

REPORT

from the Capital

Leonard receives BJC award, stresses embracing Baptist history

FORT WORTH, Texas — Church historian Bill J. Leonard received the Baptist Joint Committee's highest honor and challenged the crowd to embrace its historical Baptist identity at the 2012 Religious Liberty Council Luncheon June 22. The attendees also elected new Religious Liberty Council (RLC) officers and representatives to the BJC Board of Directors.

BJC Executive Director J. Brent Walker presented the J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award to Leonard in recognition of his contributions to the defense of religious liberty for all people. Calling Leonard a "Baptist role model extraordinaire," Walker lauded Leonard's "nearly four decades of teaching, preaching, writing about Baptist heritage of freedom and support for the BJC's fight to ensure that freedom."

Leonard, who is the James and Marilyn Dunn Chair of Baptist Studies at the Wake Forest University School of Divinity, delivered the keynote address at the event, encouraging the crowd of more than 500 people to reaffirm their Christian and Baptist identity "as persons distressed and distressing of conscience." Leonard charged them to embrace that identity, and he raised issues that were currently "plaguing" his conscience. (See page six for Leonard's prepared text or watch the speech online at BJCOnline.org/luncheon.)

During the event, outgoing Religious Liberty Council Co-chair Mark Wiggs presided over the election of new RLC officers: Pam Durso of Georgia and David Massengill of New York as co-chairs, and Rebecca Mathis of North Carolina as secretary. Aubrey Ducker of Florida and Tambi Swiney of Tennessee were elected as new rep-



BJC Executive Director Brent Walker (left) presents Bill J. Leonard with the 2012 J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award for his outstanding contributions in defense of religious liberty for all people. (Photo by J.V. McKinney)

representatives from the RLC on the BJC Board of Directors, and they will serve a three-year term. The RLC is an association of individual donors to the BJC that work to provide education about and advocacy for religious freedom and the separation of church and state.

The J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award is named for the first executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee. Characteristics of award recipients include vocal advocacy of church-state separation as a means to genuine religious freedom, consistent commitment to the biblical witness to freedom of conscience under God and the dignity of the individual, and defense of the religious rights of all citizens with no prejudice of belief or non-belief.

—BJC Staff Reports

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BJC, other faith leaders support Tennessee mosque

More than 100 religious leaders, including the head of the Baptist Joint Committee, signed an open letter July 18 voicing support for a Tennessee mosque asking a federal judge to permit use of its newly built building to celebrate Ramadan, which began July 19.

Brent Walker of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and Wake Forest Divinity School professor Melissa Rogers were among signers of a letter drafted by The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty on behalf of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro. Since 2010 the ICM has endured vandalism, arson, bomb threats and legal challenges to its effort to relocate from an undersized office building it has used as a house of worship for decades to a new multi-acre site located nearby.

The Becket Fund, a nonprofit, public interest law firm dedicated to protecting the free expression of all religious traditions, also filed a request for a temporary restraining order asking the U.S. District Court in Nashville to allow the Islamic Center to open its doors despite a local judge's recent ruling that a county planning commission must vote a second time on a building permit it approved without proper notification under Tennessee's open meetings law.

The brief argues that the ruling discriminates against the Muslim community by deeming it more controversial than other religions in the community.

"No congregation should have its right of religious liberty curtailed solely because some of its neighbors disapprove of its religious beliefs," said Luke Goodrich, deputy general counsel at the Becket Fund.

The open letter decried harassment of the Islamic center and the frequent use of "Sharia" rhetoric to sensationalize the controversy. Opponents to the site plan, a megachurch-style campus with multiple buildings and ball fields, question how a relatively small congregation could afford such a project without outside funding, and they have alleged that members of the ICM board have ties to terrorists, a charge repeatedly denied by local Muslims.

"We emphatically support the right of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro — on an equal basis with any other type of religious congregation — to build a house of worship in the City of Murfreesboro and to use its own property for religious exercise," the letter said. "Mosques must be respected and honored just as churches must be respected and honored."

"When the liberty of one faith is abridged, the liberty of all faiths — and all citizens — is threatened," the letter concluded. "Therefore, we stand united in our dedication to the First Amendment, the Constitution and the inalienable right of religious liberty for all."

—Bob Allen, *Associated Baptist Press*

North Dakota rejects ballot measure opposed by BJC

North Dakota voters on June 12 rejected a ballot measure that would have amended the state constitution to prohibit the government from burdening any citizen's religious beliefs unless it could prove a compelling governmental interest for doing so.

Supporters of Initiated Constitutional Measure 3, also known as the Religious Liberty Restoration Amendment (RLRA), claimed it was consistent with other federal and state laws protecting the free exercise of religion. The measure, however, went beyond existing law in ways that raised concern among some religious liberty advocates, including the Baptist Joint Committee. According to official state election results, about 64 percent of state voters rejected the measure.

