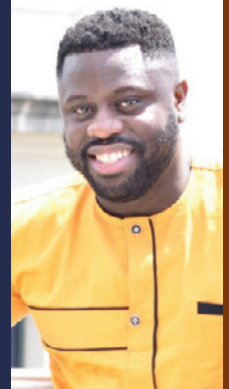


REPORT

FROM THE

CAPITAL

BJC Magazine



Voices of Black Faith Freedom

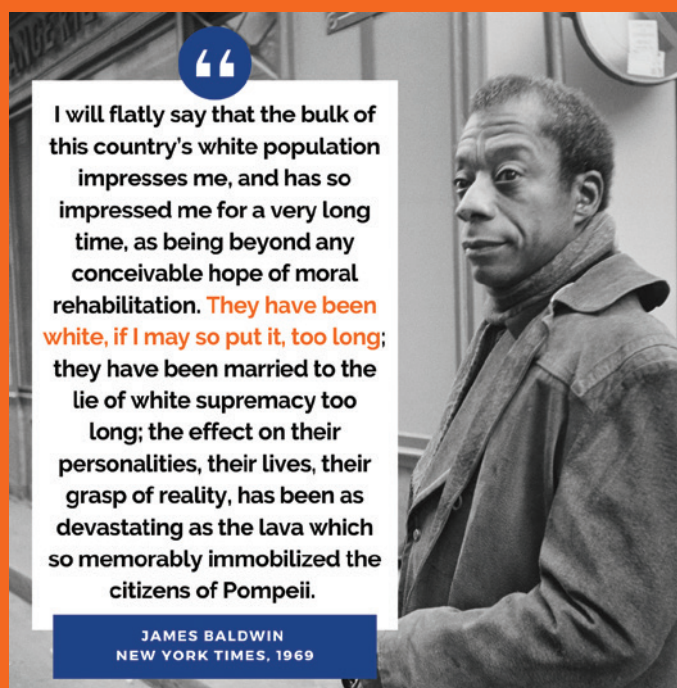
Challenged and inspired by this quote from James Baldwin, BJC programming and content are shining a light on how religious freedom has been white too long and working to dismantle white supremacy from our mission, our organization and our communities. Read more about our plans in Amanda Tyler's column on page 3.

We are listening to **VOICES OF BLACK FAITH FREEDOM**. Read pages 6-11 for excerpts of live conversations we hosted throughout the month of February and various responses to them on our social media channels. Visit page 12 for a new resource and a way to re-think Religious Freedom Day.

Learn more about our upcoming **SHURDEN LECTURES** on page 13, featuring four leading Black scholars and their examination of faith freedom for all.

Get to know Prathia Hall, the woman who first coined "I have a dream," on page 14, and learn more about how our staff is sowing seeds for the future from BJC's Danielle Tyler on page 15.

Our commitment goes beyond one month, one magazine and one year. We are re-imagining our mission at the intersection of religious liberty and racial justice. Join us as we confront the truth that religious freedom has been white too long.



BJC Luncheon to be broadcast across the country June 18

Help us bring people together for an important conversation about ways religious freedom has been white too long

For the second year in a row, BJC is bringing our annual luncheon to you. On Friday, June 18, 2021, we will be broadcasting a virtual event for religious liberty advocates and supporters — and even those simply curious about this issue — to homes across the country.

Held the day before Juneteenth, this year's luncheon will be a celebration of freedom for all and feature a keynote speaker, thoughtful reflections, opportunities for conversation, and a challenge to re-think many of the ways our discussions of religious freedom have been white for too long.

We want everyone to be able to attend this virtual event free of charge, and **that's where we need your help**. Your gift can ensure we can reach people across the country and bring them into these

conversations. There are several sponsorship packages available, which include recognition in the program and special updates on the development of this unique event.

For just \$50 — the cost of a normal ticket — you will be helping underwrite this event, making it free to others. For \$500, you will be recognized as a "table" sponsor, and we'll provide you with a digital invitation you can send to your friends, inviting them to join you at your virtual table.

For details and the latest information, visit our website page at BJCOnline.org/Luncheon or contact BJC Associate Director of Development Danielle Tyler at dtyler@BJCOnline.org or 202-544-4226, ext. 308.

Religious freedom has been white too long

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director

James Baldwin assessed the possibility of progress on racial justice in the *New York Times* in 1969. It was a bleak but realistic diagnosis of the problem: “the bulk of this country’s white population ... have been white, if I may so put it, too long.”

At our virtual luncheon event last summer, Robert P. Jones challenged the BJC community to think about how American Christianity has been “white too long.” In his 2020 book, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, Jones laid out a convincing and challenging case for the ways that white supremacy has permeated Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian and many other religious traditions in the United States.

Jones’ book, along with Jemar Tisby’s powerful *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism*, caused me to think about not only the impact that white supremacy has had on American religion but also on how we understand and advocate for religious freedom in this country. I reflected on Baldwin’s remark that we “have been married to the lie of white supremacy too long” and the devastating impact that has had, not just on those who have been oppressed and excluded but on those of us who have profited and benefited from it.

The whiteness I refer to is not about skin tone. It’s about power. The definitions that Tisby gave in our podcast conversation in 2019 are helpful. Racism, Tisby said, is a system of oppression based on race; in other words, racism is prejudice plus power. White supremacy centralizes that expression of power and makes it not only superior but also the “norm,” while everything else is lesser and peripheral.

I’ve seen this white supremacy at work in the histories of religious freedom we advance. We hold up Thomas Helwys, Roger Williams and John Leland as our inspiration. But how often do we talk about Gowan Pamphlet, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr., Prathia Hall and Gardner C. Taylor as heroes of faith freedom?

This isn’t just about representation but about valuing the contributions that members of our diverse community offer. I have come to believe that freedom is best understood through the perspective of those who know what it’s like not to be free. We see this truth in the Exodus story, in liberation theology and in the Black Church, as told so beautifully in the recent PBS documentary series. Our

ability to advocate for freedom is weakened when we exclude or diminish non-white perspectives.

My reading and learning comes alongside the work of the BJC Board of Directors and staff to take an honest look at BJC’s history. For years, the unquestioned narrative has been that BJC brought together Baptist denominations across racial lines to work together for religious freedom for all.

But our research, which is still ongoing, has revealed that the voices of the people at the table have not all been valued equally. Requests made by Black board members in the 1940s for the organization to speak up for everyone’s freedom and against segregation and discrimination were ignored. Unsurprisingly, Black board members stopped coming to meetings for many years.

This year, BJC’s Committee on Race and Religious Liberty will publicly release a report and make recommendations for reparation. But we need not wait for a final report to take action. We are committed to re-imagining our mission to advocate for faith freedom for all with specific attention paid to what we closed our eyes and ears to before: racial injustice.

Before we white people speak, we need to listen. BJC is doing just that this year, as we focus on learning from BIPOC scholars, theologians, preachers, writers, philosophers, poets, prophets and podcasters about faith freedom for all. We are intentionally working to decenter the voices that have taken up almost all of the conversation about religious freedom to this point. We aren’t erasing those voices that have been dominant for so long, but we are making room for everyone to find a home and equal place in our conversations and organization.

Baldwin thought that the American white population was “beyond any conceivable hope of moral rehabilitation.” But rather than grow discouraged or disheartened, I choose to take Baldwin’s words from 1969 as a prophetic wake-up call in 2021.

BJC celebrates our 85th anniversary this year. At our centennial in 2036, what will our community look like? Will our understanding of and advocacy for religious freedom look different than it does today? I certainly hope so. I invite you to join us as we listen, learn, dismantle white supremacy and grow into the inclusive people and organization that God wants us to be.



Take this quick quiz and see if one or more of the statements describes you.

