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REPORT from the Capital

J. Brent Walker
Executive Director

Jeff Huett
Editor

Phallan Davis
Associate Editor

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

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

♦ Capital Campaign Update ♦

Task force to find site for Center for Religious Liberty

Momentum is building for the Center for Religious Liberty on Capitol Hill. We are confident that the time is right to move the Baptist Joint Committee into its own permanent, visible space. And to help us find that perfect site we have assembled a property identification /development task force to guide us through this important process.

Located within a few blocks of the U.S. Capitol, the Library of Congress and the Supreme Court, the state-of-the-art training center will serve as a nerve center for the BJC's activities in Washington and provide highly visible education space. The Center will be used as a training center for youth, pastors, laity and others who actively advocate and advance religious liberty in their local communities.

Task members include: task force chair Reggie McDonough, BJC chair Steve Case, attorney Ken Ellison, Executive Director/Minister of the D.C. Baptist Convention Jeff Haggray, attorney David Massengill, architect Phil Renfrow, former BJC capital campaign consultant David

Rogers and developer Jerry Williamson.

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Watch your mail box next month because we will be sending you a report on your campaign pledge status. Thank you for continuing to honor your pledge during this new year.

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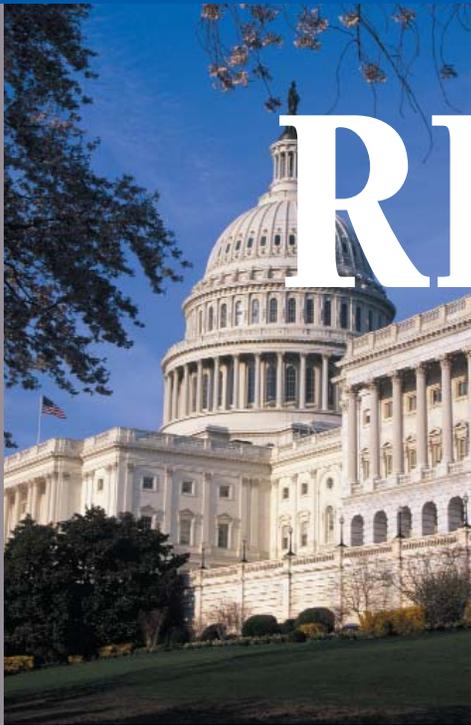
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REPORT

from the Capital

New Baptist Covenant: Unity. Harmony. Now, what comes next?

ATLANTA — Fifteen thousand participants in the New Baptist Covenant convocation arrived in Atlanta Jan. 30 seeking unity in Christ and departed Feb. 1 wondering where their quest will lead.

In the meantime, they demonstrated racial, theological and geographic harmony as they prayed, sang, listened to sermons and attended workshops focusing on ministry to the people Jesus called “the least of these” in society.

The unprecedented event brought together African-American, Anglo, Asian-American and Hispanic Baptists. They represented 30 Baptist conventions and organizations, all affiliated with the North American Baptist Fellowship, the regional affiliate of the Baptist World Alliance. They also heard from two former U.S. presidents, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, and a former vice president, Al Gore — all Baptists.

Participants scaled a 163-year-old wall that has divided the denomination since U.S. Baptists parted company over slavery more than a decade before the Civil War.

As women and men of numerous races sat side by side through sermons and hugged and laughed in hallways, they embodied a dream come true for Baptists who dreamed of racial reconciliation in their denomination.

“This is the most momentous event of my religious life,” declared an emotional Carter, a son of the South and a lifelong Baptist.

“For the first time in more than 160 years, we are convening a major gathering of Baptists throughout an entire continent, without any threat to our unity caused by differences of our race or politics or geography or the legalistic interpretation of Scripture,” said Carter, who co-chaired the gathering with Mercer University President Bill Underwood.

Carter’s euphoria echoed the aspiration of another Baptist from Georgia, and the convocation fulfilled the prophecy of Martin

Luther King Jr., Underwood told the crowd.

“Forty-five years ago, a native son of Atlanta, a Baptist pastor, shared with all of us his dream: One day, on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners would be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood,” Underwood said to sustained applause.