In 1990, the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Employment Division v. Smith*, ruling that neutral, generally applicable laws that burden religious exercise do not violate the First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause. The decision broke with decades of free exercise jurisprudence, striking down a legal test that, until then, gave heightened protection to free exercise claims. The test stated the government could not *substantially* burden religious exercise unless it had a compelling reason for doing so, and the regulation imposed is the least restrictive means of accomplishing that interest.

The High Court's decision in *Smith* drew ire from religious liberty advocates across political and ideological divides. In response, the BJC led a large and diverse coalition that helped convince Congress to pass bipartisan legis-

lation to restore the compelling interest test called the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) in 1993. And because the Supreme Court later held that the federal RFRA does not apply to the states, about 16 states have since passed their own versions of the federal bill.

The BJC sent a letter to North Dakota supporters in advance of the primary expressing concerns about Measure 3. Unlike the version of RFRA that the BJC supports, North Dakota's Measure 3 omitted the important requirement that government burdens on religious exercise must be *substantial* in order to be challenged in court. Measure 3 would have prohibited all government burdens on religion, however slight — an overbroad interpretation of what the federal RFRA was intended to do. Without the substantial burden requirement, nearly any state law or regulation could be subject to exemption challenges, effectively making religious liberty an automatic trump card. Under RFRA's more measured approach, courts seek to balance personal religious liberty interests with other important government interests.

Measure 3 also used language unprecedented in any other RFRA, defining a burden as including "indirect burdens such as withholding benefits, assessing penalties, or an exclusion from programs or access to facilities." Without any existing guidance, it is impossible to know how courts might interpret such language, and North Dakotans likely avoided costly, taxpayer-funded litigation by defeating Measure 3.

—Nan Futrell

REFLECTIONS

The Raspberry approach to public policy issues



J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

I am sometimes asked where the Baptist Joint Committee stands on the political spectrum: conservative or liberal? My response is that the BJC is neither left nor right, but at the sensible center. Let me explain.

It doesn't mean we are not passionate advocates for religious liberty and church-state separation. Nor does it mean that we are wishy-washy or afraid to take a stand. As someone once said, whoever heard of a soft-spoken advocate for the First Amendment?

What I mean is that the BJC historically and today understands that few church-state issues are black and white. Many occupy the gray area in between. Both religion clauses in the First Amendment ensure religious liberty but in different ways, and they are often in tension with one another about how they do it.

This position in the sensible center is also strategic. Precisely because we are not partisan and try always to see the big picture, we can reach out to the left and to the right to build a coalition and hopefully consensus on otherwise divisive issues.

There are others in the public arena that approach public policy issues the way we do, but not many. Unfortunately, one of them recently passed away. William Raspberry — one of the first widely read African-American columnists in the United States — died on July 17. Raspberry wrote opinion pieces for *The Washington Post* and was syndicated in more than 200 newspapers for more than four decades.

Raspberry was hard to pigeonhole politically. Conservatives thought he was a liberal, and liberals thought he was a conservative. He always was prepared to puncture left-wing orthodoxies and reject right-wing verities. His opinions were articulated forcefully but always civilly in a media culture that became increasingly bellicose during his career. In fact, according to his obituary in *The Washington Post*, Raspberry quit going on television talk shows because they demanded a strident tone and "they force you to pretend to be mad even when you're not."

In the course of opining more than 5,000 times over his career, Raspberry sometimes dealt with church-state issues. I did not always agree with him, but I give Raspberry credit for being thoughtful and struggling with the difficulties surrounding the issue at hand. His approach was generally to affirm the no establishment principle without denying the relevance of religion to public life and

to always seek a practical win-win outcome in church-state controversies.

For example, in 1980 when the California attorney general tried to take over the Worldwide Church of God — charging it with brainwashing and fraud — Raspberry cried foul. Following a well-tuned and instinctive understanding of religious freedom (I don't know if Raspberry realized he had Supreme Court precedent behind him), Raspberry wrote the government could not be the judge of salvation and the legitimacy of a particular church without establishing religion and violating the religious freedom of minority groups.

Addressing the "December dilemma" — whether to wish someone "Merry Christmas" — in 1993, Raspberry appealed more to simple etiquette than tenets of constitutional law. According to Raspberry, good manners require a season's greetings take into account the sensibilities of the listeners, but an errant or overuse of "Merry Christmas" is not the same thing as religious intolerance either on the part of well-wishers or the government.

"What's the Danger in Prayer?" was the title of a September 2000 back-to-school piece he penned. Raspberry quite properly distinguished between prayers written or sanctioned by school authorities and ones lifted up by students at lunch time, ball games and other non-coercive, non-government-controlled venues.

Suspicious of the Faith-based Initiatives in 2001 because of Establishment Clause concerns and the prospect of subjecting religious charities to governmental regulation, Raspberry settled (too quickly in my mind) on the idea of voucherized aid to the prospective clients instead of the religious body as a way to avoid the constitutional questions.

Writing shortly after September 11, 2001, Raspberry grappled with the tension between appropriate separation of church and state and the public display of religion throughout the country. The answer to misguided religious fundamentalism is not, he said, a mirror image of secular fundamentalism, but a toleration of the neutral expression of religion by persons of all faith in the public spaces.