Do you enthusiastically endorse protecting faith freedom for all?

YES
☐

Do you applaud the work the BJC's legal team does in the courts, giving voice to the separation of church and state?

☐

Do you believe a new generation of religious liberty advocates needs to be trained and equipped to stand for religious freedom?

☐

Would you like to provide BJC financial support for years or decades into the future, extending and protecting religious liberty for generations to come?

☐

Did you say "yes" to one or more of these statements? If so, you may want to discuss planned giving with your estate adviser or BJC's development staff.

What is planned giving?

A planned gift is a meaningful way for you to provide financial support for the work of faith freedom for all, beyond your lifetime. **You can make a planned gift at any time in your life, regardless of age.**

How can I make a planned gift?

One way for you to provide a planned gift is by including or modifying language in your will or trust, specifying a gift to BJC as part of your estate. Another way is to include BJC as a beneficiary in your insurance or retirement account. **No matter the size, your planned gift extends the important work of BJC into the future, even after your lifetime.**

Do I need to notify BJC of a planned gift?

Those who make a planned gift to BJC and notify us of that plan become members of BJC's **James Dunn Legacy Circle**. Dr. James M. Dunn was executive director of BJC from 1981-1999, well-known for his stalwart defense of religious liberty, contributions throughout Baptist life, pithy turns of phrase and ubiquitous bow tie.

Years before he passed away in 2015, Dr. Dunn shared his commitment to planned giving.

In explaining his own choice to leave BJC a gift in his estate plan, Dunn said a planned gift "affirms the uniqueness of the BJC among religious freedom advocates. The BJC alone supports goals, purposes, and actions which are deeply theologically rooted."



How do I learn more?

If you'd like additional information about planned giving — or if you would like to notify BJC of a gift you have already planned in your estate for our work — contact BJC's director of strategic partnerships, Dan Hamil, at dhamil@BJCOnline.org.

"When I thought about how I wanted to have my estate distributed, I realized BJC would be named because I believe it will remain solidly anchored in the principles which drew me to it in the first place."

—Susan Gillies

"As BJC fights for religious liberty, I want my legacy with them to be that of an encourager. I want BJC to continue championing a belief that I cherish: the Baptist doctrine that church and state should be separate."

—William Genet

"We believe our financial support will help sustain the work of BJC into the future. We find it to be an excellent way to exercise our God-given stewardship of influence for the good of His kingdom work."

—Dwight and Karin Jessup

Religious liberty and the presidential transition

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel

Soon after the inauguration of President Joseph R. Biden Jr., the *Washington Post Magazine* featured a collection of short proposals solicited from journalists, policy wonks and artists under the title “Biden Should ...”. It was a clever way to explore the opportunities and challenges facing our country following the historic and norm-shattering administration of President Donald J. Trump.

BJC has likewise been working to identify what we believe President Biden should do. In the BJC Podcast series “Respecting Religion,” Amanda Tyler and I discussed the Trump administration’s record as well as the religious freedom challenges and opportunities for the new Biden administration. We noted that an administration should be organized to be ready for issues that are going to impact religious liberty, both explicitly and implicitly. With so many pressing challenges facing our country, we know that many specific policy changes will take time. In the meantime, here’s what we think Biden should do.

Set an inclusive tone. President Biden should embrace religious freedom as part of his efforts to unify the country. He should articulate a vision that protects religious freedom for all and avoids stigmatizing any group based on religion. As a practicing Catholic who speaks often about his faith, Biden’s appreciation for the role religion plays in many lives comes naturally. That personal fact may make it easier for him to renew positive public discourse about religious liberty and how it protects all Americans, regardless of religion. Too often, President Trump used the term “religious freedom” as a wedge issue to ignite his base instead of a cherished ideal that has long enjoyed bipartisan support. That approach not only distorts the way our Constitution has been interpreted to protect religious freedom for all, but it diminishes support for what should be our country’s shared values. President Biden’s repeal of the travel ban — a policy rooted in anti-Muslim bias that targeted individuals based on their religious identity — was an important first step.

Bring back balance. The First Amendment protects the free exercise of religion and against its establishment by the government. Both religion clauses are designed to ensure religious liberty for all. The Trump administration paid far too little attention to Establishment Clause concerns, such as avoiding government promotion of religion

and avoiding preference for any one religion over another. Instead, religious liberty was often used as synonymous with a free exercise right to be exempt from general laws. Exemptions proliferated that prioritized the concerns of religious claimants over the rights of others. This was evident in a variety of executive orders, rule changes and positions taken in court cases. These actions affect the daily lives of individuals in a variety of settings, including the delivery of social services and health care. President Biden should restore the balance that has traditionally been the hallmark for providing religious exemptions without harm to other important government interests.

Continue efforts to support religious freedom abroad. President Biden should retain and build on the Trump administration’s efforts in the international realm where bipartisan cooperation for religious liberty is more easily achieved. He should appoint an ambassador for international religious freedom who is able to articulate a vision of religious freedom in a pluralistic society and continue the annual Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom to give a platform for building international cooperation. In addition, the administration should expand the number of State Department employees who receive training in religious freedom matters. Such efforts will help integrate religious freedom as a human right on the international policy agenda.

Early signs of President Biden’s approach to religious liberty are hopeful. Less than a month into his term, he issued an order re-establishing the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Those offices, originally established 20 years ago by President George W. Bush, have changed and shifted through the Bush, Obama and Trump presidencies. We applaud the appointment of Melissa Rogers as Executive Director for the White House Partnerships Office, a position she held during the second Obama administration. She brings a wealth of experience and a stellar reputation to the position. Rogers will also serve as Senior Director for Faith and Public Policy at the Domestic Policy Council. With this appointment, Biden is poised to integrate religious freedom into his domestic policy agenda more fully than any president before.

As BJC continues to work for faith freedom for all, we look forward to opportunities to work with the Biden administration to help it do what it should to uphold faith freedom for all.





Voices of Black Faith Freedom

Black leaders from a variety of backgrounds and faith traditions joined BJC in February for a series of live conversations.

We sought greater understanding on what America can learn from the Black Church, what faith freedom means to Black Nonbelievers, how different generations approach faith freedom, and what all this means for minority religions.

Every conversation is available on BJC's Facebook page and YouTube Channel. Here are a few highlights.



“When we’re talking about being a minister in the Black Church tradition, many ministers didn’t have the luxury of saying ‘I don’t want to be political.’”

“That wasn’t just property [the Proud Boys] were tearing down. They were trying to tear down you. And me. And anybody that looks like us. Race is at the core of all of this. And we can’t have faith freedom for all until we see this.”

—Charles Watson Jr.
BJC Director of Education



“The African Methodist Episcopal Church is an Afro-Christianity that has within it roots in African traditional religion, African ways of knowing and being, so I refuse to start our story in 1787 in Philadelphia — our story is as old as the sun, the moon and the stars. We need to be clear about that and not give theological agency over to people who debased and dehumanized us.”

“I want to define Black Faith Freedom as a gift to the American Empire and to American theological communities, if you want to open it. ... It is the gift of innate skepticism about the American project and about American religion. [My great-grandfather’s] skepticism kept him alive, and kept him human, because he did not believe what was said to him, about him.”



—Rev. William H. Lamar IV
Pastor of Metropolitan AME Church
in Washington, D.C.



—Mandisa Thomas
Founder and president of
Black Nonbelievers, Inc.



“I will say, for most of us, faith freedom means having freedom from faith ... the freedom to question those faith traditions, and any tradition for that matter. It means the freedom to ask why so many in our communities are still bound to this religion which is responsible for our systemic oppression, that has a root in white supremacy.”

“Any parents, any grandparents whose children become nonbelievers, that doesn’t mean you did anything wrong. It means you gave us those critical thinking skills.”