“Today, here on those red hills of Georgia, Baptists have come together to take a step in the long and difficult journey toward achieving Dr. King’s great dream. After generations of putting up walls between us — separation, division by geography, by theology, but most of all division by race — a new day is dawning. ... Today, we all sit down together at the table of Christian brotherhood and sisterhood.”

Leaders of most of the participating groups first affirmed the New Baptist Covenant in April 2006, when Carter and Underwood invited them to Atlanta to talk about bridging Baptists’ racial, theological and geographic divisions by working together “to promote peace with justice, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, care for the sick and marginalized, welcome the strangers among us, and promote religious liberty and respect for religious diversity.”

That effort piggybacked on a historic gathering of the four predominantly African-American Baptist conventions five years ago, plus ongoing discussions of unity within the North American Baptist Fellowship, NABF President David Goatley said.

Story continued on page 2



Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, flank Revs. T. DeWitt Smith (left) and Charles G. Adams (right) at a Feb. 1 plenary session. (Photo by Billy Howard)

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"Never before have Baptists on this scale sought to cross the boundaries we choose to live behind — ethnicity, ideology, theology. Never before have Baptists on this scale come together for cooperation and collaboration for missional ministry impact."

"We are at the threshold of great possibilities," Goatley said.

"Unity in Christ" provided the convocation's theme. Plenary sessions focused on creating Baptist unity by following Jesus' mandate set out in his first sermon: "to preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Other speakers amplified the unity theme from a range of perspectives:

— Christian oneness centers on fulfilling Jesus' "radical mission," stressed William Shaw, president of the National Baptist Convention, USA, one of the four African-American conventions, and pastor of White Rock Baptist Church in Philadelphia.

Jesus was not satisfied merely to bring relief to the persecuted and victimized, he explained, noting Jesus "concretized" his mission by seeking to reverse the structures and situations that caused oppression.

The heart of that quest is establishing justice and uprooting injustice, Shaw noted.

"When God made mankind, he made us male and female — in his image. To do injustice to anybody is to do injustice to the reality of God, because we are in his image, and his image is not to be demeaned."

That calls Baptists to seek change in society, he added. "You can't embrace the mission of Jesus and not encounter the reality of injustice. He came not with actions of charity. He came to change. ... Justice says we need to change the structures of victimization."

— Baptists could express their unity by giving themselves and their means — to rescue the poor, Tony Campolo said.

Jesus pronounced his priorities in Luke 4, beginning with preaching good news to the poor, noted Campolo, author and professor emeritus at Eastern University near Philadelphia.

"Do you think Jesus meant what he said, or do you think he was kidding?" he asked.

"There is nothing wrong with making a million dollars. I wish you all would make a million dollars. There is nothing wrong with making it, but there is something wrong with keeping it," he said. "My Bible tells me in 1 John 3:17, 'If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need but shuts off his compassion from him — how can God's love reside in him?'"

After calling on both individuals and churches to pour themselves into ministering to the poor, he shouted, "Rise up, you suckers, and go out and do the work of Jesus!"

— Gore called for Baptists to protect the environment. He pleaded with participants in the convocation to make creation care one of their major initiatives.

"There is a distinct possibility that one of the messages coming out of this gathering and this new covenant is creation care — that we who are Baptists of like mind and attempting in our lives to the best of our abilities to glorify God, are not going to countenance the continued heaping of contempt on God's creation."

Ministerial students who attended each session took notes on the outcomes and proposals for cooperation in ministry, he said. They also gathered e-mail addresses of participants who want to continue collaboration on a range of poverty, racial, equality, peacemaking and other policy issues.

This spring, the convocation leadership group will reconvene in Atlanta to consider hundreds of suggestions and discuss how to follow up, Carter said.

The answer will not be creating yet another Baptist convention, said Jimmy Allen, program chairman for the event.

Answers likely will include opportunities for individuals, congregations and larger Baptist groups "to add our voice to common commitment" to implement the ideas for ministry that surfaced in Atlanta, Carter said.

Implementation of those commitments could answer one criticism of the New Baptist Covenant — absence of Southern Baptist



New Baptist Covenant Celebration leaders share the stage.
(Photo by Billy Howard)

Convention leadership, he added.