In 2004, Raspberry took on Michael Newdow's challenging of "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. Raspberry was quick to say that "the pledge was better without the phrase, which, in [his] view, ruined the rhythm while adding no discernible meaning" to the pledge, but he argued



K. Hollyn Hollman
General Counsel

Rallying support for religious freedom

Summer, especially near July Fourth, is a good time for congregations and religious communities to host an annual religious freedom emphasis. In fact, every year the BJC consults with churches and communities on such efforts, hoping that education will prepare them to handle the inevitable controversies that arise in our religiously diverse society. Too often we take our freedom for granted, giving little thought to the big ideas that make our country special. The values protected by the first words of the First Amendment need and deserve attention by those who regularly gather to worship:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Understanding the historical foundations and current interpretations of the religion clauses and other religious freedom laws is an important part of maintaining our country’s freedom. Of course, that doesn’t mean it is always easy. While there are many ways to educate and engage audiences about the ways our laws protect believers and nonbelievers alike, and how the separation of church and state in America has been good for both, it takes hard work. A successful program requires careful planning and review of first principles. We shouldn’t be surprised that there are many specific religious liberty issues that divide us, and not every call to rally on behalf of religious freedom unites or strengthens support for our shared values.

This year we’ve seen a couple of religious freedom campaigns organized on a national scale that I believe have done little to advance understanding or support for religious freedom. Though perhaps successful in grabbing some media attention, the educational value of these efforts seemed to fizzle.

First, there were the “Stand Up for Religious Freedom” rallies sponsored by a coalition of anti-abortion groups, followed by the “Fortnight for Freedom” initiated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to span a two week period ending on July 4. Both campaigns included events in multiple cities and aimed to highlight the importance of religious freedom through a variety of means, including large public rallies. Though cast in broad terms of protecting religious freedom, both were fueled by anger toward the Obama administration’s regulation mandating contraceptive coverage in health insurance policies as applied to certain objecting religious employers. Reports from these events illustrate the opportunities and limitations of using “religious freedom” as a rallying cry.

Thousands are said to have gathered in cities

across the country for the rallies sponsored by the “Stand Up for Religious Freedom” coalition where leaders focused on the perceived threat to religion of national healthcare legislation. The lack of coherence in the effort’s message, however, was plain. Participants at one such rally were quoted as making the tired and uninformed claim that “they’ve taken prayer and Bible reading out of schools.” Another person quoted on national radio ended a litany of fear-based falsehoods with this unhelpful summary: “It’s just systematic taking-away, and if we sit by and do nothing, then we’ll be like Communist Russia or China where it’s against the law to even go to church.” While these efforts may have generated some energy for some of the groups’ specific political interests, it seems unlikely they had a positive impact on the need to understand and protect religious freedom.

The USCCB’s call to religious freedom action, which encouraged prayers, litanies and church events planned to “help save our religious freedom,” certainly had the potential for unifying Catholics to make a large-scale impact. Responses appear to have varied widely, revealing a greater diversity in opinions than may have been anticipated about the impact of national health care laws on religious freedom. For many people, the link between a religious conviction to avoid contraception use and a government program making the benefit available to those who choose it simply did not seem sufficiently threatening to rally.

While there is much to be gained by rallying support for our country’s shared values, including religious freedom, little is gained when the message focuses on fears that obscure understanding. We should all stand guard for each other’s religious liberty, and sometimes a rally is just what is needed. Rallies, however, are no substitute for the kind of reasoned debate necessary to resolve complex issues of church and state.

A consistent part of the BJC’s mission has been to equip and encourage congregations to learn about the Baptist heritage of religious freedom. Within and beyond Baptist life, we have long provided a variety of resources for those who want to explore the biblical and historical roots of religious freedom as well as the constitutional principles that protect it. (Visit our website at BJCOnline.org) Whether planned in conjunction with a patriotic holiday, or out of concern about a current controversy, educational programming on religious liberty in churches plays a significant role in protecting religious liberty. It may also strengthen our ability to rally support for religious freedom in the long run.

With health care ruling, contraception debate goes on

Critics of the Obama administration's requirement that faith-based employers include mandatory contraceptive coverage in their health care plans for women voiced disappointment June 28 when the U.S. Supreme Court upheld key portions of the Affordable Care Act, sometimes known as "Obamacare."

Melissa Rogers, director of the Center for Religion and Public Affairs at Wake Forest University Divinity School and nonresident senior fellow for governance studies at the Brookings Institution, said no church-state issue was brought before the Court in its ruling that Congress had the power to impose the health care mandate because it can be considered a tax. However, the fact that the law was upheld means religious liberty debates about issues like the contraception mandate will continue, she said.

O.S. Hawkins, president of GuideStone Financial Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, on the record raising concern about how new Health and Human Services insurance requirements might affect church health plans, said he was disappointed with the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the Affordable Care Act.

He said that while the decision has no immediate impact on rates, benefits or eligibility for any of GuideStone's health plan participants, it remains unclear

how church plans will be affected by the coverage mandate.