“Once the stigma of being a nonbeliever goes away, you find that we have more in common than we don’t. Many of us want our conditions to improve, our societies to improve. There are a lot of things that we have in common just as human beings.”

“In my generation, we had the language [of religious liberty], but it was all co-opted or hijacked by white evangelicals. And when we heard the term ‘religious liberty,’ it was a term that meant ‘I am free to be Christian, and you’re not free to do anything but be Christian, either.’ So that’s really what was contradictory to me growing up.”

“For someone of my generation — I didn’t know there were any Black Nonbelievers to that extent. I listened to [Mandisa Thomas’] interview — she’s brilliant, she’s accessible and I disagreed with almost everything she said, but I will fight for her right to say it. And I will fight for her right to believe what she believes. And that’s really at the root of what faith freedom is about. Clearly, we are not a monolith.”



—Timothy “Tee” Boddie
Social Justice Church Engagement Consultant at SOJOURNERS,
Former General Secretary of Progressive National Baptist Convention,
Former Vice Chair of the BJC Board of Directors

“We have to communicate, intergenerationally. We have to talk about [the generation gap] ... just starting those conversations and, when you get the answer, accepting the answer for what it is.”

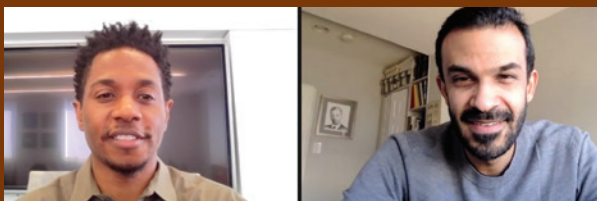


“This idea of diversity as our richness, one of our heritages, is something that we can contribute to this question of faith freedom. It’s ‘How do we recognize and honor diversity, and actually use it as a source of understanding ourselves better, understanding our own faiths better, practicing our own faiths better?’”

“When we have prejudice, it allows us to reinforce those walls of division and conflict, and then we are trying to push each other down, push each other's faiths down.”

“To claim to not be affected by racism is like being in a rainstorm without an umbrella and saying ‘I’m not wet.’”

—**P.J. Andrews**
Race Discourse Officer at
Bahá’ís of the United States



“Once I did understand what religious liberty is, in the context of the Black community that’s something we’ve been practicing forever... just like with food, with music, and with our God, we have been making things our own since forever.”

“This is the perfect time to align how you worship, how your church operates, with the issues at hand, with social and racial justice issues.”

—**Maya Boddie**
Communications Associate at
Advancement Project National Office,
Former BJC intern

Watch all of these discussions, which are available on BJC’s Facebook page and YouTube channel and at [BJCOnline.org/facebook-live](https://www.bjc.org/facebook-live). Listen and share them with others.

The conversations continued online after each discussion — the next two pages include additional responses from our community.



#BlackFaithFreedomVoices reactions online



I appreciate how each week's discussion builds upon the previous week's discussion.

Rev. Keisha I. Patrick



Dr. Timothy Tee Boddie, thank you for stating that part! Religious freedom was used to discriminate against certain groups. That is why we must define it and expand people's understanding of it.

Dr. Sabrina E. Dent



Such a mutually-respectful and gentle conversation between these two gems PJ Andrews and Charles Watson Jr....exemplifying unity. Thank you for this.

Anne Sadeghpour



I'm going to sit with these words for days. Thank you.

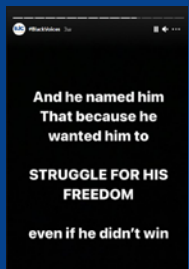
Rev. Alyssa Aldape



On an Instagram takeover, the Rev. Elijah Zehyoe shared thoughts on ways to consider faith freedom, including from the nonreligious perspective. He referenced insight from Ta-Nehisi Coates, author of several books, including *Between the World and Me*.



"As an afro-pessimist and Black atheist, [Coates] writes beautifully on this subject: 'I had no sense that any just God was on my side...'



... And this seems immensely despairing at first glance, but elsewhere he writes and tells his son that he named him 'Samori,' after Samori Toure who struggled against colonization. And he named him that because he

wanted him to struggle for his freedom, even if he didn't win. And to me, that's the brilliance of his tradition. That freedom isn't belief but it is UNWAVERING COMMITMENT to the STRUGGLE."

Continuing conversations

Members of the BJC community continued the discussion online. Visit BJCOnline.org/facebook-live for links to see more.

"I share this historical commentary about the Black Church to situate the Black Church as what it is: a diverse and varied institution that is visible (the local church) and invisible (the prayer closet, the street corner, the barbershop or beauty parlor, the nightclub). The Black Church is rooted in the refusal of people of African descent living in the United States to accept the anti-Black doctrines of white supremacist Christian theology in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is also rooted in, as Rev. Lamar articulated, long-standing African epistemologies of the Divine. Just as non-Black Christians live and believe in a multiplicity of ways, so too do Black Christians. At its best, the Black Church represents a broad tapestry of faith to which Black people of all genders, social classes, ages, and sexual orientations contribute."



—Rev. Jaimie Crumley

"The Invisible Institution: What the Black Church Reveals about Religious Freedom"

"In one of my first assignments as a seminarian in 1981, I was challenged to write an interpretation paper on the statement: 'Religion is the soul of culture and culture is the soul of religion.' The paper was the perfect invitation for me to explain my view of how in African American culture there is often no separation between cultural and religious expressions. We have taken the concept of religious freedom and made it our own through our civil and political application."



—Rev. Dr. Perry Hopper

"Religious Freedom as I See It"

"This faith freedom business is more than simply words on a page or something that we spout, but rather I think it goes in many ways to the core of who we are or who we say we might be. ... What I wish that others understood is that it was for freedom that Christ has set us free, and when we recognize our own freedom, when we recognize our own embracement and inclusion by Christ, I think that calls us to embrace others who are different than ourselves. So, yes, I have a different theological perspective. Yes, I have a different view of human sexuality. Yes, I have a different view about race and racism. Yes, I have a different view about the Bible. But, because of that faith freedom, it says to me that I'm called to stand at the table, to sit at the table with others as opposed to excluding them."



—Rev. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins

in a video on BJC's YouTube Channel

Bringing our whole selves: Faith freedom in the next generation

By Jaziah Masters



History can be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, offering perspective and in many ways comfort. Every Black History Month allows us to intentionally reflect on the heritage that we as African Americans have inherited. This is a proud legacy washed anew with every generation. In a world where “unprecedented” seems to be the new normal, I find comfort in looking back on my history, so much of which is still relatively unknown.

I have just read *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, and it still amazes me that one of the most important figures of the American Civil Rights Movement is relatively anonymous. How can a man who taught Martin Luther King Jr. the methods of Gandhi, spearheaded the 1963 March on Washington and championed the causes of economic justice and world peace face obscurity?

Rustin faced marginalization not because of personal shortcomings, but because of his sexuality. As a Black gay man, I too am familiar with this shortcoming of organized religion. Yet, knowing the mistakes of the past can help us to ensure they are not repeated. Rustin’s story can still be one of hope to those who come after. I believe his case to be a prime example of a generational shift of faith freedom.

I am encouraged by the Voices of Black Faith Freedom series. In the third conversation, Dr. Timothy “Tee” Boddie and Maya Boddie agreed that learning never stops, and each generation has something to learn from the other. Now is the time for all of us to learn together how religious liberty for all underlines an institution that has sustained a people for generations.

The message that most struck me in the PBS Documentary *The Black Church* was the institution’s sustainability through the generations. I attribute that to its flexibility and evolution over time. Paving the way is religious liberty: the right to worship, or not, how one sees fit. This faith freedom allowed African Americans to start and change religious practices that best suited their needs. We see the fruits of this in the rich tapestry of religious expression across the diaspora today.