Carter noted he had developed a positive relationship with SBC President Frank Page, who initially criticized the endeavor. Carter also said he would provide Page with a full report on the convocation and its possible outcomes.

"The results of this meeting will determine how the Southern Baptist leaders respond to us," he predicted. "We will reach out" to them to participate in follow-up projects, he added.

Historian Walter Shurden, recently retired director of the Center for Baptist Studies at Mercer University and one of the early organizers of the convocation, said the event could become "a major step in racial reconciliation and gender recognition of Baptists in North America."

"It's the most significant Baptist meeting in my life, after playing in the Baptist yard 55 years or so," he said. "I've never been to a Baptist meeting where there was the equality as well as the presence" of multiracial, multigender participation.

"It bears the marks of the ministry of Jesus."

— Marv Knox via ABP

Aims of the New Baptist Covenant require commitment to religious liberty

BY DON BYRD

We can't celebrate the worthy ambitions of the New Baptist Covenant without re-dedicating ourselves to the cause of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. That may not have been said explicitly at every breakout session and every plenary speech, but it is the message I received loud and clear from that exciting, promising weekend.

From Al Gore's call to address the dangers of global warming to Marian Wright Edelman's urgent plea that the government take action to alleviate childhood poverty, we Baptists were exhorted to reclaim our prophetic voice, to speak out on the issues of the day, and to hold our elected officials accountable with one voice.

But the simple truth is this: New Baptists (or whatever we are) will have no credibility and no true power if we seek influence by cozying up to the powers that be. Alliance with a political party, like the use of government funds, might seem like a quick and direct way to achieve our public policy goals. The church, however, has a higher calling than political power. To be the conscience of the state, we need enough distance from the institutions of power to have what Gardner Taylor calls "swinging room."

Sadly, this distance — representing the very integrity of the church — is not assumed. We must assert it. When I opened the local Nashville, Tenn., paper on the Saturday morning after our adjournment, I realized just how necessary this step is, and how steep it will be. The headline spanning the top of the front page, describing the event, screamed "Politics Butts in at Baptists' Gathering: Organizers Say Jesus Would Have Approved Agenda," this to sum up a meeting that was anything but political.

How did we get to this point, where addressing poverty and hunger, the sick and the oppressed, the environment and religious freedom for all, would be cynically perceived as a political agenda rather than a Christian mandate of good will? To be truly heard as one of faith, our prophetic voice needs to regain credibility. It must overcome the ready tempta-

tion of power and convenience offered by the political process. And it must overcome the recent damage done to the Baptist name by those who have preferred to align the institutions of the church with those of the state, at the expense of our heritage.

Proclaiming the separation of church and state as a fundamental Baptist principle is an essential first step in the process of moving forward in reclaiming that prophetic voice.

Religious liberty, protected by the Constitution, is the fulcrum balancing our need for social action on one side with our tradition of autonomy and soul freedom on the other. I believe the aims of the New Baptist Covenant simply can't be met without maintaining both sides vigilantly.

John Grisham was right when he urged us to "stay out of politics." But that's not to say religion has no place in the public debate; just the opposite. Engaging our public policy is essential to the church's mission, a calling we heard ring out through the witness of the New Baptist Covenant. Keeping the church out of the mechanisms of government and politics, though — insisting on the independence of church and state, both legally and spiritually — is the only way our true voice will be heard.

Don Byrd writes for the Baptist Joint Committee's Blog from the Capital, www.BJConline.org/blog. He lives in Nashville, Tenn., where he teaches music theory and composition at his alma mater Belmont University.

"Religious liberty is the fulcrum balancing our need for social action with our tradition of autonomy and soul freedom."

Probe of religious discrimination in prisons

Religious discrimination in prisons, including the role of faith-based rehabilitative programs, was the subject of a briefing before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, which is examining the topic as part of its annual report to Congress and President George W. Bush to be submitted later this year.

The commission, an independent and bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement, heard testimony from 11 experts including a prison warden, the vice president of the world's largest faith-based organization serving prisons, a lawyer who has successfully sued faith-based prison programs, and a U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) official who has previously worked for a religious prison program.

