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REPORT from the Capital

J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

Jeff Huett
Editor

Phallan Davis
Associate Editor

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♦ Capital Campaign Update ♦

It's time to narrow the gap; enter the campaign now

The 2008 presidential campaign is not the only campaign taking place this year. This year we're hoping to meet our goal for the capital campaign for the Center for Religious Liberty. Thanks to the summer's matching challenge, we ended 2007 with a bang. But we're still in the primaries.

Pledges at the end of 2007 totaled \$2,624,471.10, and so far we've received \$1,595,807.90. In 2007 alone, you gave more than \$1 million to the capital campaign (\$1,099,065.82) and still helped us fund 97.4 percent of our general budget expectations. Thank you!

To help us complete the campaign in 2008, we will pursue additional "matching funds" opportunities, plan more hometown meetings in key areas across the country and continue to engage our denominational bodies. And, of course, we invite you to join our efforts by pledging to be a part of the campaign or by continuing to honor your pledge with payments this year.

Since we continue to make significant

inroads, we have made plans to bring our dream to reality. We are retaining a realtor to help us find the perfect property needed for the BJC to expand its advocacy and educational efforts, and we are exploring various ownership options.

For more information contact **Kristin Clifton**, development officer at 202-544-4226 or kclifton@BJCOnline.org.

Partners in Giving

We invite you to become a **Partner in Giving** by establishing an automatic monthly gift to the BJC on your credit card.

Partners provide income that the BJC can count on for ongoing budget needs and are given the opportunity to help sustain the BJC as we work to secure religious liberty. Simply call or e-mail us or go online to www.BJCOnline.org to make a credit card gift. If you wish to set up an automatic monthly credit card gift, simply tell us so on the online form.



Our Challenge — Their Future

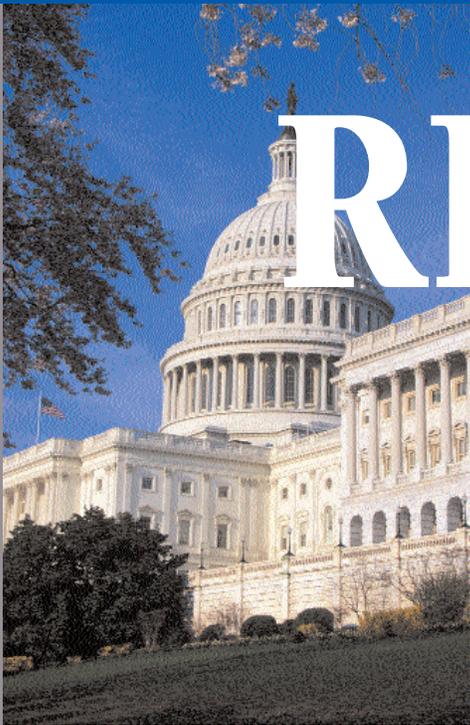
Securing religious liberty for our children and grandchildren



200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002-5797

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

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REPORT

from the Capital

Appeals court upholds ruling against funding for Christian prison programs

ST. LOUIS — A federal appeals court has affirmed a lower court’s decision saying state funding for a Christian prison program in Iowa was unconstitutional.

But the three-judge panel of the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, in its Dec. 3 ruling, overturned the lower court’s decree ordering the Christian group to reimburse the state of Iowa for most of the funds it spent on the program.

The judges said the lower court was correct in ruling that the InnerChange program at Iowa’s Newton Correctional Facility violated the First Amendment, as well as provisions of the Iowa constitution. That was because participants were offered living-arrangement advantages unavailable to those who did not participate in the program, the prison had no way to monitor whether government funds given to it were spent on sectarian purposes, and the program was focused on Bible study and conversion.

“Under these facts, the claim that prisoners participated ‘voluntarily’ mocks religious freedom,” said BJC General Counsel K. Hollyn Hollman. “The government contracted with one vendor and prisoners had no access to comparable secular services.”

In the case, a group of Iowa taxpayers and inmates represented by Americans United for Separation of Church and State sued InnerChange, which also operates in other prisons around the nation. It is run by Prison Fellowship, the ministry to prisoners founded by former Nixon White House official, Chuck Colson.

The panel was joined by retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, who is filling in for the 8th Circuit temporarily.

The appellate judges said the lower federal court erred in ordering InnerChange and Prison Fellowship to reimburse Iowa for more

than \$1.5 million in state funds it paid to operate InnerChange at the Newton facility prior to the lower court’s ruling. That ruling came in June 2006.

