freedom forward!*

Celebrating the past decade as w



BJC stands against attempts to target anyone for unfair treatment based on religion, including the Muslim and African travel ban. We joined our neighbors at the U.S. Supreme Court in 2018 after the ruling in *Trump v. Hawaii*.



Since 1936, BJC has found strength in collaborating with a diverse array of groups, both religious and secular.

BJC hosted Eboo Patel, president of Interfaith Youth Core, for a lecture series in 2020. He challenged students to consider being “the kind of leader who can encourage cooperation between people from different religious communities.”

In 2015, BJC was a leader in the Know Your Neighbor campaign, an interfaith effort to foster dialogue and understanding across lines of racial and political differences.



On the 150th anniversary of Juneteenth in 2015, the Rev. Dr. Marvin McMickle gave a call to the BJC community that set a new tone. “Religious liberty is good, but so is physical freedom. Keep the faith by breaking the silence,” he said.



BJC is raising up a new generation of religious liberty advocates, including through educational sessions and the BJC Fellows Program.



The BJC Fellows Program equips young professionals to advocate for faith freedom throughout their careers. In 2019, members of several classes spoke about the impact of the program.



Justice Stephen Breyer spoke at the opening of the Center for Religious Liberty in 2012. The facility for programs coupled with the creation of BJC’s education department in the same year expanded our educational footprint.



James Dunn gives students a tour in 2013



BJC and the Howard University School of Divinity co-hosted a symposium on religious liberty and the Black Church in 2016, featuring the Rev. Dr. Raphael Warnock. Pictured are BJC’s Brent Walker, Dean Alton Pollard of the Howard University School of Divinity, Warnock, and BJC’s Amanda Tyler.

Let's move forward



BJC responds to current threats to religious freedom. We hosted a discussion on Christian nationalism in the wake of the January 6, 2021, insurrection with The Most Rev. Michael Curry of The Episcopal Church, The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and researcher Dr. Andrew L. Whitehead.



2013 RFRA Symposium



Supreme Court in 2017



Testifying before Congress in 2018

BJC joined with religious groups to deliver a letter to Congress on behalf of thousands of faith leaders from all 50 states in 2017, asking to keep the protections of the Johnson Amendment.

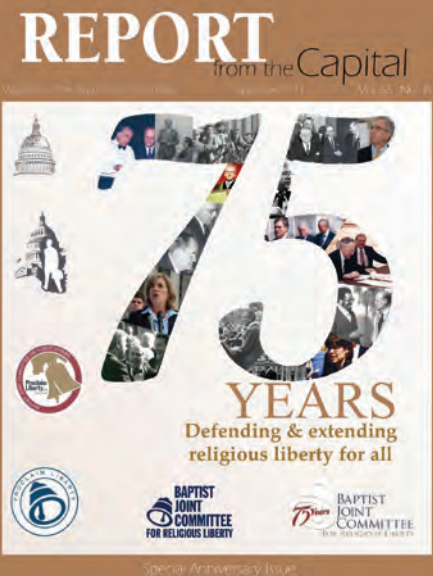


Please give today to celebrate moving faith freedom forward.

Your special gift of \$85 or \$850 this summer helps celebrate our 85th anniversary and will support the first phase of BJC's new Project on Race and Religious Freedom.

BJCOnline.org/give

MOVING FAITH FREEDOM FORWARD



For more on the history of BJC, check out our 75th anniversary edition of *Report from the Capital* from September 2011.

You can read that magazine and find other resources and images on our new page: BJCOnline.org/85years

Black scholars share ways religious liberty has been white too long

Exposing a narrative that centers white experiences during the 2021 Shurden Lectures

By Cherilyn Crowe and Jaziah Masters

How can we expand the work of decentering white voices and perspectives that have long dominated conversations about religious freedom? Four academic leaders shared their research and insight during the 2021 Shurden Lectures program, titled “Religious Liberty Has Been White Too Long: Voices of Black Scholars.”

Broadcast live April 14 via Zoom to a nationwide audience, the event featured Dr. Nicole Myers Turner, assistant professor of religious studies at Yale University; Dr. Teresa L. Smallwood, associate director of the Public Theology and Racial Justice Collaborative at Vanderbilt Divinity School; Dr. Anthony Pinn, Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor of Religion at Rice University; and Dr. David Goatley, research professor of theology and Black Church studies at Duke Divinity School. Each scholar made a presentation, and later all four joined a conversation with BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr.

The title of the event is derived from James Baldwin’s 1969 observation that the bulk of the country’s white population is beyond hope of moral rehabilitation. “They have been white, if I may so put it, too long,” he wrote in his critique.

Post-emancipation Black Protestants defining religious freedom as a critique of racial inequality

After the Civil War, freed people who were critiquing and undoing slavery saw religious freedom tied up in personal freedom, according to Dr. Nicole Myers Turner.

“Linking to James Baldwin’s critique of white supremacy, I asked myself what might we see when we look at religious freedom through the vantage point of freed people,” she said as she shared her research.

“For them, religious freedom was about fundamental soul liberty, and that was what they had to protect and wrestle away from the system of inequality that had so long denied enslaved people their fundamental humanity,” she said.