Patrick Nolan, a former legislator, former prisoner and currently vice president of Prison Fellowship, the world's largest faith-based organization serving prisons, said religious programs are vital to changing the lives of prisoners and that religious volunteers offer prisoners hope and prepare them for a return to society.

But Alex Luchenitser, senior litigation counsel for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, told the commission that tax dollars should not be used to support prison ministry programs that coerce inmates into participation and warned that government officials must ensure that prison ministry programs are operated in accordance with the First Amendment principle of the separation of church and state.

"[T]he government must not coerce any person to take part in religious activity," Luchenitser stated in written testimony filed with the commission. "Thus, the government must not provide individuals any incentive to modify their religious beliefs and practices, or to undertake religious indoctrination."

Americans United last year won a federal appeals court ruling against government funding of a Prison Fellowship fundamentalist Christian program called the InnerChange Freedom Initiative, operated in an Iowa prison. The courts initially ordered Prison Fellowship and InnerChange to reimburse the state for money spent on the program. In December, the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed that government support of the InnerChange program was unconstitutional, but reversed the ruling ordering repayment of money.

Luchenitser said six other states have InnerChange programs and other states also have intensive faith-based programs in their prisons. He said state officials should ensure that inmates are not pressured or enticed into joining those

programs.

Steven T. McFarland, director of the DOJ Task Force for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and a former officer for Prison Fellowship, told the commission that the First Amendment requires prisons to accommodate religious beliefs but also prohibits the government from promoting religion or favoring one faith over another.

He said it is not a violation of the First Amendment for prisons to pay for chaplains or religious counseling programs, nor does the Constitution prohibit chaplains or volunteers from sharing their personal religious beliefs with inmates at any time. The only requirements are that inmate participation must be voluntary and the message must not be construed to threaten prison security.

McFarland said the law, based on recent court decisions, also permits prison officials to offer voluntary faith-based residential programs. He said the Supreme Court ruled in 2002 that the First Amendment permits government to provide the programs as long as the programs have a secular purpose, the inmates' participation is voluntary and the program is available to many inmates, inmates have a "genuine and independent private choice" among religious and secular programs, and inmates have a secular alternative with benefits comparable to the religious option.

To meet the Supreme Court standards, the federal Bureau of Prisons last summer began soliciting bids from non-government organizations to train inmates 40 hours per week in secular topics such as getting and keeping a job, working with people and resisting drug abuse. McFarland said the Bureau will also ensure that inmates who choose the religious programs do not get collateral benefits or incentives.

Chaplain Gary Friedman, Chairman of Jewish Prisoner Services International, said prison ministries, especially those with a proselytizing bent, find prisons "to be fertile turf" for



Prisons includes faith-based ministries

religious discrimination.

"Though proselytizing is officially prohibited on government property, prison officials often turn a blind eye to such activity or allow it to occur under the guise of simple 'sharing of one's faith,'" Friedman's prepared remarks state. The situation is further aggravated because "inmates are a literally captive and vulnerable population," Friedman said.



The commission also heard testimony on the impact and influence of two laws that address religious discrimination and prisoners' rights. In 1993, Congress enacted the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) to exempt religious organizations from certain federal regulations.

The Supreme Court later found RFRA unconstitutional as it was applied to state governments. In 2000, Congress passed the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), to ensure that the protections offered under RFRA would apply to the states. RLUIPA also specifically ensured religious protections for prisoners.

ers.

Despite the laws protecting prisoners' religious rights, some panel experts — including an imam and a Wiccan chaplain — said religious discrimination in prisons ranges from institutional rigidity to flagrant abuse.

"While both the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act initially appeared to be good tools for preventing obstruction of religious exercise in prisons, they have produced mixed effectiveness and unintended consequences," Friedman's written testimony states.

He said the definition of "religious exercise" in both acts is overly broad and has not been narrowed by case law; the courts have provided little guidance on how a prisoner's sincerity about religion can be determined without discriminating, and no government entity includ-

ing the DOJ, has been sanctioned for not enforcing RLUIPA.