Nonetheless, InnerChange will still have to return state funds received between the 2006 ruling and last July, when Iowa officials stopped funding the program.

“While the First Amendment and other religious liberty laws require accommodation of religious practice for prisoners, the government is not allowed to endorse religion or sponsor religious conversion programs,” Hollman said. “The program challenged in this case should never have been funded with tax dol-

lars.”

The program has continued to operate at the Newton facility, but it does so under an agreement with the Iowa Department of Corrections that private funds would underwrite it. A stipulation of the agreement was that the state could end the program if the appeals panel ruled against it.

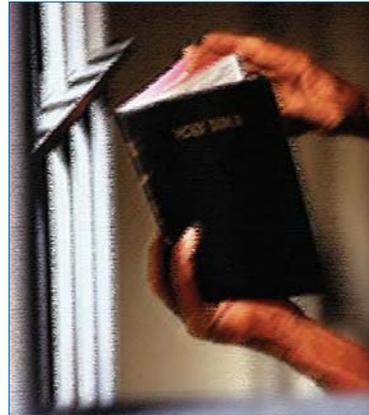
It was not immediately clear whether Iowa would exercise that option.

Prison Fellowship released a statement focusing on the reversal of the lower court’s decision to force it to reimburse Iowa to the tune of \$1.5 million.

“The Eighth Circuit has acknowledged that the operational changes we have made to the program have enabled it to remain in good constitutional standing,” Mark Early, the group’s president, said. “We are appreciative of the court for today’s guidelines that provide clearer ground rules as we continue to address a crime problem that threatens the safety of our nation’s communities.”

The case is *Americans United v. Prison Fellowship*, No. 06-2741.

— ABP and staff



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New Baptist Covenant, Huckabee rank as top stories in '07

WASHINGTON — The biggest news story among Baptists in 2007 was about an event that has not even happened yet. This according to an informal survey of journalists in the Baptist media world.

Here's the top-10 list, according to Baptist editors, journalists, bloggers and public relations professionals who responded to ABP's call for voting:

1. Carter, Clinton announce New Baptist Covenant gathering. The two Baptist ex-presidents hope the "Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant" draws as many as 20,000 Baptists from a broad array of racial, theological and political backgrounds to the gathering to hear from high-profile Baptist ministers and laypeople. They will discuss ways to cooperate in areas on which they all agree, such as promoting social justice and evangelism.

But some SBC leaders — including convention president Frank Page — criticized the event, complaining that the SBC had not been invited to participate on an official level. Some of them, as well as conservative political commentators, said the event had a left-leaning political bias, with some claiming it was aimed at shoring up the presidential candidacy of Clinton's wife, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y.

Organizers countered that many Southern Baptists were involved with the planning and that the denomination was not involved on an official level because it dropped out of the North American Baptist Fellowship of the Baptist World Alliance. They also noted that prominent Baptist Republicans had been invited to speak, including Huckabee — who later dropped out in protest over remarks that Carter made about President Bush's policy toward Israel. But organizers later secured two prominent GOP senators as speakers — Lindsay Graham of South Carolina, who belongs to an SBC congregation; and Charles Grassley of Iowa, who belongs to a congregation affiliated with the Baptist General Conference.

2. Former pastor Huckabee runs for White House. Mike Huckabee was considered by most pundits to be at best a second-tier candidate, until support from disgruntled rank-and-file GOP evangelicals fueled a surge in the critical early voting state of Iowa, where he finished first. However, Huckabee's new attention has led to new scrutiny, including of his record as Arkansas governor as well as what some critics consider blatant pandering to evangelical voters.

3. Klouda sues SWBTS, Patterson. Sheri Klouda, who was hired to teach Hebrew in Southwestern's School of Theology in 2002, was fired in 2006. Prominent SBC pastor and blogger Wade Burleson called attention to her plight in January, precipitating a firestorm in the denomination's blogosphere. She sued in March, claiming gender discrimination and breach of contract. Southwestern officials — including seminary president Paige Patterson — said having a woman training male pastors in the theology school was unbiblical and counter to seminary policy.

4. Strife on IMB board continues as trustees censure Burleson. A long-simmering dispute between Wade Burleson, an Oklahoma pastor, and many of his fellow IMB trustees boiled over again in November. The board voted to censure Burleson and bar him from official participation in board activities. They claimed his blogging in opposition to two controversial IMB policies violated trustee rules. Burleson countered that the rules themselves were un-Baptistic.