Turner shared the story of Fields Cook, an enslaved person in the early 1800s who found that the institution of slavery denied



him the right to pursue soul salvation and his ministerial calling. Growing up, Fields was the same age as his enslaver’s son, and the two were playmates. As they grew older, the enslaver’s son began lording his slave master status over Fields. As the son went off to school, Fields was sent into the fields and admonished to “work little pig or die.”

“One can imagine how the clouds of doubt and disappointment and then spiritual frustration and anguish descended on Fields as slavery separated him from his friend, his calling and his God,” Turner said.

“Slavery dealt its severest spiritual blow by denying Fields and other enslaved people the freedom to follow God and tend to their soul salvation.”

Sharing his story later in life, Fields “exposed religious freedom as a critique of racial inequality that denied enslaved and freed people the fullest and deepest expression of their humanity because of their status as slaves.”

When more than four million enslaved people became free after the Civil War, they began to stake out their terms of freedom, including separating into their own churches and denominations.

“Thus, religious freedom meant for freed people the capacity to critique racial inequality and white supremacy and their doctrines in a thorough-going way and to affirm Black humanity and



“The forces that move the earth when the veil was torn asunder at the death of Jesus are the same forces that have combined to bring seismic shifts in the atmosphere to move policy towards a more equitable world for African Americans. The ground has shifted and the veil is torn because we have learned as a people to operate in the power of the spirit, and that is religious freedom.”

Dr. Teresa L. Smallwood

dignity,” Turner said.

The separation allowed them to worship away from the oppressive gaze of white planters, but it was more than that, according to Turner. “Being in their separate worship spaces undermined enslavers’ claims to authority and superiority through the legislation that has subjected enslaved and free Black people’s worship to surveillance.”

Post-emancipation activities were infused with a sense of justice, requiring political engagement. “In securing for themselves a soul liberty, they seized religious freedom to work out their soul salvation unhindered. That work was not simply spiritual — it required political engagement,” Turner said.

Tearing the veil from top to bottom and bottom to top

Dr. Teresa L. Smallwood focused her presentation on analyzing the symbol of

the veil, which has “particular meaning for religionists, in general, and for Black religionists, in particular.”

Smallwood pointed to a collection of essays published in 1944 entitled “What the Negro Wants,” which laid out an agenda.

“They wanted to have what everyone else wanted: the five freedoms mentioned in the First Amendment to the Constitution,” she said.

For them, first class citizenship included equal opportunity, equal protection under the law, equal pay for equal work, equality of suffrage, equal recognition of the dignity of human beings, and abolition of segregation.

“These were all of the freedoms veiled from them in society, and the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was considered one of the vehicles they would use to tear that veil from top to bottom,” Smallwood said.

“In their estimation, the freedom of speech, religion, press, the right to peaceable assembly, and the right to petition the government were the perfect combination of rights and privileges to equalize the playing field for Negroes in America. In effect, it was thought that these five freedoms make the people of the United States the freest in the world.”

Smallwood asserted that the deep symbol of the veil is “at once a symbol of what is hidden and a symbol of what is revealed.” And, for Christians, the veil being torn illustrates the removal of obstacles or barriers to connectivity, providing license for people to access God for themselves.

Smallwood said tearing of the veil from the top is evident where African Americans mastered conventions of American life, including breaking from the denial of rights and conquering the highest office in the land. It is torn from the bottom, she



“It is at the auction block that our enslaved ancestors most forcefully feel this ‘otherness,’ most forcefully feel the way in which they have been dehumanized — rendered things of no consequence. And the ability to reinforce this ‘otherness’ and to convince Black folks on a variety of levels in a variety of ways that they are ‘less than’ continues to guide the social logic of the United States.”

Dr. Anthony Pinn



“In securing for themselves a soul liberty, [formerly enslaved people] seized religious freedom to work out their soul salvation unhindered. That work was not simply spiritual — it required political engagement.”

Dr. Nicole Myers Turner

said, when African Americans “have been pinned to the ground by knees on their necks,” and their ensuing deaths have shifted the atmosphere.

“Never before have we seen such a global outcry for justice from police brutality than what we saw with the senseless death of George Floyd — gone too soon but not soon forgotten,” Smallwood said.

“The forces that move the earth when the veil was torn asunder at the death of Jesus are the same forces that have combined to bring seismic shifts in the atmosphere to move policy towards a more equitable world for African Americans. The ground has shifted and the veil is torn because we have learned as a people to operate in the power of the spirit, and that is religious freedom.”

How does it feel to be a problem?

Sharing from a secular humanist perspective, Dr. Anthony Pinn extended the conversation on religious liberty to include discussions of the deep existential questions of life.

Pinn said a question from W.E.B. Du Bois haunts him: “How does it feel to be a problem?” Pinn argued that the question is

fundamental, and when it comes to America, Black people are a “problem.”

“It is at the auction block that our enslaved ancestors most forcefully feel this ‘otherness,’ most forcefully feel the way in which they have been dehumanized — rendered things of no consequence. And the ability to reinforce this ‘otherness’ and to convince Black folks on a variety of levels in a variety of ways that they are ‘less than’ continues to guide the social logic of the United States,” Pinn said.