When Black people were denied churches outside the glare of oppression, they started their own. When Black

women were denied leadership positions in congregations, they started their own. And when Black worshippers saw a faith stagnant and unwilling to respond to the needs of the time, they started new denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and later the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC). At each juncture, religious liberty has allowed us to imagine something different and then make it our own. Because, in the words of Bishop Yvette Flunder, “What we don’t have, we must create.”

“When Black people were denied churches outside the glare of oppression, they started their own. When Black women were denied leadership positions in congregations, they started their own. And when Black worshippers saw a faith stagnant and unwilling to respond to the needs of the time, they started new denominations.”

I am optimistic about the next chapter of the Black Church currently being written, and hopeful that an individual with the talents of Bayard Rustin could find a home in today’s Black Church and not be held to the background. Our faith must be big enough to include him and so many others throughout the Church’s history that were not recognized, affirmed or supported. True faith freedom means bringing the entirety of our being to our search for the highest truth. That is our generation’s challenge.

What does faith freedom mean for my generation? I hope that it is an acknowledgment of the value of an individual bringing their entire personhood to worship, or not, as they see fit. In the last years of his life, Bayard Rustin repeated a statement he attributed to his friend and mentor A. Philip Randolph, another unsung civil rights hero: “The struggle must be continuous, for freedom is never a final act.” So too must this generation, and every other generation, recognize the worth of faith freedom for all.

Jaziah Masters is the advocacy and outreach manager at BJC.

New perspectives for congregations, communities

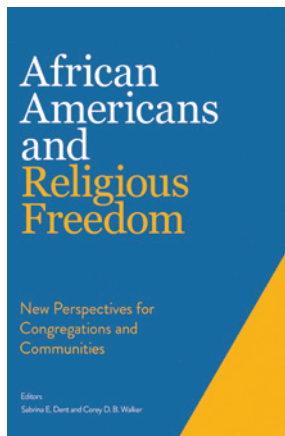
A new resource is available for exploring the complex politics of race, religion and religious freedom in America.

African Americans and Religious Freedom: New Perspectives for Congregations and Communities is a new book edited by Dr. Sabrina E. Dent and Dr. Corey D.B. Walker. It features a collection of essays, including a collaboration by Dent and the Rev. Keisha I. Patrick — also a BJC Fellow — titled “Race, Advocacy and the Limits of Religious Freedom.”

Other writers featured in this collection include the Rev. William H. Lamar IV, Dr. Teresa L. Smallwood and other thought leaders. Suzan Johnson Cook, former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, penned the foreword.

Dent and Patrick participated in a Facebook Live conversation about the project and the book. Watch their discussion and get a link to access the book at [BJCOnline.org/facebook-live](https://www.bjc.org/online/facebook-live).

“This book is an entry point into a larger conversation that needs to happen in the public square about religious freedom in this country,” said Dent, who is a member of the BJC Board of Directors and a BJC Fellow. “It specifically raises the question: Whose religious freedom? It is through the lens of Black experiences where we have to continue to fight for humanity by pushing



Dr. Sabrina E. Dent



Rev. Keisha I. Patrick

back on public policies that threaten our right to exist, live and believe freely as outlined in the First Amendment.”

Since 2018, the Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum has partnered with Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University to explore these issues, leading to the development an academic course and public programs that raised the visibility of religious freedom through the lens of African American experiences.

The project was supported by all six Historically Black Theological Institutions: Hood Theological Seminary, Howard University School of Divinity, Interdenominational Theological Center, Payne Theological Seminary, Shaw University Divinity School, and Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University.

Several nonprofit partners also joined in the project, including BJC, Black Nonbelievers, Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington National Cathedral and Wesley Theological Seminary. The publication and ongoing project were made possible through the generous support of The Henry Luce Foundation.

Rethinking ‘Religious Freedom Day’

Since 1993, the United States marks every January 16 as “Religious Freedom Day.” It’s a day set aside to remember the date in 1786 when the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom was signed. This year, we asked the Rev. Dr. Corey D.B. Walker to share his thoughts on this day. You can watch his entire video on our YouTube channel.

“In 1786, not all citizens — nor all people — enjoyed the rights and privileges of religious freedom.

In our time, when we see the rise of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, Christian nationalism, right-wing extremism and white supremacy all using the languages and symbols of religion to divide, we know that the work of religious freedom is incomplete.

So, on this day, let us commit ourselves to making real the promises and privileges of religious freedom in the lives of all Americans, so that we unleash a new experience of freedom — religious freedom — in the lives of all people.”

Dr. Corey D.B. Walker serves on the board of directors and as president of the Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation, an independent theological think tank based on the campus of Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.



Religious Liberty Has Been White Too Long: Voices of Black Scholars

Join us April 14 at 5 p.m. Eastern Time

In our discussions about religious liberty, how can we dismantle a narrative that centers white experiences and upholds white supremacy? Learn from four Black scholars on redefining religious freedom to deconstruct a harmful ideology deeply ingrained in our culture.

Join us April 14 at 5 p.m. Eastern Time for a live conversation with academic leaders and moderator Charles Watson Jr., BJC director of education. The conversation will include in-depth exploration of Black religious freedom, including efforts to make meaning in an anti-Black world and how post-Emancipation Black Protestants defined religious freedom as a critique of

racial inequality. We'll hear from Dr. Teresa L. Smallwood of Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Dr. Anthony Pinn of Rice University, Dr. Nicole Turner of Yale University, and Dr. David Goatley of Duke Divinity School.

This event is free and open to all, but you must sign up to attend. Visit our website at BJCOnline.org/ShurdenLectures.

Dr. Walter B. and Dr. Kay W. Shurden made a gift to BJC in 2004 to establish this annual lectureship. Each program brings together leaders who can inspire and call others to an ardent commitment to religious freedom and the separation of church and state.



Dr. Teresa L. Smallwood

Associate Director of the Public Theology and Racial Justice Collaborative at Vanderbilt Divinity School

Smallwood earned a B.A. degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where she majored in Speech Communications and Afro-American Studies followed by a Juris Doctor degree from North Carolina Central University School of Law. Answering the call to ministry, she earned a Master of Divinity degree at Howard University School of Divinity and a Ph.D. from Chicago Theological Seminary. Her Ph.D. concentration in Theology, Ethics, and Human Sciences informs her multivalent methodological approach to racial justice. She is licensed and ordained to Baptist ministry.



Dr. Anthony Pinn

Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor of Humanities and Professor of Religion at Rice University

Pinn earned his B.A. from Columbia University, and Master of Divinity and Ph.D. in the study of religion from Harvard University. He is the founding director of the Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning and the inaugural director of the Center for African and African American Studies, both at Rice University. In addition, he is Director of Research for the Institute for Humanist Studies — a Washington, DC-based think tank. Pinn's research interests include religion and culture; Black religious thought; humanism; and hip hop culture. He is the author/editor of more than 35 books.



Dr. David Goatley

Research Professor of Theology and Black Church Studies at Duke Divinity School

Goatley earned a B.S. at the University of Louisville and his M.Div. and Ph.D. at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. A constructive theologian whose scholarship and practice is at the intersection of missiology, Black Theology, and leadership strategy, he emphasizes cross-cultural experiential learning with indigenous communities to deepen understanding, broaden horizons, and strengthen Christian discipleship and leadership formation. He is ordained in the National Baptist Convention, USA, and serves in leadership with the NAACP, Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Society, and the Baptist World Alliance.