The Supreme Court decision came midway through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' "Fortnight for Freedom," a 14-day campaign protesting U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations they say would require Catholic and other faith-based organizations to pay for medical services that violate their religious beliefs.

Churches are exempt from the contraceptive mandate, but not faith-based institutions like hospitals and universities that serve larger constituencies than just adherents to the faith. The White House responded to religious liberty concerns in the new rules by requiring

insurance companies to pay for birth control services for women who work for religious institutions that object to paying for them on moral grounds. Critics of the compromise called it an accounting trick, saying insurance companies will simply pass on their added expenses to employers in the form of higher premiums.

Conservative organizations including the Alliance Defending Freedom and the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty vowed to continue to challenge the contraceptive mandate on religious liberty grounds.

—Bob Allen, *Associated Baptist Press*



'Radicalization' hearings on Muslims return to Capitol

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers split along party lines at a hearing June 20 meant to gauge Muslim responses to earlier hearings on the "radicalization" of American Muslims.

Testimony by four witnesses was overshadowed by Republicans who defended the four prior hearings and Democrats who questioned whether they were misguided or actually harmful to Muslim Americans.

Short on new data but long on rhetoric, lawmakers argued both sides of the same statistics and relied heavily on anecdotes.

"The overwhelming majority of Muslim Americans are outstanding Americans, yet the reality is that the Islamist terror threat comes from the community," said Rep.

Peter King, R-N.Y., who chairs the House Committee on Homeland Security.

Meanwhile, the ranking Democratic member, Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., said he hoped the hearings did not increase hate crimes or religious profiling, and worried that America's image abroad is of a nation at war with Islam.

Muslim physician and writer Qanta Ahmed told lawmakers that difficulties in discussing American Islam stem from shortcomings in language, especially extreme post-9/11 rhetoric. "What's so important about these hearings and why we actually need a synopsis of the hearings is (that) the distinction between Islam and Islamism has been lost in public discourse," she said.



King

Others argued that any religion can breed extremism. Faiza Patel, co-director of the Liberty and National Security Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, said the current model of investigating terrorist threats is ineffective because it often equates Muslim piety with extremism.

Rep. Hansen Clarke, D-Mich., argued that the heated political discourse has resulted in discrimination beyond Muslims. He recounted an incident in his district in which a Sikh temple was defaced with anti-Muslim graffiti.

"These hearings are not an assault against Islam," he said, his voice rising passionately. "It's (an) assault against all Americans, especially Asian Americans," he said.

—Chris Lisee, *Religion News Service*

In a Rhode Island deed dated 1661, Roger Williams reflected on his decision to purchase land from the Narragansett Indians and establish Providence in 1638. Williams wrote: "I desired it might be for a shelter for persons distressed for conscience. I then considering the condition of divers of my distressed countrymen, I communicated my said purchase unto my loving friends [whom he names] who then desired to take shelter here with me." Of this action, 19th century historian Edward Underhill commented:

"This worthy conception of [Williams'] noble mind was realized, and he lived to see a settled community formed wherein liberty of conscience was a primary and fundamental law."¹

"A shelter for persons distressed for conscience," of all the statements that capture the essence of religious liberty, that one grips me the most — words so haunting that they find their way in to various essays and articles I've written over the years. Whatever else we Baptists can claim or disown in our history, we have been, are and will be at our best when we offer "shelter for persons distressed of conscience" even if we don't agree among ourselves what the specific issues of conscience may be. And before we go any further, let's say that at least for today we're not going to quibble over whether Roger Williams' ideas on religious liberty can represent Baptist ideals because he did not remain a Baptist very long. Denying Williams a part in Baptist commitments to religious liberty would be like saying that John Calvin can't influence certain Baptists because he wasn't one; or that Martin Luther can't inform us on the priesthood of all believers since he wasn't a Baptist. Or whether Jesus ... Well you get the point. (For whatever it is worth, we know that Luther and Calvin were not immersed but Roger Williams and Jesus were!)

And what do we mean by conscience? This may surprise you, but today I'm satisfied with the definition that Williams' nemesis Puritan preacher and establishmentarian John Cotton gave when they started their famous debate that became the source for *The Bloody Tenent*. Cotton noted, "Now, by persecution for cause of conscience, I conceive you mean, either for professing some point of doctrine which you believe in conscience to be the truth, or for practicing some work which in conscience you believe to be a religious duty."² Do you follow? For Cotton and apparently for Williams, conscience involves internal commitment to truth and external action or duty demanded by truth. But here the two Puritan divines parted company (as do many in our culture to this day). John Cotton wrote: "It is not lawful to persecute any for conscience' sake rightly informed; for in persecuting such, Christ himself is persecuted in them." However, he insisted that "for an erroneous and blind conscience, (even in fundamental and weighty points) it is not lawful to persecute any, till after admonition once or twice"³ Conscience based on falsehood as determined by the orthodox majority was a sin against God and had to be dealt with punitively.