5. SBC messengers declare BF&M "sufficient." One of Burleson's arguments is that the IMB policies in question — regarding the baptisms of missionary candidates and their beliefs about speaking in tongues — went beyond the parameters of the 2000 version of the SBC's "Baptist Faith and Message" statement. At the denomination's annual meeting in June, he and like-minded bloggers encouraged the successful passage of a motion declaring the document the "sufficient" doctrinal guide for convention agencies. However, some SBC agency heads quickly noted they will continue to use other doctrinal restrictions in addition to the document.

6. Texas Baptists elect first female president. At their annual meeting in October, the moderate-controlled Baptist General Convention of Texas elected retired Texas Woman's Missionary Union Director Joy Fenner as its president in a contested election. Fenner became the first woman to head the largest state convention affiliated with the SBC.

7. (tie) Geoff Hammond elected NAMB president. After a tumultuous year at the SBC's domestic-missions agency, in which a previous president was dismissed after an investigation into his management and financial dealings, Hammond was recruited from his position as an executive with the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia convention.

7. (tie) Turmoil in Missouri Baptist Convention. Disputes between rival conservative Baptist groups in Missouri led to the ouster of the state convention's executive director. Later, messengers to the Missouri Baptist Convention annual meeting registered their disapproval of the political faction that forced David Clippard out, rejecting all of the candidates endorsed by the Missouri Baptist Layman's Association.

9. Jerry Falwell dies at 73. Legendary Southern Baptist pastor and media impresario Falwell died suddenly in May, the first of an aging generation of conservative Christian leaders to pass away. Falwell was beloved by his followers and reviled by his critics. However, he built both a massive church and an evangelical university from nothing.

10. North Carolina convention in turmoil. Years of pro-SBC conservatives consolidating their grip on the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina's leadership led most of the state convention's affiliated agencies — including three colleges and the state's Woman's Missionary Union — to distance themselves from the convention. In response, messengers to the annual meeting voted to defund WMU.



REFLECTIONS

BJC a living witness to cooperative model New Baptist Covenant espouses



J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

For nearly four centuries, we Baptists have been a clamorous and contentious bunch. We have squabbled as much with each other as we have with outsiders. Maybe more. A heart-felt commitment to soul freedom and local church autonomy and a healthy suspicion of ecclesiastical hierarchies have facilitated this rambunctious spirit. It was our birthright and is our guiding light.

But, there has always been a cooperative, more irenic side to Baptist life. Indeed, what holds us together as Baptist Christians is stronger than what divides us. And, over the past century, this has been exhibited most prominently in the life and ministry of the Baptist World Alliance and for more than seven decades through the work and witness of the Baptist Joint Committee. The upcoming New Baptist Covenant meeting in Atlanta (see page 7) will provide a wonderful opportunity to build on these examples of cooperation in Baptist life and take it to a higher level.

Four Baptist Joint Committee staffers will participate in the meeting, leading workshops on religious liberty, meeting friends and supporters and hearing from a diverse group of public figures that share the Baptist label. We are enthusiastic supporters of what the New Baptist Covenant meeting signals for future joint opportunities and challenges. In fact, I believe this meeting represents an unprecedented chance for a pan-Baptist effort at cooperation in ministry. We hope to see you there!

No one really knows for sure where the New Baptist Covenant movement is going to lead after Atlanta. Several, including Dr. David Goatley, president of the North American Baptist Fellowship of the Baptist World Alliance, have outlined various ministry opportunities for Baptist communities, congregations and individuals. He envisions a seven-week "summer of jubilee" built around the ministry mandates that Jesus outlined in his inaugural sermon in Luke 4:18-19 — preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, setting free those who are oppressed and announcing the acceptable year

of the Lord.

This is a very good start. We should be looking ahead. But it's important for us to allow the Holy Spirit to move during the meeting in ways we might not see or are unable presently to predict. It's also important not to hasten to develop new organizations and denominational structures. We have plenty of them and, it seems to me, the North American Baptist Fellowship is sufficient to provide the necessary structure, at least for now.