"We are actually very displeased with our prison system and believe it is in need of ongoing reform as our courts have affirmed. The system is not perfect," Abu Qadir Al-Amin, an imam with the San Francisco Muslim Community Center, stated in prepared remarks. "There have also been documented cases of racial intolerance along with religious intolerance that have involved Muslim chaplains being escorted off of the institutional grounds in a very humiliating and demeaning manner."

Frank Cilluffo, director of the Homeland Security Policy Institute at George Washington University, said limited access to religious practices may threaten security in a country with the world's largest prison population and the highest incarceration rate.

"The inadequate number of Muslim religious services providers increases the risk of radicalization," Cilluffo wrote in testimony given to the commission. "It creates an opportunity for extremists ... to exploit by filling the role of religious services providers. A solution is more, not fewer, Muslim religious services providers."

Cilluffo co-authored a report with Gregory Saathoff, executive director of the Critical Incident Analysis Group at the University of Virginia, that has been the focus of a hearing by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs.

Saathoff told the commission that RFRA has allowed a forum for grievances to be brought forward and addressed, and RLUIPA may serve as a means to limit the potential for religiously promoted radicalism, violence or terrorism.

"Indeed, it may well decrease the likelihood that extremists will exploit otherwise unaddressed grievances in order to foment violence," state Saathoff's prepared remarks.

As part of its year-long review of civil rights enforcement by the DOJ, the commission will hold another panel briefing September 12 at its Washington, D.C. headquarters on religious discrimination in the workplace. The commission is also in the process of sending questionnaires to selected prisons to gain more information about religious discrimination in the prisons.

— Anne Farris, Roundtable on Religion and Social Policy correspondent

Evangelical panelists: Christian voters broadening political agenda

WASHINGTON — The Washington auditorium that once hosted a news program famous for back and forth arguments between political opponents instead recently featured a very different dialogue — a group of evangelical Christians denouncing the religious and political polarization of the last two presidential campaign cycles.

Panel participants addressed the question, “Choosing a president: What do evangelicals really want?” They spoke Jan. 23 on the George Washington University stage once used for the CNN show “Crossfire.”

The discussion validated many pundits’ observations that Christians in the United States are seeking new ways of adapting Christ’s commands to the political arena. While white evangelicals seem to be broadening their political agenda, evangelicals who are minorities are looking more critically at the Republican Party than in past elections.

“We are no longer single-issue voters, number one, and we’re not going to blindly follow prominent leaders in the religious right or otherwise who are telling us what we have to believe,” said Richard Cizik, vice president of governmental affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals. Cizik, who opposes abortion and gay rights and twice voted for President Bush, is an outspoken proponent for Christians to combat global warming.

“For a lot of the young people I meet, the religious right has been replaced by Jesus,” said Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners/Call to Renewal, an evangelical social justice group. “Politics is stuck in its polarities — every issue has only two sides, and both sides do it.”

Wallis has been a frequent critic of many of President Bush’s policies, particularly regarding poverty and the Iraq war. He has also criticized religious right leaders for their closeness to Bush. His organization co-sponsored the discussion along with Beliefnet, the religion-focused Internet news site.

Such overt identification of evangelical Christians with the Republican Party is dangerous for Christians, one prominent African-American evangelical on the panel said. Harry Jackson, pastor of Hope Christian Church in suburban Washington, was one of only a handful of prominent black pastors to support Bush in both his 2000 and 2004 campaigns.

While Jackson declined to retract those endorsements, saying they were correct “at the time,” he did say that evangelicals’ support of Bush “was fear-based, versus vision — and passion-based.”

He said he appreciated the moves that white evangelicals began to make 30 years ago to begin to affect the political process, but he said pinning their hopes on one party was a dangerous strategy.

“It’s impossible ... to be a conscience to the entire nation and to be partisan as well,” Jackson said. “So, at some point

we’ve lost our ability to be a conscience to the entire nation.”

Joel Hunter, pastor of an Orlando-area megachurch and a former president of the Christian Coalition, said the evangelical political movement fell prey to the “certain seduction in political power that makes us all want to get in one category so that we can push through a particular political agenda.”