The Baptists: Distressed

Speech by Bill Leonard at the annual

Roger Williams, on the other hand, understood that God alone was judge of conscience. In words still relevant to cases of state-privileged religion, Williams wrote: "All civil states, with their officers of justice, their respective constitutions and administrations, are proved essentially civil, and therefore not judges, governors or defenders of the spiritual, or Christian, state and worship."⁴ The radical role of conscience, Williams believed, was at the heart of Christian identity. He declared:



Leonard

It is the will and command of God that since the coming of his Son the Lord Jesus, a permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or anti-christian consciences and worships be granted to all men in all nations and countries: and they are only to be fought against with that sword which is only, in soul matters, able to conquer: to wit, the sword of God's Spirit, the word of God.⁵

So heretics, non-Christian and "anti-Christian" were free to exercise conscience, as Dr. John Clarke, Williams' Baptist co-founder of Rhode Island wrote, because "every man being such as shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and must give an account of himself to God, and therefore ought to be fully persuaded in his own mind, for what he undertake. ..."⁶

Yet for Williams, some acts of conscience were not appropriate. He wrote: that "the blood of so many hundred thousand souls of protestants and papists, spilt in the wars of present and former ages, for their respective consciences, is not required nor accepted by Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace."⁷

Baptist commitment to conscience is inseparable, I believe, from a commitment to uncoerced faith in Jesus Christ, a pre-Enlightenment insight born of a Believers' Church, described no more clearly than in the classic 1611 Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam, which states:

That the church off CHRIST is a company off faithful people 1 Cor.1.2 Eph.1.1 separated fro[m] the world by the word & Spirit off GOD. 2 Cor.6.17. being k[n]it vnto the LORD, & one Vnto another, by Baptisme. 1 Cor. 12.13. Vpon their owne confessio[n] of the faith. Act.8.37. and sinnes. Mat.3.6.⁸

In this seminal statement, the Baptists built on a growing concern among some English Puritans that a profession of faith was required of everyone who would claim membership in Christ's church. Yet the Baptists went beyond the separatist and non-separatist Puritans by making such profession normative from the

Distressed and Distressing Conscience

Annual Religious Liberty Council Luncheon, June 22, 2012

Faces from the luncheon



In addition to the keynote address from Bill J. Leonard, attendees of the Religious Liberty Council Luncheon heard from (shown left to right) BJC Executive Director Brent Walker, incoming Religious Liberty Council Co-chair Pam Durso (shown leading the benediction), outgoing Religious Liberty Council Co-chair Mark Wiggs, BJC Board Chair Mitch Randall, and BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman. (All photos by J.V. McKinney)

beginning of their movement, by rejecting governmentally enforced infant baptism in favor of believer's baptism, and by insisting that faith cannot be coerced on heretic or atheist by any ecclesial or governmental hierarchy or tribunal. They formed such a church and then did something else very Baptist, they split.

As they knocked on the door of the Mennonites, John Smyth's schismatic group wrote their own confession bridging Anabaptist and Baptist ideas including an amazing statement on religious freedom and uncoerced faith — a clause that William L. Lumpkin called an "important landmark," representing "the first confession of faith of modern times to demand freedom of conscience and separation of church and state."⁹ It asserts:

That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of religion, or doctrine: but to leave Christian religion free, to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions (Rom. xii), injuries and wrongs of man against man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc., for Christ only is the king, and lawgiver of the church and conscience. (James iv.12).¹⁰

From the beginning, the Baptist concept of a Believer's Church provided a theological foundation that shaped issues of unco-

erced faith, freedom of conscience, dissent, and Christian responses to the state. Faith is required for baptism and church membership; such faith must be uncoerced; conscience shapes the response to faith and God alone is judge of conscience, therefore all official state or ecclesial efforts to compel faith must be resisted for conscience' sake. And since states and churches often succumb to coercion, dissent is inevitable. That's us, from the beginning.

Baptists, some at least, have been distressed for conscience since Roger Williams' views got him exiled by the godly New England Puritans and led him to found Providence and with it the first Baptist church in America. Yet there are also times when Baptists have distressed the consciences of those around them, challenging their culture even when they knew they would never gain the majority. Today, let us consider doing the same, reaffirm our Christian/Baptist identity as persons distressed and distressing of conscience. Today, I am grateful to the BJC for permitting me to raise issues plaguing my conscience that I hope will distress ours.

—First, let's celebrate religious pluralism, after all we helped invent it. Such pluralism does not mean a nebulous religious syncretism without particularity, that we have to make all religions "fit" in common affirmation. It means that everyone has voice and the freedom to choose or reject religious identity — that is the heart of a free conscience. Thus in the pluralistic environment

SPEECH CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

religious groups have the freedom to be as welcoming or as obnoxious as their convictions compel them. And their would-be constituency is free to run to or run away from them as they choose. Indeed, faith communities are often forced to accept irreconcilable differences and schism for conscience's sake.