In response to that fundamental question posed by Du Bois, Pinn said “religiosity becomes a fundamental way that Black folks have responded” to this “otherness.”

“Black religion becomes a formal mechanism by which Black folks have wrestled with the fundamental questions of existence: Who are we? What are we? Why are we? When are we?” according to Pinn.

Pinn posited that secular humanism — just like the Black Church — puts into place modes of thought and activities meant to wrestle with those fundamental questions.

One of the most significant ways those religious considerations are mapped out in culture is through hip-hop music and culture, Pinn said.

Tupac Shakur argued the relevance of Black Jesus — by which he meant the patron saint of thugs who recognized difficulties of Black life in an anti-Black world.

Queen Latifah called for unity and to re-think community in a way that is much more inclusive, honoring responsibility beyond individuals.

When dealing with the question of “How does it feel to be a problem?” rapper Jay-Z reformulated the question to say he’s not a problem but a god.

“Here you get these artists reconceiving and rethinking moral and ethical obligations in a way that centers life, and they do this without ignoring — without denying — the messy and tense nature of our collective dealings,” Pinn said.

“Thinking in this much broader way that recognizes that there are tensions, inconsistencies and conflicts within the ways in which Black folks have wrestled with those fundamental questions gives us a greater sense of the contours and the content of liberty and freedom.”

Words of warning and encouragement

Dr. David Goatley offered “caution and encouragement, particularly for our white



“White religious liberty leaders need to be cautious about assuming that, however well-thought and however well-argued, your perspective can speak for all. Where one sits determines what one sees, and Black vision for religious liberty will enhance life for everyone.”

Dr. David Goatley

siblings who are working for religious liberty.”

Goatley noted that “religious liberty conversations in the United States are often engaged by white leaders who inhabit extremes.” Because of this, many Black leaders have only heard misconstrued narratives about religious liberty that are not in line with how Black people live and believe.

“On one hand, there are conservatives who operate on an extreme, and they assert that freedom for religion should be defended by their social, cultural and ideological locations. All Black people know this is an injurious and murderous way of living, and these have been demonstrated in the history of the United States through genocide, through slavery and through domestic terrorism,” he said.

“On the other hand of the extreme are progressives who promote freedom from religion — that is seen because religion is seen for some of them as an encroachment on their liberty. They want to ban religion from the marketplace of ideas while perspectives on history, philosophy, economic theory, et cetera, are seen as belonging in the public square,” Goatley continued.

“And so, unfortunately, many religious liberty conversations for many Black religious people have been happening on the extremes, and this is not helpful.”

Goatley said the BJC approach has potential for partnership among Black religious leaders and people who have been subjected to the extremes, speaking of freedom both for religion and from religion. But, he had important words of warning.

“Some Black leaders have felt about BJC and others who similarly are situated that agendas have often been set prior to engaging them in conversation or including them in meetings. Then, by the time Black religious leaders get to the room or to the table, they’re there for disseminating information or an attempt to secure affirmation,” Goatley said.

“White religious liberty leaders need to be cautious about

assuming that, however well-thought and however well-argued, your perspective can speak for all. Where one sits determines what one sees, and Black vision for religious liberty will enhance life for everyone.”

Goatley encouraged groups like BJC to keep working and including all voices at the table, reminding everyone that “Black perspectives on religious liberty are diverse, but they’re clear, and they need to be considered.”

Black people embrace a diversity in the practice of religion, but Goatley rejected the labeling of such as “syncretism” — intertwining religious and cultural practices — since there are no religions that are not informed or influenced by culture.

“Many of us are supporters of religious liberty because we are not willing to impose a kind of homogeneous understanding to which we have been victim,” Goatley said, noting that there are many expressions of religious and non-religious ideas that Black people support.

Continuing the discussion

To conclude the program, the panelists engaged in conversation on a variety of current issues, including how America is still racially segregated in many ways, hypocrisy in advocating for freedom among both theists and non-theists, and more. They also discussed critical race theory — the idea that race is a central factor in structural inequality — and the importance of using that lens in viewing religion in the United States.

The Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State were established when the Shurdens made a gift to BJC in 2004 for this annual lectureship. Our 2021 event was the first in the series to be held completely online and feature four different scholars. A [recording](#) is available at [BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures](#), as are discussion guides for further conversation.



BJC has a new resource for discussion-oriented small groups interested in talking about Religious Liberty Has Been White Too Long: Voices of Black Scholars.

The discussion guides offer questions corresponding with the five elements of the program to deepen conversation at the intersection of Black freedom and religious liberty. They cover a range of topics, including critical race theory, the Black Church and more.

These are free to access and use in small groups or for personal reflection. You can find the [five-session](#) discussion guide and the abridged version for [one session](#) at [BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures](#).

Discussion guides

Our partnerships show ‘faith freedom truly being for all’

THE REVS. ROBIN AND MARTY ANDERSON co-pastor Commonwealth Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia. Robin first learned about BJC when she was in youth group and heard former BJC Executive Director James Dunn speak at her church. We asked the Andersons to talk about their unique relationship as co-pastors and their support for BJC in their personal lives and through the church.