Yes, to the extent this gathering represents an effort to bring Baptists together to work on the essentials of our faith, to affirm common commitments to our traditions, to present a hopeful face to the culture at large, and to work together toward shared goals, we are anticipating a truly new and exciting opportunity. The Baptist Joint Committee — serving many of the same Baptist bodies that comprise the North American Baptist Fellowship — is a living witness to the cooperative model that is possible with respect to a more narrow set of issues dealing with religious liberty and separation of church and state.

For our part, we commit to working with our Baptist brothers and sisters and kinfolk organizations holding up the importance of these Baptist distinctives along with many other ministry objectives that surely will be pursued in the aftermath of the Atlanta meeting. We have learned that by working together, we have a much stronger voice than any single Baptist church or organization can alone.

The New Baptist Covenant can also be a model for the rest of society for how we can come together on fundamentals, agree to disagree on nonessentials and, throughout it all, work together in a spirit of charity and respect.

Not a bad way to celebrate in the run up to our commemoration in 2009 of 400 years of being Baptists.

"We have learned that by working together, we have a much stronger voice than any single Baptist church or organization can alone."

In South Carolina, Black churches

COLUMBIA, S.C. — If it's true that a house divided cannot stand, then black churches across South Carolina should be shaking.

Take, for instance, this city's Bible Way Church of Atlas Road.

The black megachurch's pastor, the Rev. Darrell Jackson Sr., is a paid consultant for Sen. Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign.

In the pews, longtime Bible Way parishioner Anton J. Gunn directs the statewide political operation of Clinton's main rival, Sen. Barack Obama.

The congregation as a whole, some 10,000 strong, sits somewhere in the middle, according to both men.

"I think we have a lot of people who support Hillary Clinton, and we've got a lot of people who support Barack Obama," Jackson said.

Both candidates will need all the support they can muster from the black community to win South Carolina's crucial Jan. 26 presidential primary, a contest destined to play a significant role in determining the Democratic nominee. And in a state where half of all primary voters are African-American — a large majority of whom attend worship services three times or more each month — the road to the White House may run straight through black churches.

It's not unusual to see Democrats hunting for votes in black houses of worship. Churches have long been the center of African-American communal and civic life, especially in the South.

"You hunt where the ducks are," said Scott H. Huffmon, a political scientist at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, S.C. "African-Americans in South Carolina are highly religious, they're in church."

But this year's Democratic field, which pits a charismatic black man against a woman who bears a trusted family name, divides the loyalties of black churches and churchgoers — especially women — like no election in recent history. A

September state poll found that 31 percent of black women favored Clinton, 31 percent Obama and 33 percent were undecided. December polls show Obama surging ahead among African-Americans and Clinton clinging to an overall lead in South Carolina.

"Is it the woman's turn or is it the African-American's turn?" asked Tracy Thompson, a 30-year-old criminal justice instructor, as she stood in Brookland Baptist Church in West Columbia. "I think that is a struggle for a lot of African-American women right now."

Though accurate national poll numbers are hard to come by at this stage of the presidential campaign, anecdotal evidence suggests the tug-of-war extends well beyond South Carolina's borders, said

John C. Green, a senior fellow at the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

"The idea of having a black president is really attractive, and so is the idea of having a woman president, so a lot of African-American women are struggling with the question: Which way do I go?"

Of course, many blacks say this election is about more than race and gender; it also concerns health care, the war in Iraq, experience and "electability." And even those who are emotionally torn exult over their choices. It's about time, many said, that a woman or an African-American sat in the Oval Office.

But from the choir lofts of the largest sanctuaries to the small corners of a preacher's soul, the Clinton-or-Obama dilemma is vexing consciences throughout the Palmetto State.

"It's crazy," said Willie Lyles III, 23, executive director of Freedom Temple Ministries in Rock Hill. "I was talking to my grandmother the other day, and you can just feel the tension inside her."

Thelma MacKinney, 74, and Susie Smith, 65, expressed similar thoughts as they sat together in a pew at Bible Way Church on a recent Sunday. McKinney, a member of the church for 25



Susie Smith, shown here at Bible Way Church of Atlas Road, thinks presidential rivals Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama should share duties in the White House. Religion News Service photo by Renee Ittner-McManus



struggle over Clinton vs. Obama

years, said she was “mixed between Hillary and Obama.”

“It’s so difficult because we’ve got a woman, plus we have a black man” in the primary, said the retired social worker. “And it’s a good thing because it’s time for a change.”

Smith said, “I like both of them. One should be president and the other vice president.”

Gunn, the Obama operative, and Jackson, his pastor, reflect another fault line in the black community: a generational division.