—Second, pluralism was relatively easy for Protestants until now. Early Baptists affirmed pluralism and conscience as a distinct, sometimes persecuted minority in America. As religious liberty became more normative, they discovered something else. One, that Americans to this day and in spite of the First Amendment, tend to grant religious liberty grudgingly (just ask Baptists, Quakers, Shakers, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, Roman Catholics, Jews and Muslims); and two, once Protestantism gained privilege in American religious life, talk of religious liberty became less dangerous for Baptists as they became part of the religiously privileged class. Liberal and conservative alike could use the rhetoric of religious liberty generously since they owned much of the culture, particularly in the South and Southwest. But something happened in our generation. The pluralism that Baptists anticipated and defended, often much earlier than most American Protestant groups, has prevailed. Cities and towns large and small are now populated by multiple religious groups, including many non-Christians, each claiming a place at religio-political table. These days, our consciences are sometimes distressed because we are experiencing the death rattle of Protestant privilege in American culture, especially in the South/Southwest. This loss of religious hegemony forces us to ask: What will become of our commitment to religious liberty now?

—Third, let us learn to replace culture-privilege with culture-witness. We do not claim religious rights at the expense of other's conscience but demand voice, the right to declare our views publicly and privately in ways that take dialogue and differences seriously. Disagree vehemently on the basis of conscience; but burn no one, implicitly or explicitly. Defend and live into the heritage of religious freedom with humility, tempering the advocacy of church/state separation with the confession that some among us retain certain ministerial tax exemptions, the last gasp of fourth century Constantinianism in a democratic culture. That alone should give us pause in being too self-righteous about "separation of church and state." Being a Baptist remains a messy business.

—Fourth, let us rediscover the power of conscience and the

possibility of dissent. In a society where individualism is rampant, churches need to take communal responsibility for distinguishing Christian conscience from destructive fanaticism or political meanness. At the same time, faith communities themselves often require the prophetic voice of the lone individual, even when it is painful and divisive. For example, as we celebrate the concern of Roman Catholics for religious liberty after years of waiting on them to claim it, some of us might insist that for conscience' sake, and in the name of religious freedom, we revisit posting an American ambassador to the Vatican, or offering government-funded vouchers to parochial schools. Conscience cuts both ways, we dissenters might gently but firmly remind the bishops. Conscience calls us to distinguish religious freedom from religious privilege, implicitly and explicitly. We may not win on those issues but we can be Protest-ant and Baptist about them.

—Fifth, let us struggle (and it is a struggle) to distinguish between freedom of conscience in church/state matters and freedom of dialogue and debate inside the Baptist house. In my own town, I was struck this year by the fact that in multiple political debates — deity specific prayer at government meetings, Christian flags at military monuments, and constitutional marriage amendments, Christians in general and Baptists in particular seldom found ways to talk about their differences outside sound bites in the public media. Right now I've put a personal moratorium on using the term Body of Christ too readily so deep are the divisions and the silence between supposed brothers and sisters in Christ. At the same time, when our consciences are "pricked" across the political spectrum, we need not be silent, hoping to talk to, not just at, those with whom we differ. Roger Williams and John Cotton did it in 17th century New England, but only because Williams was "sheltered" in free Rhode Island. I wish we'd try harder.

—Finally, amid all the distress, in good conscience let's consider this, in the year of our Lord 2012 a Republican, former Mormon missionary, and a Democrat, nurtured in an African-American Liberationist congregation, are running against each other for President of the United States. That situation appears to bear out Roger Williams' radical 1644 assertion that "true civility and Christianity may both flourish in a state or kingdom, notwithstanding the permission of divers and contrary consciences, either Jew or Gentile."¹¹ He won, didn't he? At least for now.

Endnotes:

1. Edward Bean Underhill, Introduction, in Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience Discussed* (London: J. Haddon, 1848), xxv.
2. Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, 19.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 2.
6. John Clarke, *Ill Newes from New*

England, in H. Leon McBeth, *Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 92.

7. Ibid., 1.

8. *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland, 1611*, in William L. Lumpkin and Bill J. Leonard, editors, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* Second Revised Edition (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2011), 111.

9. William L. Lumpkin and Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* Second Revised Edition, 115.

10. "Propositions and Conclusions concerning True Christian Religion, containing a Confession of Faith of certain English people, living at Amsterdam", 1612, in Lumpkin and Leonard, editors, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* Second Revised Edition, 128.

11. Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, 2.

New State Department report highlights global religious restrictions

Religious minorities continue to suffer loss of their rights across the globe, the State Department reported July 30, with a rise in blasphemy laws and restrictions on faith practices.

Almost half of the world's governments "either abuse religious minorities or did not intervene in cases of societal abuse," said Ambassador-at-Large Suzan Johnson Cook at a State Department briefing on the 2011 International Religious Freedom Report.

"It takes all of us — governments, faith communities, civil society working together to ensure that all people have the right to believe or not to believe," she said.

Christians in Egypt, Tibetan Buddhists in China and Baha'is in Iran are among those without religious rights, the report states.

In Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, people have been killed, imprisoned or detained because they violated or criticized blasphemy laws. In Indonesia, a Christian was sentenced to prison for five years for distributing books that were considered "offensive to Islam."

These statutes, the U.S. government says, silence people in countries that claim to be "protecting religion."

The report highlighted the plight of religious minorities in countries that have been in political transition, especially Egypt, which it said has failed to halt increasing violence against Coptic Christians.