What is it like to pastor a church as a couple?

Pastoring together allows both of us to play to our strengths, and we can share the more stressful and mundane aspects of ministry. By modeling shared leadership, we foster that within our congregation and can break away from hierarchies. One major benefit to pastoring together as opposed to serving separate congregations is that we get to build relationships with and invest in the same community of people. The hardest part of co-pastoring for us is that we still have to lead together even when we don't agree on how to best do that.

What did you find challenging in pastoring during the pandemic?

Lutheran minister and author Nadia Bolz-Weber described the challenge of pastoring during the pandemic well when she said that pastors are spending twice as much time doing things they're half as good at without the relational benefits that come from pastoring. Shifting from an in-person community to an online community was hard. Trying to offer pastoral care when everyone was isolated was incredibly challenging.

There were surprise blessings, too, though. New leadership has emerged in our church, and being forced out of our “box” prompted our lay leaders to think outside of the box. Their creativity is giving us new life and a fresh perspective.

How do you keep from bringing your work home each day?

Not bringing work home is a challenge for us, especially since one of us works from home most days. We try to give ourselves about 15 minutes when whoever has been at work first arrives home to report on what's happened that day. Then we consciously shift to home life.

How do you talk about the importance of faith freedom with your congregation and share the need for it in your community?

It's not uncommon for us to reference the importance of faith freedom for all in our preaching



and teaching, and we've invited multiple BJC staff members to preach at our church. We have interfaith partnerships, and those help our congregation personalize the importance of faith freedom truly being for all. We also post BJC programs and essays on our church's social media so our congregation stays informed about current events dealing with faith freedom.

Why did you decide to start giving to BJC?

We started giving to BJC simply because their work is important, and it benefits all people, not only those like us. We think one of the best ways pastors can help their congregation become more aware of faith freedom issues is by including BJC in their church budget.

BJC provides fantastic resources that are accessible to small churches as well as large ones. People pay more attention when you can say, “This is what our ministry partner is doing!”

Join the Andersons and Commonwealth Baptist Church in supporting BJC. You can make a donation at any time at BJCOnline.org/give. If your congregation would like to support BJC, contact Dan Hamil, director of strategic partnerships, at dhamil@BJCOnline.org for more information.



Voices of Asian American Faith Freedom

Asian American leaders joined BJC in May for a series of live conversations about how their identities and faith intersect.

We sought greater understanding on what America can learn from the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Community, what faith freedom means to them, what everyone can learn from their experiences, and much more.

Each conversation with BJC Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. is available on BJC's Facebook page and YouTube Channel. You can also see them by visiting BJCOnline.org/facebook-live.

Read a few highlights on the next pages and see how the conversations continued after the live discussions.





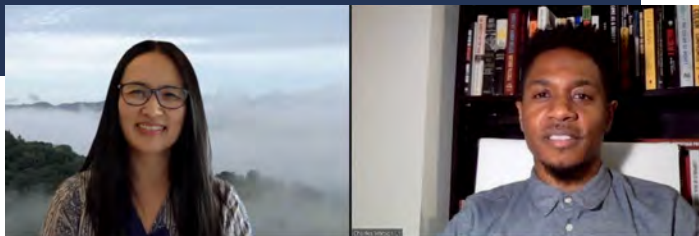
—Rev. Lauren L. Ng

Director of Leadership Empowerment at
American Baptist Home Mission Societies

“When I think about ecclesiology, I think back to the class I took in seminary. At the time, I felt like in the AAPI community we were trying to carve a new path or a new stream within the white-dominant landscape, like we are assuming that the white-dominant Christianity was the foundation upon which we are trying to build.

But, what I am coming to realize now is that we are actually removing layers of sediment to uncover and reveal and mine for manifestations of AAPI faith that have always been there but have been subjected to suppression and oppression.”

“I no longer tolerate an understanding of God that engages in ethnic scrubbing, cultural erasure or racial self-hatred in how we seek to do and be church.”



“Oppression is a coin. One side of the coin is discrimination and marginalization. The other side of the coin is privilege. If there’s a down, there must be an up. Religious oppression is a system of advantages and disadvantages based on religion.”

“Privilege is often invisible to those who already have it.”



—Dr. Khyati Joshi

Professor of Education at Fairleigh Dickinson University,
Author of *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious
Equality in America*

“If we don’t acknowledge the condition of others, we are actually diminishing our own conditions. So the best way I find myself in prayer, is when I’m out in the public square fighting for the rights of others.”

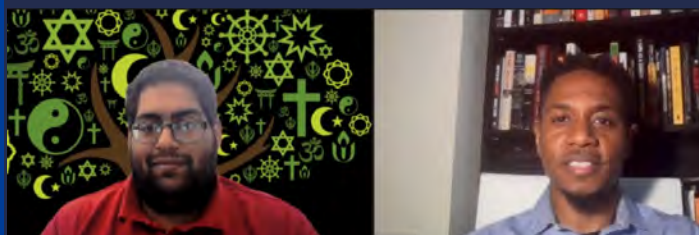
“I was born at an intersection. There are so many different crossroads and so many different identities that make me the unique person that I am, and if I don’t learn to center service and justice as a part of that, I’m actually not fulfilling the entire person that I am.”