Gunn, 34, said he’s working for Obama because of the senator’s ability to bring people together and turn the page on the country’s stifling partisan past.

Jackson, 50, said he signed on with Clinton because of her experience as first lady and nearly seven years in the U.S. Senate. Like many African-Americans, Jackson also said former President Bill Clinton was a factor in his decision.

“That got her an audience with me, but she had to close the deal,” he said. “When you get to know her, you will understand that she is as smart as he is.”

Jackson has been criticized by the media and by political opponents because his company, Sunrise Communications, was hired by the Clinton campaign before he endorsed her. The pastor said the criticism is fueled by racist stereotypes and that Sunrise, from which he does not derive a salary, existed decades before any politicians came calling.

Jackson and Gunn, who are close, said they do not debate presidential politics and view each other as temporary rivals, practicing for the big game against Republicans when the primaries are over.

“I really view this as a scrimmage; we’re trying to get the best team in the fall,” Jackson said.

The minister said he does not preach politics from the pulpit, but a pastoral seal of approval means a lot in the black community, said Todd Shaw, a professor of African-American studies and political science at the University of South Carolina.

“It says two things,” Shaw said. “One, that I have a minister in the central social institution in the black community behind me. And it’s a cue to the congregation: If your minister thinks enough to endorse me, maybe you should take a look in my direction.”

Both Clinton and Obama have released lengthy lists of clergy endorsements, including out-of-state civil rights

leaders and heads of national denominations. Moreover, both campaigns have trotted out megastars like Oprah Winfrey (for Obama) and Maya Angelou (for Clinton) to help make their case to black women.

In addition, Bill Clinton has graced the pulpit of several black churches, including Bible Way, and met with dozens of black ministers. Two prominent black pastors, the Rev. Suzan Johnson-Cook and the Rev. Marcia Dyson, have discussed faith and women’s issues on behalf of Hillary Clinton in a statewide tour titled “For Such a Time as This,” a line from the Bible’s Book of Esther.

Frances Mitchell, 65, the financial minister at St. Luke Baptist Church in Columbia, said the pastors “gave us some pointers on some of the things that Hillary was looking to do for the African-American community.” Mitchell said she left the meeting sold on Clinton.

Obama has countered with endorsements of his own, as well as frequent Sunday visits to churches throughout South Carolina. But the focus of his outreach to religious voters, advisers say, is the 200 “faith community contacts” who signed up during “faith forums,” in small towns and cities across the state.

The forums, which typically draw a few dozen people, are rooted in Obama’s experience as a community organizer in Chicago’s black neighborhoods. Staffers ask forum attendees to explore how their faith and family interests inform political choices, said Joshua DuBois, the campaign’s director of religious affairs.

Pastor Kay Colleton, founder of the Manna Life Center in Charleston, said she was drawn to a forum last August out of curiosity. The 45-year-old pastor said she found something there that resonated with her own ministry.

“What has been very attractive is the grass-roots movement,” she said. “The reaching out to people of every variation of life and holding us accountable to each other. That’s what the Bible calls us to do.”

Despite the faith-based outreach, some black voters — at least one-third, according to the polls — remain up for grabs. Sarah Franklin is one of them.

“I think Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton both have good platforms,” said Franklin, 56, as she stood between services at Bible Way Church of Atlas Road. “I’m really waiting to hear something that clicks with me.”

—Daniel Burke and Cecile S. Holmes, Religion News Service

If it ain't broke, don't fix it

BY RABBI JAMES RUDIN

Following a recent Sunday service at a Des Moines evangelical church, 38-year-old Ron Heins told a *Washington Post* reporter he would like the United States to rid itself of the separation of church and state.

"That is not in the Constitution anywhere," he said. "Our country was founded on Christian principles. ... Give me the chance to share my faith."

Even though Heins' ideas are shared by many Americans, his description of the Constitution is both wrong and dangerous.

Article Six of the Constitution declares that 'no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.'

In his speech in December, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt

Romney cited that section of the Constitution in an effort to overcome the belief that his Mormon faith disqualifies him from the presidency.

Romney declared candidates should not be required to explain their religious beliefs: "To do so would enable the very religious test the founders prohibited in the Constitution." Rightly put.

In 1791, the Bill of Rights was adopted, and the First Amendment says clearly that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"

These are not vague promises or ethereal concepts that can be blithely dismissed. Instead, these rights were specifically included in our nation's founding document to make certain there would never be a legally mandated established religion in the United States.