Dr. Nicole Myers Turner

Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Yale University

Turner earned Ph.D. and M.A. degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, her M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary, and her B.A. from Haverford College. Her book, Soul Liberty: The Evolution of Black Religious Politics in Post-Emancipation Virginia narrates the transformation in Black religious political strategies that occurred from 1865 to 1890. In addition to researching the history of Black Protestants and politics after emancipation, Turner also studied Black churches and activism during the civil rights and contemporary periods, the memory of slavery in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and in the Works Progress Administration.

She had the dream: The freedom faith of Prathia Hall

By Rev. Dr. Courtney Pace

Prathia Hall (1940-2002), civil rights activist, preacher, and professor, was a preacher's kid from Philadelphia who learned social gospel ministry from her father. She found her voice through church programs, debate competitions and community support. While in college, she joined an ecumenical social justice organization, Fellowship House, where she learned nonviolent resistance. After graduating from Temple University, Hall went to the South to join the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in southwest Georgia.

Hall was one of the few female field workers in SNCC. Because of the immense danger of door-to-door voter registration, women typically worked either in "freedom schools" (educational programs to help potential voters pass registration tests) or as secretaries. Hall, however, was second-in-command of SNCC's Southwest Georgia Project. The people respected her, and she offered excellent leadership to new SNCC workers, particularly related to safety in the racial environment of the rural South. She also recognized the profound wisdom of the people they encountered, deepening her understanding of freedom faith — not only as a theological concept but as an embodied commitment of trusting God amid danger and persisting anyway to fight for life. While SNCC workers had important information about voter registration and political rights, the people in the counties where SNCC worked had what Hall called the "wisdom of the ages," the inherited freedom faith that empowered them to survive enslavement, Jim Crow laws and systemic oppression.

During a 1962 prayer service at Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Sasser, Georgia, after the burning of four Black churches in Terrell County affiliated with the movement, Hall used the phrase "I have a dream." The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was at that service, and he secured Hall's permission to use "I have a dream" in his own speeches as they later rode together to the airport. Having known her from Fellowship House while he was in seminary, King so esteemed Hall that he described her as "the one platform speaker I would prefer not to follow."

By 1963, Hall led SNCC's voter registration project in Selma, Alabama. By the end of the year, SNCC leader Jim Forman called her to Atlanta to run civil rights collaboration between six organizations to desegregate Atlanta. Hall described her time in the movement as the best education she ever received. She continued raising money for civil rights work in the South and expanded her activism to include education, women's job placement and community resources.

Hall went to the South, in part, to run from her call to preach, which by the 1970s, she could no longer escape. She was one of the first Black Baptist women ordained by the American Baptist Churches of the U.S.A. (1977), was the first woman accepted into the Baptist Minister Conference of Philadelphia and Vicinity

(1982), completed her M.Div. and Ph.D. (1997) degrees at Princeton Theological Seminary, and became a well-respected professor of Christian ethics, womanist theology, and Black religious history.

Throughout these endeavors, Hall not only continued commuting to Philadelphia to pastor Mt. Sharon Baptist Church, but she also preached across the country and worked in hybrid academic positions while finishing her degree. In 1997, *Ebony* magazine named her first in its list of "15 Greatest Black Women Preachers," and she was the only woman considered for its list of "10 Greatest Black Preachers," ultimately placing eleventh.

Hall's pastoral career was shaped by her prophetic womanist homiletic. She centered women's narratives in the text and emphasized a liberating, Christocentric perspective. Rejecting patriarchy, she used the Biblical text to display equality, justice and the necessity of Christian commitment to liberation. Her preaching demonstrated that salvation is not merely the deliverance from personal sin but necessitates dismantling systemic oppression, bridging personal faith and social justice, and calling Black churches to remember their heritage as mediators of the people's struggles for liberation and justice and to honor that heritage in their ministries.

Hall's freedom faith inspired her to pursue justice from a young age. Her preaching insisted that anyone who claimed the Gospel must join in the work of liberation. Hall's womanism valued all people regardless of race, gender or class, and she sought the equality and liberation of all people. She inspired hundreds of students and challenged them to continue the legacy of their Christian and Black heritage in their ministries.

Hall's freedom faith — the belief that God wants everyone to be free and equips and sustains those who work for freedom — was the central idea of her womanist vision, communicated through her theology and preaching. As churches continue their historical legacy of mediating the struggles of the people for freedom and liberation, and as all people of faith work together against oppression and injustice, freedom faith lives.

The Rev. Dr. Courtney Pace is the Prathia Hall Scholar in Residence of Social Justice History at Equity for Women in the Church. She is the author of Freedom Faith: The Womanist Vision of Prathia Hall, which is available from the University of Georgia Press and local booksellers. She also is a BJC Fellow.



Throughout Women's History Month in March, BJC celebrated contributions of women. Visit [Medium.com/@BJContheHill](https://medium.com/@BJContheHill).

At Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston in 2015, nine people lost their lives at the hands of a white supremacist. Last year in Washington, D.C., Metropolitan AME Church had its Black Lives Matter sign torn down by members of the Proud Boys. We saw racial terrorism and religious violence become one, just as it did in the bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham in 1963. Thus, a part of our continuing growth as Baptists must include acknowledging our past and present shortcomings while cheering our victories that we as Baptists have garnered.

It is crucial to know where we have been to know where we are going. In the 20th century, the Black Church exemplified how fruitful multigenerational collaborations could be. By creating space for a new generation of leaders holding various perspectives, the church's ability to allow diverse subcultures from across the nation that deviated from the norm proved to be key in bringing to light the infringements on the Black community's inalienable rights, including religious freedom. The battle fought then to ensure religious freedom continues today.

The pandemic provided an opportunity to stand still. I have used this time to immerse myself in the work of racial healing and reconciliation. We must be seen, accountable, welcoming and listening to all perspectives to move through the uncomfortable nature of conflict to the light of collaboration. I thoroughly enjoyed leading classes and workshops with congregations and students from California, Minnesota, and D.C. The Fellowship Center for Racial Reconciliation in Monrovia, California, and Urban Refuge Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, partnered to bring people together from all walks of life to work through the social construct of whiteness — leading to the notion that America is an inherently white nation.

This prompted me to think about issues of diversity and inclusion at BJC. Since we re-branded in 2019, our staff has talked about how we see ourselves in the orange dot of our new logo, which speaks to **BJC's desire to create a space for people to find themselves in BJC or BJC's work.**

As a development professional, I wake up every morning dreaming of ways to help individuals see themselves in that orange dot. What new strategies can we use to engage people in the cause of faith freedom for all and inspire them to partner with us? An in-

dividual's commitment to an organization is reflected by whether they are willing to share their resources, even if it's a small gift. As the population of the United States continues to shift — becoming more diverse demographically and bringing new generations to the forefront — nonprofit organizations like BJC must ensure that everyone recognizes the value of our mission and has an opportunity to hear about our work across cultures, regions and generations.

Crucial to that engagement is drawing connections between advocacy for religious freedom with other policy issues related to human freedom. During my tenure at BJC, I have seen the organization tackle polarizing intersections within religious liberty, such as same-sex marriage, immigration and the death penalty. Our staff works diligently to stay focused on religious freedom while acknowledging the intersectionality and without shying away from those issues. With the world changing rapidly and emotions flaring quickly, our task now at hand is to re-imagine BJC's mission at the intersection of racial justice and religious freedom. I am inspired to be part of our team as we undertake this crucial work.

The next generations are attuned to issues of justice, equality and freedom. The pipeline of new advocates joining BJC are energizing the work of protecting religious freedom. During the pandemic, we have missed in-person camaraderie and insights from BJC interns who influence our advocacy to resonate with college students and youth groups. Our BJC Fellows continually sow into BJC by standing on the front line of advocacy of faith freedom, giving monthly and making positive contributions in their own communities. Building a more inclusive BJC means being intentional about recruiting diverse classes of BJC interns and BJC Fellows and continuing to engage them long after their programs end.