“[T]hink about the realities of what happens when we focus on rehabilitative and restorative justice in the ways that need to be done, and we don’t think about preventative justice that requires us to be activists, that requires us to be educators, that requires us to be artists and all of those things that stop the things from happening in the first place and stop the cycle of injustice in its tracks. I think we need to have an approach to making sure that the right people show up for the right ways of doing justice beforehand — [doing so] can prevent something from taking place.”



—Tahil Sharma

Regional Coordinator for North America
at the United Religions Initiative,
Hindu-Sikh Interfaith Activist



“Something that resonates with me is the idea of lived religion ... of living one’s faith. It’s full of contradictions. It’s not just the Wikipedia version of Hinduism. It’s really how religion comes out in my life.”



Visit our website
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a discussion-
oriented small
group:
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[facebook-live](https://www.facebook.com/bjconline)

Continue the conversation by
reading more on the next page
and sharing these conversations
with your own community.

Discussion guide

Continuing conversations

Members of the BJC community shared further thoughts and reflections on Voices of Asian American Faith Freedom. Read more on our Medium channel at [Medium.com/@BJContheHill](https://medium.com/@BJContheHill).

“Every Sunday from when I was a toddler until I left home for college, my mom, my younger brother, and I attended Young Nak Church, one of the largest Korean American churches in Los Angeles. My mom and the church worked together to teach my brother and me what it meant to be a Christian and how to follow Christ: They taught us how to pray, how to read the Bible, and how to enjoy fellowship with other believers. Less apparent to me at the time was the fact that the church also helped shape my Korean American identity, whether it was through the Korean language classes I attended for several years after service or the weekend retreats where we would play Korean games and eat spicy instant ramen late at night. It was one of the few spaces in my life that was made by and made for Korean Americans. ...

As all of the speakers [in the Voices of Asian American Faith Freedom series] emphasized, Asian Americans and Asian American faiths are not monolithic, which means that we have an incredibly diverse array of religious traditions, experiences, and perspectives to offer to those who are willing to be open to them. Likewise, I hope that Asian American faith communities can appreciate and celebrate the diversity that surrounds them while not feeling pressure to erase their unique cultural and religious heritages.”

—Richard Chung

A 2017 BJC intern, Chung graduated from New York University School of Law in spring 2020 and currently serves as a law clerk on the Massachusetts Appeals Court.



“I am thrilled by the fact that BJC insists on having these difficult discussions, even as I gravely lament the circumstances that necessitate having them. And the truth is that I am both proud of and pining for more of the kinds of conversations taking place since the new year. This pining is actually a positive assessment, just as it is a plea for more open, principled, and civil discourses concerning pluralities and differences that, frankly, we need. Too many conversations these days are held in bad faith — such as it is.

I appreciate deeply what the Rev. Lauren L. Ng shares about a kind of ecclesiological miseducation she experienced in seminary. My own research on immigrant churches and ethnoreligious identity formation is, in my view, animated by the same spirit by which Rev. Ng declares that “we’re actually removing layers of sediment” from a “white-dominant landscape.” Whiteness has been a false foundation on which the erasure of languages, the commodification of cultures, and the burying of lived experiences (redivivus as self-hatred) are predicated. Rather, the theological preference ought to be for lifting up so many othered communities, over against the compulsion to scrub facts.

At the same time, BJC must continue to press into the implications of recognizing Christian privilege, as pointed out helpfully by Professor Khyati Joshi. ... For established and culturally dominant religious institutions, this fact may be difficult to take in, as it would naturally be for any community that has become so insular that it dubs its own practices and behaviors as normative or (worse) ‘normal.’”

—Rev. Chris The

A member of the 2016 BJC Fellows class, the Rev. The currently serves as the Director of Commission Information Services for the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). He is a member of the BJC Board of Directors, representing the Religious Liberty Council.



Social media reactions in real time



Thanks for sharing your insights and ways of putting it all in words that reach for understanding.

—Cecily Watson Kelln



“Watch us as we write our own stories of faith legacy. Learn from us.”
Rev. Lauren Lisa Ng--watching, listening, learning, my friend.

—Jennifer Sanborn



“Religious oppression is a system of advantages and disadvantages based on religion.” So important to recognize both!

—Bryan P. Kelley

Standing on principles of faith

By Madison McClendon



As a queer person, I felt deep pain while reading the Supreme Court ruling regarding the ability of queer people to be considered as foster parents by certain agencies. Regardless of their intention, their actions leave me feeling dehumanized.

It might seem hard to see how I can support religious liberty after this case. The arguments from the plaintiffs against the city of Philadelphia, that their religious freedom required them to judge as unworthy any parents that might look or think or love the way I do, was painful. They want to be able to take money that I and my queer friends pay in taxes and then tell us we aren't worthy of their time, attention or respect. It felt cruel, and it did a fundamentally destructive act of violence to public Christian witness.