The seductive siren song to link church and state in America comes at a moment in history when our country is increasingly multi-religious, and when every religion in the world has members in the U.S. The Constitution guarantees no one is "prohibited" from the "free exercise" of any religion, including the 18 percent of us who do not identify as Christian — Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Baha'is, Native Americans, and others. Thanks to the Constitution, agnostics and atheists are also protected because they, too, represent the "free exercise" of religious (non)belief.

Now, some Americans mistakenly view church-state

issues as a series of obscure court cases that involve prayers and Bible-reading in public schools, efforts to eliminate teaching of evolution, or divisive legal questions surrounding religious symbols on public property during the December holidays.

The proper balance between religion and state is a major issue that will never go away. Many Americans believe the question was permanently settled long ago by the adoption of the Constitution, and the vigorous support of church-state separation by people like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

Despite numerous attempts to undermine those bedrock constitutional guarantees, Jefferson's "wall of separation" requires constant maintenance. That wall has enabled both religion and

state to prosper and grow strong in the U.S.

Americans who would eliminate the separation of church and state should remember that such a position is a recipe for disaster. When religion and state become entangled and intertwined, atrocities inevitably occur. Throughout history, religious minorities and dissidents have been the victims of persecution, even murder, at the hands of the majority.

Those who advocate a comingling of church and state need to recall that many early settlers came to these shores fleeing hostile governments and tyrannical religious institutions, seeking liberty and freedom of conscience. Think of Quakers, Pilgrims, French Huguenots, Roman Catholics, Jews, Baptists, and a host of other religious groups that sought escape from regimes that harassed them because their beliefs were not part of the "establishment."

Retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said it best in rendering her last Supreme Court opinion: "Why ... trade a system that has served us so well for one that has served others so poorly?"

Rabbi James Rudin, the American Jewish Committee's senior interreligious adviser, is the author of the recently published book "The Baptizing of America: The Religious Right's Plans for the Rest of Us."



WHEN ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GET TOGETHER: A Perspective on the New Baptist Covenant

BY DR. EMMANUEL MCCALL

This article is the last of a three-part series in the run up to the New Baptist Covenant Celebration in 2008.

In May 2007, Mercer University Press released my new book "WHEN ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GET TOGETHER: Memoirs of Baptists and Race." The title comes from a spiritual often sung in southern African American churches.

In the book I attempt to show the racial progress made by Baptists in the south, as well as the events, organizations and special people God used to make it happen.

While there have been other attempts to overcome the racial and social barriers among Baptists in the south, none are as promising as The New Baptist Covenant. It has the advantage of building on past attempts, learning from past mistakes, having new persons in significant leadership of the various representative bodies; the support of social, educational and political progress; and the desire to see the Church live up to divine expectations. It also has the cooperation and presence of other national and international Baptists bodies. The North American Baptist Fellowship (NABF) of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) is a substantive ally of Baptist cooperation in North America. This organization has not been forceful in other years, but since 2003, a valiant attempt has been made to resurrect the potential of the NABF. God is richly blessing those efforts.

What is so different about The New Baptist Covenant?

1. The preceding paragraph notes the inclusion of the other Baptist bodies in North America. The number is now more than 40. The contributions of Canadian Baptists and other Baptists outside the south brings richness and diversity to the conversations.

2. There is a genuine desire to learn from each other, knowing that no one group of Baptists have a corner on God's revelation and inspiration.

3. Previous efforts of National and Southern Baptists were often on unequal playing fields. The field is now more level. "Big Brother" and paternal approaches are not to be found in the conversations among the leaders of The New Baptist Covenant.

4. With the new persons in leadership positions, the mistakes of the past do not glare as hindrances preventing creative

relationships and strategies.

5. We have already confessed our need for each other. No one of the bodies, national or continental, claims to have a handle on the problems or the answers our day demands. We have recognized the hemispheric connectedness that beckons us to cooperative interaction. As Dr. Martin L. King is reported to have said, "We may have come to North America in different ships, but we are in the same boat now."

6. We feel the compelling urgency of the biblical mandates, the obedience to the Holy Spirit, and the desire to join God in doing what God has called the Church to do, — TO LOVE THIS WORLD BACK TO GOD.