In spite of this pandemic year, we saw success in cultivating a new community of BJC monthly supporters. The Faith FULL Community includes people across generations, regions and backgrounds — it's a group that looks more like the population of our country. Seeing their commitment to and investment in our mission inspires me to continue the work that we are doing, knowing we are making strides in bridging gaps but acknowledging we have a long way to go. I have confidence that the seeds BJC plants today will bloom even brighter at our centennial in 2036.



Seeding the future of a faith freedom nation at BJC

By Danielle Tyler
BJC Associate Director
of Development



BJC responds to the January 6 insurrection

Editor's note: On January 6, a mob stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to stop the certification of the Electoral College votes. The violence during the failed insurrection left five people dead, injured more than 140 people, damaged the building, terrorized lawmakers and threatened our democratic institutions. Many in the mob carried Christian symbols and invoked the name of Jesus as they took over parts of the building. BJC issued this response, which is available at [Medium.com/@BJContheHill](https://medium.com/@BJContheHill).

We take seriously the teaching of Jesus to let our “yes” mean “yes” and our “no” mean “no” (Matthew 5:37). At this time of crisis for our country — when the value of truth itself is in serious jeopardy — we are compelled to speak the truth as a sign of our love for God and our love for our neighbors. While Americans and people of faith can disagree in good faith on policy and theological issues, we believe the following statements to be true:

- [Joe Biden won the presidency in a free and fair election, and the results have been rigorously vetted.](#) Claims to the contrary are utterly false and without support, as dozens of courts found in legal challenges brought to them. The failure to repudiate lies that suggested that the election was fraudulent led directly to the deadly events at the Capitol on January 6.
- [Challenges to the free and fair election results, especially in some of America's largest cities, constitute intentional attempts towards the disenfranchisement of the votes of African Americans.](#) Perhaps, more than any other American freedom, voting has been the key to the full participation of African Americans in this democracy. Americans have protested for it, agitated for it and died for it. The mantra “Stop The Steal” is rooted in fear that to include participation and recognition of everyone is to diminish the power and privilege of some. The insurrection on January 6 was fueled by lies about votes and is a painful reminder to African Americans who are constantly told in many different ways, “You don’t belong, you don’t count, and you don’t matter.”
- [President Donald J. Trump continues to repeat lies about the election result and incited insurrection against our constitutional democracy.](#) He has betrayed his oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States of America and constitutes a danger to our democratic system itself. Because he has attacked our democracy, he is unfit to serve in elected office.
- [Christian nationalism, a poison to both our democracy and faith, was on display during the mob's assault on the U.S. Capitol, including in images of rioters holding up signs with Christian references and carrying Christian symbols.](#) Christian nationalism perverts Christianity and endangers our political union, claiming a special, privileged position for Christianity and its adherents. Because it ignores the sin of Black chattel slavery, Christian nationalism in the American context also provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation.
- [The United States is not a “Christian nation.”](#) While that term could be used to refer to the demographic fact that a majority of Americans identify as Christian, it is usually used to describe the mythological founding of the country by Christians and for Christians, providing a privileged place for Christianity and its adherents in our laws and in our society. The country's founding document — the U.S. Constitution — established a system in which the government would remain neutral in terms of religion and where there would be no second-class faiths. We know that our country has not lived up to those ideals. The persistent falsehood that the United States is a “Christian nation” has contributed to the insidious ideology of Christian nationalism which, in the hands of extremists, leads to the kind of violence we witnessed on January 6.

We remain committed to the core values that have sustained BJC — telling the truth, refraining from the demonization of those with whom we have honest disagreements, proceeding in a posture of humility, love and mercy, and protecting our neighbors’ faith freedom as we would our own.

Standing up and speaking out against Christian nationalism

How can we respond when we see our faith and democracy under siege?

By Cherilyn Crowe and Jaziah Masters

The world watched in horror as rioters stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6, some cloaking their destructive acts in Christian imagery. In the aftermath, BJC brought together faith leaders and experts for an exploration of how we are identifying and responding to the dangers of Christian nationalism in the wake of the insurrection.

“Christian nationalism is not new,” said BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler, who moderated the event. “But the frequency of violent acts inspired by Christian nationalism and a resurgence in attempts to legislate and govern from a position infused with Christian nationalism has been on a dramatic uptick in recent years.”

The nationwide webinar brought together The Most Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church; The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and Dr. Andrew L. Whitehead, Associate Professor of Sociology at Indiana University Purdue University-Indianapolis.

Tyler said Christians bear a special responsibility to understand and root out Christian nationalism, and not just in its most extreme forms — we have to recognize it “in the deeply ingrained manifestations in our culture, in our churches and ourselves.”

Dr. Whitehead provided an overview of how researchers identify Christian nationalism. He also dispelled the myth that it is confined to one particular social, demographic or even religious tradition — rather, it’s pervasive across all segments of society.

On the surface, Christian nationalism seeks to merge “Christianity” with American civic life, but it’s a type of “Christianity” that



carries assumptions about nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, authoritarianism and militarism, according to Dr. Whitehead.

“The ‘Christianity’ in Christian nationalism, to a certain population, means ‘people like us,’ and the ‘people like us’ are generally white, native born and culturally Christian,” he said.

Adherence to and support of Christian nationalism shapes Americans’ behaviors and attitudes on a variety of topics, including racial injustice, immigration and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whitehead noted the overlap between white supremacy and racial subjugation in the research, including how Christian nationalists often believe police brutality against Black Americans is exaggerated by the media.

“Christian nationalism, for white Americans, in many ways, blinds them or is part of helping them blind themselves to believing that there isn’t inequality in the U.S.”

Religious leaders responded to the research, and they shared a theological perspective on the political ideology.

“Since the beginning of the Christian movement, one of the earliest confessions of faith was ‘Jesus is Lord,’ which was seen as a direct threat to — at that time — the Roman Empire,” said Bishop Elizabeth Eaton.

“Christians faced persecution because they declared that their primary allegiance was not to any temporal or secular

“Christian nationalism is not new. But the frequency of violent acts inspired by Christian nationalism and a resurgence in attempts to legislate and govern from a position infused with Christian nationalism has been on a dramatic uptick in recent years.”

—BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler



“Christians faced persecution [in the early church] because they declared that their primary allegiance was not to any temporal or secular government, but it was to the Lord.”

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton



“I am 67 years old — been Black all those 67 years — and I have known since childhood that the [Ku Klux] Klan professed to be Christian. ... [W]e knew there was an unholy conflation of Christianity and white supremacy, and it was often tinged with Americanism.”

Bishop Michael Curry



“Christian nationalism, for white Americans, in many ways, blinds them or is part of helping them blind themselves to believing that there isn’t inequality in the U.S.”

Dr. Andrew Whitehead

government, but it was to the Lord, so that’s a primary problem in all this.”

Bishop Michael Curry pointed out that there is a consistent pattern when you see Christianity go astray, such as by supporting slavery, being comfortable with apartheid or being silent the midst of evil: Each time that happens, he said the teachings of Jesus get moved aside and suppressed for “a broad, ambiguous Christ-figure who can be adapted to any cultural context.”

Curry said we’ve all seen the dangerous kind of Christian nationalism before.

“I’m 67 years old — been Black all those 67 years — and I have known since childhood that the [Ku Klux] Klan professed to be Christian,” he said.

“We grew up knowing that, so we knew there was an unholy conflation of Christianity and white supremacy, and it was often tinged with Americanism.”

As Eaton pointed out, being a patriotic American is different from embracing Christian nationalism, and no one is condemning patriotism.