It was even more painful to see the ruling give credence to this hurtful argument. The high court acts as if referring us to someone else is an effective consolation for someone who was just reminded how much we are despised by people who claim to love the God they can't see but who won't serve the neighbors they can see.

How could I defend religious freedom after it was invoked with such shameless cruelty?

Quite easily: because religious liberty makes it possible for me to be a queer Christian. I believe in a religious freedom that is bigger than the right to hate. My religious freedom is the right to love, and the right to stand before not only God as individual, but before my fellow humans as a human.

This freedom extends to others: my religious freedom says that I have a right to be Jewish, Catholic, Muslim or atheist and seek to foster a child, without an agency — like Miracle Hill Ministries in my hometown of Greenville, South Carolina — telling me that my faith commitments disqualify me from the right to raise children.

My religious freedom says that my faith — or my choice not to have a faith — isn't a reason to exclude

me from the public square.

And it goes beyond that: my religious freedom is the freedom to know that my God is proud of me. No pastor, priest or Pope can take that from me. On the day I stand before God in judgment, it will be with God that I speak and with Christ as my advocate, and not with Chief Justice John Roberts or Justice Sonia Sotomayor. I will continue to live — proud and alive and in love — with the expectation that I may one day hear the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

In short, my religious freedom is bigger than that held up by the Supreme Court in the *Fulton* decision. The Supreme Court may not believe that my full citizenship is a compelling public interest, but this is the good news about religious liberty: I worship a God who dissents from harmful and destructive rulings. I will continue to stand on the principles of my faith: that all people matter, that all ways of loving are blessed by God, and that religious liberty is not a weapon against those who are different from me — it's a gift of life that permits us to live together.

My religious freedom is the right for me to walk into a church and say to my pastor, my lay leadership, my friends and my family that I am the beloved son of the living God, the worthy daughter of the Most High. Religious liberty is the right to walk into a social service agency funded with the tax money I pay alongside my fellow citizens and be served equally — whether I am a Jew or a Christian, an atheist or a Muslim, a trans man or a non-binary person.

And religious liberty is my right to say that I am proud to be what I am: a gay man, who loves his partner and loves his God.

I'd say the same to the Supreme Court.

Madison McClendon is a member of the BJC Board of Directors, representing the Religious Liberty Council.

New survey shows four nations' attitudes on Christian identity

Fewer people in the United States, United Kingdom, France and Germany believe that to truly belong in their nation a person must have been born there, be a Christian, share customs and traditions and speak the dominant language.

According to a Pew Research Center report published May 5, all four nations saw an overall decline during the last four years in the number of adults who believe these four categories are "very / somewhat important" for a person to truly belong.

Respondents were presented with the following prompts:

Some people say that the following things are important for being truly [name of country's nationality]. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is?

- To have been born in [name of country]
- To be able to speak [country's dominant language]
- To be a Christian
- To share [country's nationality] customs and traditions

Respondents were asked to select one of the following responses for each: very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important.

For birthplace, the U.K. saw the sharpest decline in "very / somewhat important" responses (down 25 points to 31%), followed by the U.S. (down 20 points to 35%), France (down 15 points to 32%) and Germany (down 9 points to 25%).

For language, the U.S. saw a 15-point drop to 77% from 2016 to 2020, followed by the U.K. (down 11 points to 87%), with France and Germany both seeing a four-point decline to 93% and 94%, respectively.

For customs and traditions, 17% fewer U.K. adults believe this is "very / somewhat important" to national belonging (down to 70%), followed closely by the U.S. (down 13 points to 71%), France (down 12 points to 71%) and Germany (down 11 points to 62%).

For Christian affiliation, the U.K. saw a 17-point decline (to 20%), followed by the U.S. (down 16 points to 35%), France (down 9 points to 14%) and Germany (down 7 points to 23%).

"Christians are more likely to say there is a great deal of discrimination against Christians in their society than against non-Christians. They are also more likely to say that being Christian is essential to truly being part of their country's citizenry," the report said. "But they are also more likely to say other key factors — including speaking the language and being born in the country — are essential components of national belonging."

The margin of error for Pew's survey varied by country: U.S. (plus-or-minus 3.7%), U.K. (plus-or-minus 4.1%), France (plus-or-minus 3.9%) and Germany (plus-or-minus 4.2%).

"The UK has been very specifically impacted by Brexit and this is well reflected in this research," said Margot Hodson, director of theology and education for the John Ray Initiative and an Anglican pastor in Oxfordshire, United Kingdom.

"Many would describe the country as divided, with one half becoming more nationalistic and the other more global-inclusive," she said.

"Over the last few decades, the Christian faith has gradually shifted from the dominant national religion to being a religion alongside others in the U.K., with the majority of the population as non-religious. That is reflected in the research questions about the distinction between national and religious traditions, which remain complex," Hodson continued.

"When 35% of the Americans surveyed — and 48% of American Christians — believe that it is very important to be a Christian in order to be an American, we still have a culture firmly entrenched in Christian nationalism."

—BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler

Martin Rothkegel, who teaches church history at Theologische Hochschule Elstal, a Baptist theological seminary in Berlin, offered insight on Germany's results.