So forceful is the urgency, and so motivating is the Holy Spirit, so clear is the Word of God, that we are compelled to respond in grateful haste. God's creation seems to be soccered by demonic powers. We have not been given the spirit of fear, but the assurance that WE CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS US.

We have already heard of one meaningful partnership that has resulted from conversations in our planning meetings. Dr. Bill Underwood, president of Mercer University, heard Dr. David Goatley, Executive Secretary of the Lott Carey Missionary Convention, tell of having mission stations where HIV-AIDS was ravishing the population. They needed medical missionaries to assist in the pandemic. Mercer University's Medical School had students who needed places to intern. The two of them begin working on a partnership that will allow two Baptist entities to cooperate in God's mission. As the organizations now committed to The New Baptist Covenant begin to meet, discover each other, seek God's will and purpose, we expect amazing things to happen all over this continent. We believe that God is getting us ready to do a greater thing than has ever been done in North America. I THANK GOD THAT I CAN BE A PART OF IT.

NEW BAPTIST COVENANT



Emmanuel L. McCall is pastor of the Fellowship Group Baptist Church, East Point, Ga. He is also past national moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and vice president of the Baptist World Alliance.

Christmas Gifts to the

Christmas Cards

At the request of those offering financial support to the BJC, we mailed Christmas cards to the friends and family of donors acknowledging gifts made in their honor.

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Paul and Shirley Piper
Mark and Rebecca Wiggs

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Investigations should spur thinking on relationship between church & state

Despite persistent misunderstandings and deliberate distortions of the phrase “separation of church and state,” one thing is certain: most people of faith support the concept insofar as it prevents government from interfering in matters of religious doctrine and church finances. Interpretations of the Establishment Clause that restrict government promotion of religious messages, protect minority rights

and prohibit taxpayer funding of religious ministries are not always popular, but few religious individuals or entities question laws that protect religious liberty by keeping government out of church business.

Proponents of separation, from early Baptist leaders to the framers of the First Amendment, aimed to prevent both government interference in and government sponsorship of religion. Government should neither advance nor inhibit religion.

The tax code’s treatment of religious entities does not fit squarely into the constitutional framework, but reflects some of the underlying principles. Churches receive many of the same tax benefits (with accompanying regulations) as other nonprofit entities. Some exemptions from filings and audit procedures, however, are available only to certain religious entities as a permissible accommodation of the need to keep government from becoming entangled in religious affairs.

Sen. Charles Grassley’s investigation of six high-profile ministries provides an opportunity and incentive to consider various aspects of the relationship between government and religious entities. As the ranking member of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over federal tax policy, including the policy governing tax-exempt organizations, Grassley is well known for his efforts to uncover fraud and scandal. He turned his sights on these ministries, apparently spurred by reports of lavish compensation and displays of wealth, unbecoming a nonprofit entity. As explained by Grassley’s office, the rules against private benefit serve to prevent anyone involved in such organizations from “siphoning off any of a charity’s income or assets for personal use.” To that end, Senate investigators have requested detailed information about the ministries’ organizational structure and practices.

While government investigation of particular religious groups (in this case, media ministers who preach a so-called “prosperity gospel”) inevitably raises concerns about government intrusion into religion or select enforcement, it is important to note that the First Amendment provides no blanket protection against reasonable oversight and enforcement of tax laws. Investigators should not be based upon theological considerations (such as differences of opinion over biblical teachings on wealth). Nor should Grassley ignore reports of financial wrongdoing because they coincide with a theological perspective.

Lawyers for some of the ministries will no doubt challenge the extent of the committee’s powers to conduct oversight through inquiries and hearings. They will correctly argue that the primary responsibility for tax law enforcement lies with the Internal Revenue Service, which operates under audit rules that are especially protective of churches. That protection is intended to prevent government from targeting entities based on theology, and it is reasonable to expect the Senate to honor those protections.

More worrisome, however, is that the investigation may lead to a push for legal reforms that would be more burdensome on all religious entities. As Ethics Professor Larry McSwain of McAfee School of Theology noted in an *Ethics Daily* piece, other outcomes are possible. The investigation may have the beneficial effect of focusing needed attention on the legal and ethical responsibilities of churches with regard to clergy income and tax reporting. It may also promote conversations in churches about the benefits of transparency.