“Christian nationalism conflates our allegiance and our understanding and even our relationship with God with a particular secular state — in this case, the United States — to be a ‘Christian country,’” she said. If you hold that view, she explained, you would think that someone cannot — by that definition — be a “real American” unless that person is a certain kind of Christian.

When we see our nation as the best or “God’s favorite,” that borders on blasphemy and idolatry, according to Curry.

“That kind of nationalism is dangerous to civic health, it is dangerous to the health of Christianity,” he said. “When it gets going, it means if we’re ‘God’s favorite’ and we’re the ‘chosen ones’ and we’re in charge, then everybody else is secondary,” he said.

Panelists pointed to the history of our country, including how the Bible was used to justify slavery and how Europeans treated non-Christians in the Americas. Under the Doctrine of Discovery, the Spanish, English and French saw areas of land without Christians on it as available to Christians for the taking, and they took land from the Native Americans who lived on it.

Slave owners in Colonial America debated whether they should baptize their slaves and teach them about Christianity. In Europe at the time, Christians generally couldn’t be enslaved. The Bishop of London settled the

issue by declaring that baptism is totally a spiritual matter and has no effect on a person's civil standing.

"You see Christianity was right there being perverted to accommodate itself to what folks wanted to do to other folks — like Doctrine of Discovery," said Curry. "I think, 'What a painful anecdote from history,' but a perfect illustration of just how Christian nationalism can pervert our faith."

Tyler, Whitehead, Eaton and Curry discussed ways to stand against the dangerous ideology, including countering negative perversions of Christianity with positive examples.

Curry offered three steps, including re-centering Christianity on the teachings and example of Jesus, calling on our common humanity, and rebuilding relationships between people across differences of politics, race and religion.

"We are all children of God made in God's image and likeness, and that means we're brothers, sisters — we are related to each other," he said.

Curry said we also have to rebuild relationships intentionally between people across differences.

"Everybody who knows somebody who's different than they are: Get to know them, spend some time with them, let that become a personal value for your life, and then maybe we can begin to chip away," he charged.

"Lutherans talk a lot about grace," said Eaton. "I think it's time for us to understand it and live it. God's grace is for everyone, not just for certain people."

"The reality is Christianity has been held hostage," said Curry. "And we must reclaim it."

Curry said Christian people must stand with those who have nobody to stand with them.

"We must speak up and show up when something happens against our Jewish brothers and sisters, against our Muslim, our Sikh brothers and sisters," he said.

"We must stand publicly for things that don't give us any advantage — that is to be spokespersons for children in this society who are hungry right now, to advocate in the public sphere for what is just and kind and decent and humane."

Curry said people have to see the shift before they believe it, and it's got to happen consistently from those of us who are Christians and Christian leaders.

"It's that simple," declared Curry, sharing that people need to see a different version of Christianity than the perverted version that Christian nationalism showcases, and we have to reclaim the faith.

"We've got to speak up and stand up."

Join us in standing against Christian nationalism

CHRISTIANS AGAINST CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

In 2019, BJC joined with other ecumenical leaders to create the **Christians Against Christian Nationalism** statement. Your financial support of BJC makes this program possible. You can make a gift to BJC at any time at BJCOnline.org/give.

As Christians, we must speak in one voice condemning Christian nationalism as a distortion of the gospel of Jesus and a threat to American democracy. All Christians are welcome to join the 22,000+ others who have signed the statement.

Visit ChristiansAgainstChristianNationalism.org

to sign the statement and access additional resources, including:



A podcast series and small group discussion guide for deeper conversation.



A collection of webinars, including one hosted by Fellowship Southwest on confronting the ideology.



Digital and printable resources to educate yourself and share with others in your community.

Biden repeals travel ban, re-establishes faith-based office

In his first 100 days in office, President Joe Biden issued two executive orders that will help protect faith freedom for all.

On the day of his inauguration, President Biden issued an Executive Order to repeal the Trump administration's Muslim and African travel ban, an action considered a "victory for faith freedom" by BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler.

"Religious freedom is threatened when our leaders use fear and othering to exclude entire groups of people from our country based on their religious identity," she said.

"Repealing the ban is an important step, but it does not undo the damage this policy has done to religious freedom. If we want to truly preserve faith freedom for all, we as Americans must loudly and clearly denounce religious bigotry in all its forms — now and in the future."

Less than a month later, Biden re-established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, with a charge to "better serve people in need through partnerships with civil society, while preserving our fundamental constitutional commitments."

The president named Melissa Rogers as the head of the office on February 14. Rogers led the office during the second term of the Obama administration, and she previously served as BJC general counsel. Josh Dickson was named the deputy director of the office, and Trey Baker will serve as the office's liaison to Black communities, including Black faith communities.

Tyler lauded the records of Rogers, Dickson and Baker of collaborating with a number of religious and community organizations representing the full breadth of our pluralistic society. She also noted that Rogers' appointment includes a seat on the Domestic Policy Council, which "shows that the administration recognizes the complexity and intersection of religious freedom concerns across a number of domestic policy issues."

According to a fact sheet issued by the White House, the initial areas of focus for the White House Partnerships Office will be to



President Joe Biden signs one of the 17 Executive Orders he signed on Inauguration Day Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2021, in the Oval Office of the White House. (Official White House Photo by Adam Schultz)

"address the COVID-19 pandemic and boost economic recovery; combat systemic racism; increase opportunity and mobility for historically disadvantaged communities; and strengthen pluralism."

The office was first constituted as the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives under President George W. Bush, and it was renamed with a new set of policies and practices under the Obama administration. The Trump administration did not staff the office and instead created its own Faith and Opportunity Initiative. The creation of that office included a charge to propose ways to reduce barriers "to the full and active engagement of faith-based and community organizations in Government-funded or Government-conducted activities and programs."

—BJC Staff Reports

Tyler honored by Baylor Line Foundation

BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler was recognized for her work defending religious freedom with the 2021 Abner V. McCall Religious Liberty Award from the Baylor Line Foundation.

The award honors alumni and friends of Baylor University who, by their lives and actions, exemplify the courage and dedication of McCall to the belief in and commitment to religious liberty. McCall was a justice of the Texas Supreme Court in 1956,

dean of the Baylor Law School from 1948 to 1959, and Baylor president from 1961 to 1981.

Previous recipients include former BJC Executive Directors James M. Dunn, Brent Walker and James E. Wood; BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman; John F. Baugh; Melissa Rogers; and Rep. Chet Edwards.

—BJC Staff Reports

‘I had a very narrow perspective of religious liberty’

CARLTON GRACE GAY serves as the executive assistant at BJC. She first came to BJC as an intern in spring 2019, and she is leaving for law school this summer. Carlton also is a monthly giver, making her part of BJC’s Faith FULL Community. We asked Carlton to share about her experiences working at BJC and why she decided to support the organization each month, including after she is no longer on staff.

What was it like to move from being a BJC intern to a full-time staff member?

It was a big adjustment for me in my personal life as it was my first “real” full-time job. BJC has been so gracious in teaching me the ins and outs of the organization while also helping me on my professional journey to become the kind of lawyer that I aspire to be.

Was it helpful to be at BJC for your gap year before law school?

I think everyone would agree that learning from some of the top constitutional law experts in the nation is a beneficial experience at any juncture, but especially just before attending law school. Our legal team has given me so many pro tips from their wealth of knowledge about law and life as I embark on my own legal career.

Everyone at BJC knows you are a huge fan of “The Office.” What at BJC reminds you the most of that TV show?

Definitely the PPC, or “Party Planning Committee” for those who may not be familiar with “The Office” culture. As a staff, we have our own PPC to plan celebrations for birthdays and holidays with treats, games and singing that would make Michael Scott proud.

Part of your job is opening the mail and answering phones. What have you learned from being that “front line” at BJC?