"The Reich, with its Protestant majority and Catholic minority, was divided by religion rather than united. The Nazi doctrine of national identity based on biological descent from 'Germanic ancestors' became state ideology in 1933: the result was an abyss of war and genocide," he said. "After 1945, West Germany reclaimed a pro-European identity based on the myth of occidental Christendom. Indeed, the two major Christian denominations, Catholic and the (mostly Lutheran) Protestant territorial churches, contributed a great deal to the recovery of a morally bankrupt population."

"Today, affiliation with the church is in decline, but the Christian tradition is still a significant point of reference in public debates on ethics and values," Rothkegel said. "The Pew report suggests that religion is becoming less relevant for national identity discourses. I hope this indicates that German secular and liberal democracy is eventually becoming mature."

"I'm optimistic about Pew's new report on the change in public opinion about national identity, but I'm also keenly aware that there is significant work yet to be done," said Amanda Tyler, executive director of BJC who leads the Christians Against Christian Nationalism campaign.

"When 35% of the Americans surveyed — and 48% of American Christians — believe that it is very important to be a Christian in order to be an American, we still have a culture firmly entrenched in Christian nationalism," she said. "I'm most encouraged that, according to the report, people under the age of 30 are more inclusive in their views about national identity. We should be listening and learning from our younger neighbors as we create a more inclusive society."

By Zach Dawes, Good Faith Media

A version of this article first appeared on [GoodFaithMedia.org](https://www.GoodFaithMedia.org).



Save our church from destruction

By Terry Rambler

Despite sustained efforts by the U.S. government to criminalize Native American religions beginning in 1883 and continuing until passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978, Western Apaches, like many Native American tribes, steadfastly maintained traditional religious beliefs and ceremonies rooted in sacred places.

Among our most sacred places is *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel*, also known as Oak Flat. *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel* holds the foundation of our religious beliefs, no different than St. Peter's Basilica, the Mount of Olives or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

The federal government is now poised to destroy *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel*. We cannot allow that to happen. Protecting *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel* is vital to ensuring religious freedom for all Americans.

The government intends to trade *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel*, located on the Tonto National Forest 15 miles from our reservation boundary, to foreign-based, multinational mining companies seeking to construct the proposed Resolution Copper Mine. The underground mine would cause the land above to collapse into a 1,000-foot-deep crater nearly two miles across. As a result, *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel* would vanish into the abyss.

We have sustained our traditional religious practices despite U.S. government-sanctioned genocide against our people in the 19th century followed by a concerted effort to destroy our culture in the 20th century. After years of bloody conflict, the U.S. government established the San Carlos Apache Reservation in 1872 in the desert and mountains east of

Phoenix. My ancestors were rounded up at gunpoint, confined to the Reservation and held as prisoners of war. Armed federal troops occupied our Reservation for nearly 30 years.

The federal government then diminished the size of our Reservation several times to enrich others due to the discovery of minerals and natural resources. Our burial sites, living areas and farmlands were flooded to create Roosevelt Lake, which provided water essential to Arizona's subsequent economic development. Our children were stolen from our homes and sent to boarding schools designed to destroy our language, culture and religion. Many never returned home.

Throughout this extended period of traumatic cultural upheaval, *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel* has remained our spiritual bedrock, connecting our past to the present and giving us hope for the future.

Chí'chil Bitdagoteel is an Apache holy and sacred site graced with Emory oak trees and seeps and springs emerging from the high desert ground surrounded by spiraling rock formations. *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel* has played an essential role in Apache religion, tradition and culture for centuries. In 2016, it was listed on the federal National Register of Historic Places as a Traditional Cultural Property.

Apaches gather here for prayer, to conduct ceremonial dances such as the Sunrise Dance celebrating a young woman's coming of age, gather medicines and ceremonial items, and seek peace and personal cleansing. *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel* belongs to the powerful *Diyin* or Medicine Men. It is the home of a particular kind of *Ga'an*, which are mighty Mountain Spirits and Holy Beings, on whom we Apaches

depend on for our well-being.

Resolution Copper plans to destroy *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel* to develop a massive mine. The sprawling operation will plunder the groundwater, create a massive toxic waste dump and industrialize a vast portion of the Tonto National Forest. In addition to *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel*, hundreds of our cultural resources will be destroyed. The mine will enrich shareholders of two of the world's largest mining companies, BHP and Rio Tinto. The raw copper will almost certainly be exported overseas, most likely to China. BHP and Rio Tinto each have a notorious history of destroying sacred aboriginal sites.

Would Resolution's supporters callously dismiss religious beliefs if an ore body were located beneath their church, cathedral, the Vatican, Arlington National Cemetery or Mt. Sinai? The answer is a resounding no.

The only way to stop the pending land exchange is to repeal a 2014 law that requires the government to trade *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel* to Resolution Copper. The House Natural Resources Committee approved the Save Oak Flat Act in April, which would repeal the land trade. Many tribes and national tribal organizations have joined us in supporting the Save Oak Flat Act.

To prevent the certain destruction of *Chí'chil Bitdagoteel*, our church, our religion and our way of life, we respectfully request that you urge your members of Congress to support the Save Oak Flat Act.