"Government officials have not been held accountable for their actions, and there were indications in early 2012 of mounting Coptic emigration," the State Department report noted.

Some religious groups struggle to be recognized by their countries. A new law in Hungary reduced the number of recognized religious groups from more than 300 to fewer than 32.

Iran, one of eight nations designated by the State Department as "countries of particular concern," was criticized for deterioration of an already "egregious"

state of religious freedom. Christian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani — who has garnered support from U.S. Christians — remains in jail and faces possible execution, while seven Baha'i leaders' sentences were

returned to their original 20 years after they were reduced to 10 in 2010.

Conditions in China, another country designated for particular concern, also deteriorated, with growing restrictions on Tibetan Buddhists.

"The self-immolation of over 40 Tibetans to protest Chinese policies continue to demonstrate their desperation," Johnson Cook said.

Katrina Lantos Swett, chair of the U.S. Commission on



U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton meets with Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Suzan Johnson Cook in Istanbul, Turkey, on July 15, 2011. Cook is an American Baptist minister. (RNS photo courtesy U.S. State Dept.)

International Religious Freedom, called the State Department report "commendable" but said the department still must convince policymakers that religious freedom should be a "moral imperative."

"The other challenge is convincing foreign governments to make needed improvements," she said.

In several countries, the department noted a rise in anti-Semitism, from Holocaust-denying websites sanctioned by Iran to an openly anti-Semitic party in Hungary.

Despite numerous examples of diminished religious rights, the State Department said there has been improvement in some countries.

In Cuba, while "significant" restrictions remained, most religious organizations reported increasing ability to hold activities and seek new members.

The Russian government "generally" showed respect for religious freedom, but the Russian Orthodox Church received preferential treatment over less traditional faiths.

"Even as this report documents abuses of religious freedom, the events of 2011 show that change is possible," the report's summary states, "and suggests that countries whose constitution, laws, policies, and practices protect religious freedom and human rights will be the most vibrant and stable."

— Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service

BJC announces winners of 2012 essay contest

WASHINGTON — An essay exploring the history of religion in presidential campaigns and calling for a courteous discussion of religion from candidates is the winner of the 2012 Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest, sponsored by the Religious Liberty Council of the Baptist Joint Committee.

This year's essay topic asked students to examine the role religion should play during a presidential campaign. More than 735 high school juniors and seniors from 47 states, as well as students from Canada, Puerto Rico and Guam, submitted entries.

The grand prize winner is Scott Benjamin Remer from Beachwood, Ohio. Remer will receive a \$1,000 scholarship and a trip to Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the Baptist Joint Committee board meeting in October. His essay, titled "Deities and Dialogue: The Proper Role of Religion in Presidential Elections," argued for a cautious and courteous discussion of religion from the candidates, using examples from history to illustrate conflicts that can arise in the political process. Remer pointed out that the Constitution created what Baptist preacher Isaac Backus called a clear-cut distinction between the "civil" and the "ecclesiastical." Using examples from present-day campaigns and the campaigns of 1800, 1928 and 1960, Remer wrote, "Since religion is such a deeply personal and profoundly important part of people's lives, vilipending others'

faiths is extremely hurtful and divisive." Remer concluded, "An inclusive, respectful dialogue about religion can elevate our national civic discourse and create more well-informed voters," and wrote that "as long as candidates refrain from using their religion as a means of obtaining votes or belittling their opponents or potential constituents, initiating a candid conversation with clear limits can enlighten our politics."

Michael Aitchison of Iowa City, Iowa, earned the second place prize of a \$500 scholarship. In his essay, Aitchison suggested the campaign could be treated as a "job interview." He concluded, "Religion has proved itself to be a valid political discussion point when used properly, and as such it should not be ignored, but neither can it be allowed to dominate the election."

The third place winner is Katelyn Harrop of McMinnville, Oregon, who will receive a \$100 scholarship. In her essay, Harrop wrote, "In politics, especially competitive and brutal presidential campaigns, the key is to allow religion to fuel the moral reasoning behind political actions without presenting them in a way that excludes or degrades those of other or no religious preference."

The Religious Liberty Essay Scholarship Contest was established in 2006 to engage high school juniors and seniors in church-state issues. A panel of judges issued scores based on the content of each essay and the author's writing skills.



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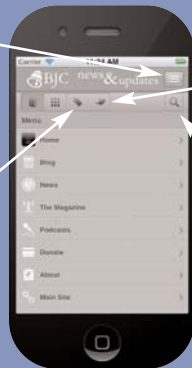
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Hughes serves as BJC summer intern

Ivana Hughes of Evans, Ga., served as an intern working alongside our staff in Washington, D.C., this summer. Hughes is a rising senior at Gardner-Webb University majoring in Political Science. She is the daughter of Jesse and JoAnne Hughes and a member of Bean Pond Baptist Church in Jackson, S.C. After graduation, she plans to attend law school.



Hughes

BJC, others condemn representatives' attacks based on religious affiliation

The Baptist Joint Committee and 41 other organizations condemned religiously based allegations raised by five members of Congress that American Muslims connected to the U.S. government may be trying to spread the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic political movement.