But, in politics, your agenda has to mature, he added. “It’s like the middle-school years — you’ve defined yourself by what you hate, what you’re not. But when you grow up, you have to define yourself by who you are, by what you build.”

The results of a Beliefnet poll of evangelicals, announced at the discussion, suggest that their agenda may be broadening beyond hot-button social issues.

It revealed that 41 percent of evangelicals identified themselves as Republicans, 30 percent as Democrats, and the remainder considered themselves independent or were affiliated with third parties.

Respondents also said the most important issue in the election is not abortion or gay rights, but the economy, with 85 percent ranking it either “most important” or “very important.”

In fact, they ranked six other issues above ending abortion on the scale of importance. Ending the Iraq war, caring for the poor, ending torture and cleaning up government all ranked ahead of the abortion issue. Preserving marriage as a heterosexual-only institution ranked even farther down the list, with less than half of respondents ranking it as important.

The poll was not scientific — it asked all Beliefnet readers about what issues they thought were the most important. It then considered results only from respondents who considered themselves evangelical or born-again Christians.

“There is a really interesting conversation going on now in evangelical Christianity,” said Steve Waldman, the founder and editor of Beliefnet, in announcing the survey results. “Although the press has gotten a little bit better at understanding [evangelicals], there is still a lot of stereotyping — people being put in boxes and a lack of awareness.”

One of the reasons for that, several panelists noted, is that when the media talks about “evangelical voters,” they almost always mean white evangelicals. African-American and Latino evangelicals, meanwhile, have always had broader policy agendas than their white counterparts.

“Immigration reform — that’s a moral issue for Latino evangelicals,” said Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference. “The major difference between Latino evangelicals and white evangelicals is that many white evangelicals take their marching orders from Bishop Rush Limbaugh, Prophet Sean Hannity... and many Latino evangelicals still listen to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.”

— ABP



The religious test failed by voters and candidates

Eight years ago, when George W. Bush declared that Jesus was his favorite philosopher, suppose someone had asked a follow-up question.

"Mr. Bush, Jesus invited his followers to love their enemies and to turn the other cheek. How will that guide your foreign policy, especially in the event, say, of an attack on the United States?"

Or: "Gov. Bush, your favorite philosopher expressed concern for the tiniest sparrow. How will that sentiment be reflected in your administration's environmental policies?"

Or: "Jesus called his followers to care for 'the least of these.' How does that teaching inform your views on tax policy or welfare reform?"

For the past several decades, we Americans have evinced more than passing curiosity about the religious views of our presidential candidates, and they feel obliged to talk about their faith. The news media almost invariably identify Mike Huckabee as a former Baptist minister and note that Mitt Romney is a Mormon.

So too with the Democratic candidates. They show up in churches on Sunday morning in an apparent effort to demonstrate that they, too, are people of faith.

But a review of the last 40-plus years suggests that a candidate's apparent piety finds scant expression in his comportment as president. There's little evidence to suggest that John F. Kennedy, the nation's first (and still the only) Roman Catholic to serve as president, inflected his faith into his administration's policies. Ronald Reagan insisted that abortion was the defining moral issue of his time, and campaigned twice promising to outlaw it. Yet, as even his supporters now acknowledge, he made no serious effort to outlaw abortion.

On the other hand, no one could accuse Lyndon Johnson of being a demonstrably pious or religious man. Yet he learned (and sought to live by) a simple maxim that he attributed to his mother: The strong have an obligation to look after the weak. That principle led him, a white Southerner, to push for civil rights, and it also animated his quest for the Great Society. Tragically, Johnson used the same principle to justify American involvement in Vietnam.

Billy Graham detected vast reservoirs of faith and piety in his friend Richard Nixon, who hosted worship services in the White House. Probity, however, is not the

first word that comes to mind in recalling the Nixon administration. And Bill Clinton's many critics would be justified in pointing out the disconnect between his professions of faith and his conduct in the Oval Office.

Arguably, the only exception to this litany proves the rule.

Jimmy Carter ran for office promising a government as "good and decent as the American people" and pledging never to "knowingly lie." After he sought actually to govern according to his moral principles — revising the Panama Canal treaties, seeking peace in the Middle East — the American people denied him a second term.