I love interacting with our constituents. We receive a lot of correspondence included with donations that are mailed to us. People will write a note to describe their affinity for our work or an event we’ve recently held and how much our work impacts their perspective on religious liberty for all. I’ve found that on days when I’m focused on the task at hand and I forget the magnitude of BJC’s impact, reading a personal note from a constituent telling us why they donate always reignites my gratitude for our work.



Why did you decide to give monthly to BJC?

I had a very narrow perspective of religious liberty when I first came to the organization almost 2 ½ years ago. If I had known about BJC sooner, perhaps my frame of mind wouldn’t have been so limited. If my monthly donation broadens BJC’s scope to reach people like me in any way, I will continue to faithfully give, and I’d invite others to do the same.

Do many of your friends give monthly to a nonprofit? Do they find it strange that you do?

I’ve found most of my friends who have a faith tradition give to their congregations. Few give to other organizations, and they find it commendable that I do. My mother was the director of a nonprofit for a time, so I’ve always had a predisposition for nonprofit work and enjoy giving to organizations whose missions I believe in.

Become a monthly donor today. Learn more about joining BJC’s Faith FULL Community by visiting BJCOnline.org/give-monthly. For more information or for assistance, you can contact Danielle Tyler, associate director of development, at 202-544-4226, ext. 308, or by email at dtyler@BJCOnline.org.



Honorary and memorial gifts to BJC

In memory of Joyce Alexander
By Henrietta Njoku

In memory of John and
Mary Baker
By Robert Baker

In memory of David Bartlett
By Carol Bartlett

In memory of
Barbara "Babs" Baugh
By Joanna Jones
Patsy Ayres
Melinda Huff
James Williamson

In memory of Lyle Baumgartner
By Judy Baumgartner

In memory of Clay Burns
By Margaret Behrens

In memory of Emanuel Carlson
By Keith Carlson

In memory of Hardy Clemons
By Luwilda M. Rogers
Carolyn Strange

In memory of Art Coltharp
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In memory of
Joseph Martin Dawson
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In memory of Leah Flowers
By Ronald Flowers

In memory of J. Perry Hannah
By Eunice Hannah

In memory of Muriel M. Hardy
By Valerie Hardy

In memory of John and
Arlena Hasel
By David Hasel

In memory of Bettie Haste
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Dr. E. Edward Jones
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Clifford Longino
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In memory of Orba Lee and
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In memory of Dr. & Mrs.
Stanley A. Nelson
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By Kelley Smith

In memory of James Strange
By Carolyn Strange

In memory of Phil Strickland
By Bobby Wood

In memory of Breonna Taylor
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In memory of
Rev. Dr. Melvin Taylor
By Paul Gehris

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Jackie B. Moore

In memory of Riley Walker
By Gary Walker

In memory of Richard Wood
By Marvin Henry

In memory of
Dr. Bettye Whiteaker
By Dean Dickens

In memory of G. Ray Worley
By Bess Worley

In honor of Gary Armstrong
By Stephen Hemphill

In honor of Patsy Ayres
By David Wilkinson

In honor of Phelps Behrendt
and Robert Behrendt
By Bob and Lynn Behrendt

In honor of Joe Biden
By Gurrola Baptist Foundation

In honor of Kevin Boswell
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Ann Caulkins
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By Austin Connors

In honor of Ravensworth
Baptist Church
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In honor of Melissa Rogers
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In honor of Felicia Roper
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In honor of Layne and
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Supreme Court: RFRA allows monetary damages

In a unanimous 8-0 decision (Justice Amy Coney Barrett did not participate), the Supreme Court held that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) allows for monetary damages against officials who are sued in their individual capacities.

Tanzin v. Tanvir was brought by Muslim plaintiffs who claim agents of the FBI violated their religious liberty rights under RFRA by placing them on the No Fly List as retaliation for refusing to act as informants against members of their religious community.

The opinion, released December 10, 2020, and authored by Justice Clarence Thomas, focused on the text of RFRA, which calls for “appropriate relief against a government.” The Court rejected the government’s argument that the phrase does not allow for monetary damages, emphasizing that “if Congress had meant to exclude damage remedies, it would have done so.”

BJC joined a friend-of-the-court brief with the Christian Legal Society and other religious liberty experts urging the Court to affirm that RFRA was intended to allow for monetary damages in some circumstances. BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler hailed the decision as a “rare (and welcome) unanimous opinion upholding religious freedom rights.”

—Don Byrd

Clergy in execution chamber

The Supreme Court continues to face the ongoing issue of whether the religious liberty rights of death row inmates require the government to allow a spiritual adviser from the inmate’s religious tradition in the execution chamber.

Prisons have a duty to accommodate constitutional rights when there is no safety concern, particularly when it comes to religious exercise. For death row inmates, access to a spiritual adviser in the execution chamber had been a relatively uncontroversial accommodation of religion in the moments leading up to the inmate’s state-imposed death.

The federal government and many states permit inmates to choose a spiritual adviser with whom they are comfortable for these final religious practices. Other states limited that choice to state-employed chaplains, which sometimes meant Christian chaplains were the only choice. When challenged to allow other traditions, some states revoked the access to spiritual advisers in

the execution chamber for all inmates. Yet, challenges continued.

In February, the Court protected the religious rights of Willie Smith, refusing to let the state execute the Alabama inmate without allowing him to have his pastor by his side.

In 2019, the Court issued two decisions weeks apart with opposite outcomes: allowing Alabama to go forward with the execution of Domineque Ray without allowing him to have an imam by his side but delaying the execution of Patrick Murphy in Texas who requested his Buddhist priest be present in the chamber. Both states would have allowed a state-employed Christian chaplain in the execution chamber. Ray was put to death; Murphy remains on death row.

After Murphy’s case, Alabama and Texas changed their policies to bar all spiritual advisers from the execution chamber. In June 2020, the Supreme Court stopped Texas’ execution of Ruben Gutierrez and told the lower court to determine if the presence of a spiritual adviser in the execution chamber poses a security risk. When the trial court said no, the Supreme Court in January 2021 asked the lower court to consider Gutierrez’s religious liberty claims in light of those findings.

Alabama and Texas did not amend their policies regarding spiritual advisers in the execution chamber over security breaches or lapses but after non-Christian inmates had requested an accommodation for their own religious traditions. The Court has now given both Alabama and Texas an opportunity to explain why a common religious accommodation in other jurisdictions is impossible in their states.

—BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks

Free speech case to continue

On March 8, the Supreme Court ruled 8-1 that a free speech lawsuit against a Georgia college can proceed. While not a religion clause case, the students claim that the college’s policies violated their First Amendment right to engage in religious speech and distribute religious material on campus.

In *Uzuegbunam v. Preczewski*, the college agreed to rescind its challenged policies, and the trial court dismissed the remaining claim for nominal damages, which the appellate court upheld. The question before the Supreme Court was whether the case could proceed when the only claim remaining would be a claim for nominal damages.

—BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks

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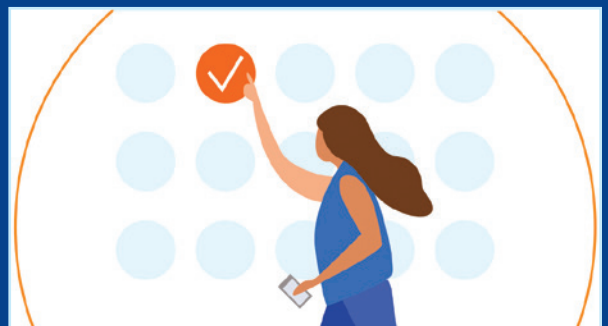
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Mark your calendars!

Our 2021 Shurden Lectures are coming April 14, and our summer luncheon will be June 18. See pages 2 and 13 for details on these events you don't want to miss!