The original deadline to respond to Grassley has passed, and it remains to be seen what will become of the investigation. Some ministries responded fully and publicly, some partially and with requests for extensions, while others refused to cooperate at all. The Committee will determine the next steps, including whether to issue subpoenas and hold hearings. We will follow the story closely as it unfolds. In the meantime, all churches should note that ensuring financial responsibility under the tax laws is not necessarily a threat to religious freedom. By contrast, ministries that take for granted or abuse legal protections for religion, while claiming an unfettered right to avoid transparency and accountability, may jeopardize the very liberty they invoke.

“Sen. Charles Grassley’s investigation of six high-profile ministries provides an opportunity and incentive to consider various aspects of the relationship between government and religious entities.”

In 1657, a small group stood up for religious freedom of others

Three hundred and fifty years ago, on Dec. 27, 1657, 30 inhabitants of

Flushing, New Netherland (now New York), defied Gov. Peter Stuyvesant's order barring townspeople from harboring Quakers.

"For our part," they protested to Stuyvesant, "we cannot condemn [the Quakers], neither can we stretch out our hands against them, to punish, banish or persecute them."

Today the signers of what is known as the Flushing Remonstrance are celebrated as early advocates for religious freedom. And so they were. But the historic significance of their protest is not merely their plea for religious freedom. After all, 17th century Europe and America rang out with cries for the right to choose in matters of faith.

No, what is truly remarkable about the signers of the Remonstrance — and why they are still remembered 350 years later — is their demand for religious freedom not only for themselves, but also for others.

And not just any "others," but for Quakers, widely reviled in that day as dangerous zealots who threatened the public good.

Here was something new, an early defining moment in the history of religious freedom in America. For the first time in the Colonies, one group of people stood up for the rights of another.

What many find noble in 2007 was not well-received in 1657. Stuyvesant was firmly resolved to maintain order and cohesion in New Netherland through outward religious conformity. His response to the Remonstrance was to arrest town officials who had signed the document, abolish their government and replace it with his own appointees. The town clerk was banished and other signers forced to recant.

So why did the protesters dare to put their names on that document? Why risk so much on behalf of a small religious sect that, in fairness to Stuyvesant, did indeed have a reputation for stirring up trouble?

The question is not academic. In our own time, when rivers of blood are spilled in the name of religion throughout the world, it's well worth contemplating what motivated those 30 citizens of Flushing "to doe unto all men as wee desire all men should doe unto us," in the words of the Remonstrance.

In the document itself, the protesters invoke the Dutch Republic's tradition of toleration, "which is the glory of the outward state of Holland." And they cite their own town charter, which granted liberty of conscience "according to the Custome and manner of Holland." But

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neither of these references explains the motivation behind the act.

Of course, as English dissenters who had earlier fled Puritan persecution in Massachusetts Bay, the inhabitants of Flushing were already primed to oppose any sign of Dutch persecution in New Netherland.

The deeper source of the protest, however, was a simple but profound conviction: Liberty of conscience is required by God — and defense of that liberty for all people is an obligation of faith.

What began as a religious insight about rights of conscience in the 17th century translated into a civic commitment to religious freedom in the 18th century when the First Amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution in 1791. Today, the twin principles of "no establishment" and "free exercise" are meant to guarantee what the Flushing Remonstrance sought: religious freedom as a fundamental, inalienable right for every person.

But legal protections can never be sufficient to ensure full religious freedom. In real-life conflicts, religious freedom often means little unless ordinary citizens speak up for the rights of others, including members of the smallest minorities and least-popular communities.

When government officials ignore the rights of minority faiths — in a town opposed to an Islamic center, in a public school hostile to Wiccan children, in a court that ignores Native American religious claims — will those at the helm stand up for those in the hatches?

And when religious intolerance turns violent — a mosque is bombed, a synagogue desecrated — will those of the majority faith act to counter prejudice and stop erosion of civil liberties for those of minority faiths?

The 350th anniversary of the Flushing Remonstrance is a rare collective opportunity for Americans to ask the hard questions about the depth of our commitment to religious freedom — not just for ourselves, but for people of all faiths and none.

It won't be easy. In what is now the most religiously diverse nation on earth, religious differences are a growing source of division and conflict. But if we hope to live with our deepest differences in 21st century America, we must do all we can to keep alive the spirit of 17th century Flushing.

(Note: The minutes of the New Netherland colonial council provide the only contemporary copy of the Flushing Remonstrance. It is kept in the collections of the New York State Archives.)

Charles C. Haynes is senior scholar at the First Amendment Center, 555 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C., 20001. Web: firstamendmentcenter.org.