According to a letter signed by the BJC and other groups, allegations made by Reps. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., Trent Franks, R-Ariz., Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, Thomas Rooney, R-Fla., and Lynn Westmoreland, R-Ga., "have serious [harmful] implications for religious freedom" because they questioned "the loyalty of faithful Americans based on nothing more than their religious affiliations and what is at best tenuous evidence of their associations." The interfaith letter was sent to those members of Congress as well as department heads at five federal agencies to whom the representatives' allegations had been addressed.

In their letters, sent in June, the five members of Congress called for government investigations of individuals and organizations which they claim may have ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Their accusations were based largely on a report by the Center for Security Policy, a group "known for its consistently anti-Muslim agenda," according to the letter signed by the BJC.

The letter protesting the allegations said, "We will continue to speak out in support of people of all faiths and no faith, and the religious freedom of all Americans to practice — or choose not to practice — a religion without fear of criticism or suspicion."

Other signatories of the letter include American Baptist Churches USA, Interfaith Alliance, NAACP, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness, the ACLU and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

—Cherilyn Crowe

Joint statement provides guidance for election year

As Americans focus on the November election and the rules governing religious expression in public life, a document explaining the laws regarding religious expression in America is being re-released.

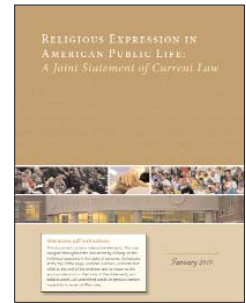
"Religious Expression in American Public Life: A Joint

Statement of Current Law" is the product of collaboration among national religious leaders of different faiths and civil liberties leaders. Baptist Joint Committee Executive Director Brent Walker and General Counsel Holly Hollman were among the drafters of the 32 page question-and-answer document. The Center for Religion and Public Affairs at Wake Forest University School of Divinity coordinated the project.

"As the campaign cycle moves toward November elections, the statement provides helpful guidance for tax-exempt organizations about the IRS rules that apply to their political activities," said Melissa Rogers, director of the Center for Religion and Public Affairs, according to a Wake Forest University news release. "Our purpose in providing this statement is to increase understanding of current law regarding religious expression in American public life," Rogers said. "While the drafters of this document may disagree about how the legal line should be drawn between church and state, we have been able to come together and agree in many cases on what the law is today."

The statement can be downloaded as a pdf document from the Baptist Joint Committee website (BJCOnline.org/currentlaw) or from the website of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity Center for Religion and Public Affairs (<http://divinity.wfu.edu/religion-and-public-affairs/joint-statement/>). To download a free iPad version of the document or to order a printed version for a small fee, visit HP's MagCloud at <http://www.magcloud.com/browse/issue/352564>.

—BJC Staff Reports



REFLECTIONS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

that removing it after 50 years was not warranted or practical.

According to his *Washington Post* obituary, Raspberry said in 2006 that he had learned two important lessons throughout his career. First, with respect to virtually every public policy issue, "most thoughtful people secretly believe both sides." I judge this was his way of saying that there is at least an element of truth or something worth considering in both arguments. And, it is entirely possible to be confident without being arrogant and possible for someone to "disagree with me without being, on that account, either a scoundrel or a fool."

A lot has been said recently about the value of civility and a more textured grappling with difficult policy questions, including church and state, that confront us today. William Raspberry incarnated those values. We shall miss him, but the BJC will carry on in his tradition.



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REPORT from the Capital

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Center for Religious Liberty Update

Construction continues on the Baptist Joint Committee's Center for Religious Liberty on Capitol Hill with completion scheduled for early fall. Located on the site of the BJC's current offices, the Center will be across the street from the U.S. Supreme Court and two blocks from the U.S. Capitol. This strategic location has long been a major asset for the agency and its work with other organizations in the battle for religious liberty.

For more than five years, the BJC has worked to fulfill its vision of the new Center.

It will expand the organization's ability to accommodate additional staff and visitors as it ramps up its education efforts. The BJC will be able to host larger and more frequent groups of students, church members and clergy who visit Washington, D.C.

The office design — using wood and glass, a smart layout and advanced interactive technology — will balance the needs of staff with the goal of providing

visitors meaningful exposure to the work of the organization and our Baptist heritage.

The floor plan will take advantage of the impressive view of Capitol Hill. The new state-of-the-art conference room will double the BJC's meeting space capacity and highlight a southwest corner view of the U.S. Supreme Court building and the U.S. Capitol dome.

The centerpiece of the conference room is a 70-inch interactive video screen that will make learning about religious freedom come alive for groups of all ages, including the high school, college

and seminary students that visit the BJC office every year.

In addition to these exciting plans, the Center will include office space for visiting scholars and advocates, a gallery highlighting the history of the BJC's 75-plus years defending and extending religious liberty for all, and new and improved resources, curriculum and literature — in print and online.



Top: An artist's rendering of the view from the planned conference room.

Bottom: Executive Director Brent Walker helps bring down a wall in the old offices.