The Honorable Terry Rambler is Chairman of the 17,000-member San Carlos Apache Tribe.

Honorary and memorial gifts to BJC

In honor of Laura Alden
By Gurrola Baptist Foundation

In honor of Lynn Behrendt
By Amanda Tyler

In honor of Phelps Behrendt
By Bob and Lynn Behrendt

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In honor of
The Honorable Robinson B. James
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.....

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You can honor someone at any time with a gift to BJC. Send a note with your check or make a gift at BJCOnline.org/give.
For more information, contact Danielle Tyler, associate director of development, at dt Tyler@BJCOnline.org.

Fierce Freedom sponsors

Thanks to your support, we could provide the program for free to people across the country. See pages 6-9 to learn more about the event.

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BJC welcomes summer intern

JESSICA MAJORS, from Danville, Kentucky, is a rising senior at Samford University, double majoring in Communication Studies and Political Science and minoring in Spanish. She most recently interned for the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute. Majors also volunteers as a small group leader with Community Group for Girls, a nonprofit in Birmingham, Alabama, that holds Bible studies and service projects for high school students.



The daughter of Perry and Donna Majors, she attends Mountain Brook Community Church. Majors plans to pursue a master's degree in Communication Studies and attend law school to become an adoption attorney.

BJC Book Club

This summer, members of the BJC Book Club are reading *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America*. Written by Dr. Khyati Joshi — who participated in Voices of Asian American Faith Freedom (see pages 19-21) — the book explores Christian privilege, Christian normativity and Christian hegemony.



Interested in joining the BJC Book Club? Visit BJCOnline.org/bookclub for the latest information or contact BJC Programs Assistant Christine Rigodon at crigodon@BJCOnline.org.

The next edition of the BJC Book Club will begin meeting in October 2021.

Update on clergy in the execution chamber in Texas

In April, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice reversed a policy and announced it will allow death row inmates to bring clergy or spiritual advisers of their choice into the execution chamber.

Texas used to have a policy that only allowed state-authorized clergy of certain faiths. That changed in 2019 when the U.S. Supreme Court stopped the state's execution of a Buddhist inmate over the state's refusal to allow the inmate's spiritual adviser to accompany him. After that ruling, Texas barred all spiritual advisers from the execution chamber — a decision that BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler blasted as the “exact wrong direction.” This new policy will provide an important religious accommodation to death row inmates in Texas.

—Don Byrd

NO BAN Act passes House, awaits Senate vote

On April 21, the U.S. House of Representatives took an important step to protect religious freedom in immigration by passing H.R. 1333, the NO BAN Act, on a bipartisan vote. This bill prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion in immigration decisions and adds accountability measures on any future temporary immigration bans.

Adding religion as a protected category in the Immigration and Nationality Act is a commonsense move to ensure that American immigration policy complies with the First Amendment. The United States has served as a beacon for religious freedom throughout history, but the country has not always lived up its ideals, including in immigration policy. With religion as a protected category, no one will be turned away from the United States because they are the “wrong” religion.

The NO BAN Act does more than simply add religion as a protected category — it also contains provisions to ensure religious liberty is protected. The bill adds accountability measures for the current and all future presidential administrations who may see a need to temporarily curb immigration. Under this bill, if the president decides that national security interests demand a temporary immigration ban, the president would have to consult with the Secretary of State and Secretary of Homeland Security before issuing the ban and regularly report back to Congress on the continuing need for the ban.

The NO BAN Act does not prevent the president from protecting the United States in times of crisis, but it does require our executive branch to work with the co-equal legislative branch in temporary immigration decisions to protect American interests.

Originally introduced in the previous Congress, the earlier version of the NO BAN Act contained an additional section to repeal the various Muslim and African travel bans issued by then-President Donald Trump. On his first day in office, President Joe Biden signed an executive order repealing those actions, and therefore there was no need to address the actions of the previous administration in the current bill.

The NO BAN Act says “yes” to a robust protection of faith freedom for all. Singling out a religious group for mistreatment in immigration or any other government context is antithetical to our constitutional ideals. BJC looks forward to working with the NO BAN Act coalition to secure passage of this important bill in the U.S. Senate.

—BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks

Join the BJC Advocacy Team

Get updates on legislation impacting religious freedom and find out when you can take action to make a difference.

Sign up for our email list at BJCOnline.org/subscribe and check the box to join. If you already receive our emails, you can update your profile to join the team. For more information, contact BJC Advocacy and Outreach Manager Jaziah Masters at jmasters@BJCOnline.org.



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We are attorneys, Capitol Hill insiders, ministers, mobilizers and scholars. We file briefs in pivotal Supreme Court cases, advocate for and against legislation, testify in Congress and unite with others across faiths to ensure that all Americans have, and will always have, the right to follow their spiritual beliefs.

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Amanda Tyler EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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Visit our YouTube channel to hear members of the BJC community share how they are taking a stand for faith freedom for all.

BJC85
MOVING FAITH FREEDOM FORWARD

Moving faith freedom forward

We are celebrating 85 years of protecting faith freedom for all. Join us as we head toward our 100th anniversary and learn more on pages 10-13.