Does a candidate's declaration of faith provide any indication of how she or he would govern as president?

The past half century suggests strongly that the answer is no.

We Americans think of ourselves as a religious people, so it shouldn't be a surprise when politicians clamor to speak the language of faith. Those affirmations turn out to be, more often than not, shallow and perfunctory.

But placing the blame on the candidates misses the point. We the voters settle for shallow, perfunctory bromides about faith and piety. We allow candidates to lull us into believing they are moral and virtuous simply because they say they are.

At the very least, we should question whether those claims reflect any real substance. Do the principles the candidates purport to affirm find any expression whatsoever in their policies? Jesus, for example, instructed his followers to welcome the stranger in their midst; how would that affect a Christian candidate's views on immigration?

If we're not willing to probe the depth and the sincerity of politicians' declarations of faith, then we shouldn't bother to ask the question. The history of the past half century suggests that a president's conduct in office bears little resemblance to his campaign rhetoric.

This article was first published by Religion News Service. Randall Balmer, an Episcopal priest, is professor of American religious history at Barnard College, Columbia University, and a visiting professor at Yale Divinity School. His most recent book is "God in the White House: A History: How Faith Shaped the Presidency From John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush."



By RANDALL BALMER

Faith, public life take center

Rogers challenges churches to engage in justice issues

ATLANTA—Participants at a session held in conjunction with the New Baptist Covenant celebration in Atlanta received a lesson in “going upstream” to address the root causes of injustice.

Melissa Rogers, a visiting professor of religion and public policy at the Wake Forest University Divinity School in Winston-Salem, N.C., led a special interest session that focused on matters at the intersection of faith and public policy.

To illustrate the distinction between one-on-one church ministries, in which many churches engage, and seeking justice, Rogers told a story about a man standing on the side of a river and saving people one-by-one until finally deciding to go upriver to figure out who was throwing the people in the river.

“The discussion today is about going upstream,” Rogers said.

Just like food pantry, soup kitchen and other ministries that churches undertake, Rogers said it was important to be heard on issues such as advocating just economic policy, reforming the criminal justice system and pushing for sound environmental policies.

The Old Testament prophets Micah and Amos — as well as Jesus Christ’s example in the Gospels — demonstrate the biblical justification for personal involvement in justice issues, she said. Prophets confront unjust social structures, she noted.

On the decision to enter the public policy arena, Rogers quoted religion scholar Martin Marty: “In the political world, not to be political is political.”

Rogers then offered principles to help participants navigate the sometimes perilous faith



Melissa Rogers leads a discussion Feb.1 at the New Baptist Covenant Celebration in Atlanta. (Photo by Joel McLendon)

and politics intersection.

In quoting former Representative Barbara Jordan of Texas, Rogers warned that “we are God’s servants, not his spokespeople.” Secondly, she said religious groups should practice prophetic, not partisan, politics. Additionally, “we must not let our faith be used,” Rogers said, drawing on a sermon by Martin Luther King, Jr., when he said that the church must be the conscience of the state, not its tool.

She also suggested that the separation of church and state and religious liberty should be at the forefront. “When we work on public policy issues, we should work for the common good and not for the establishment of Christendom,” she said.

After all, “the only faith that can call government to account ... is the one that is seriously independent from government,” she said.

— Jeff Huett

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ees urged to combat ignorance on religious liberty

In an increasingly pluralistic culture, ensuring religious liberty for all requires more education about religion, funding about the proper relationship between church and state, and an emphasis on the historic Baptist principle of religious liberty. Panelists at the New Baptist Covenant Celebration

...-Gilkes, professor of American Studies at ...ville, Me., suggested ... of religious liberty in ... sustains tremendous

...ted by the majority.

"The bill of rights is, by definition, counter-majoritarian, Walker said.

"America is one of the most religious and most religiously diverse nations on the face

of the earth," he said. "But despite our religious passion and pluralism, we have been able to avoid the religious conflicts and



...es our commitment to church and state." ... commitment will require ... about religion in ... ven to the point of creat- ... colleges and universities ... eciation." She said the ... ght much like a music ... where students are ... a symphony, all the ... ognize individual

... wars that have punctuated history and plague much of the world today."

Walker put forth what he called the golden rule for church-state separation: "I must not insist that government promote my religion if I don't want government to promote somebody else's religion, and I should not permit government to harm someone else's religion if I don't want government to harm my religion."

Cynthia Holmes, a Clayton, Mo., attorney and former moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, warned that the future of the historic Baptist principle of church-state separation hinges on our treatment of the principle today.

"We can't guarantee that our kids will be free to practice their religion if we deny that freedom to any other group," she said.

"As Baptists, we must champion the historic Baptist position on religious liberty. ... As Baptists, we must understand that freedom to exercise religion does not mean our freedom to impose our religion on everyone else by government favoritism," Holmes said.

Panelists were quick to point out that the proper relationship between church and state does not divorce religion from the public square.

"Church-state separation does not keep religious voices from influencing public policy or acknowledging our religious heritage in the public square," Walker said. "But it does mean the government should not be able to pass laws or take official action that has the primary effect of advancing or prohibiting religion.

"The best thing government can do for religion is to leave it alone," he said. "Neither should do the work of the other."

Holmes echoed Walker's sentiments on the rightful place of religion in the public square, but suggested the problem occurs when Christians believe that their position is "the" Christian position.

Walker added that the work of the 71-year-old Baptist Joint Committee in extending and defending religious liberty for all is a prototype for the kind of "Baptist togetherness" espoused by the New Baptist Covenant. The BJC is comprised of 15 Baptist bodies, including American Baptist Churches USA, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, National Baptist Convention of America, Inc., and Progressive National Baptist Convention, each partnering organizations in the New Baptist Covenant.

— Jeff Huett



K. Hollyn Hollman
General Counsel

Perspectives on religious liberty from the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant

It is rare to come out of a meeting that lasts several days, saying “Boy, that was terrific!” But, in fact, that is what I’ve been saying about the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant in Atlanta. Meetings inevitably involve sitting for long periods; and success can be hard to measure. For me, the key is sticking to a well-

organized and meaningful agenda, balanced with enough flexibility to allow unexpected contributions, and resolve to build on what is achieved. The organizers and participants accomplished that and more during this historic gathering.

The preaching and music inspired me, and the special interest sessions on a range of topics were informative and practical. Among the events were four well-attended sessions on religious liberty and the separation of church and state. The assignment for me and other panelists was specific: identify and explain “best practices for ministry” to offer attendees essential information and practical ideas. Guided by skilled moderators

such as Wake Forest Divinity Dean Bill J. Leonard and Walter B. Shurden, the sessions gave the audience food for thought and tips to take away. Here is a sampling of the information from the sessions on religious freedom. (See pages 8-9).

It was my pleasure to share with a broad Baptist audience the work we do to promote the BJC’s mission of defending and extending God-given religious liberty for all and to provide resources for churches and individuals. Through our offices in Washington, Baptists have an established voice for religious liberty. I explained our work in the corridors of Congress and the courts, as well as the broader public square to protect religious freedom, building on our theological commitment to “soul freedom” and respect for the voluntary nature of religion. Our assignment includes educational work in churches, on campuses, and in the media, as well as specific and direct involvement with legislative proposals and court cases. On a number of current topics, such as the dangers of government funding of religious ministries and the role of churches in political debates, we offered information that could be used directly in congregations, as well as continued service through the BJC’s office and Web site.

The perspectives of the other panelists amplified the importance of religious liberty and led to an engaging question and answer session. As J. Stanley Lemons shared, the historical role of Baptists in articulating a vision for and promotion of religious freedom is unique. It gives us a special opportunity and responsibility to teach about the values embodied in the First Amendment. His church, the First Baptist Church in America, is admittedly part of the tourism industry in Rhode Island. Many who come to learn about the state’s history also learn about its founder Roger Williams, who founded the First Baptist Church and whose often overlooked commitment to radical religious freedom shaped our country’s history.

James M. Dunn, as professor at Wake Forest University Divinity School and former executive director of the BJC, captured the challenges and demands of the moment, recognizing that some words have been deliberately misused in ways that skew their meaning. We must engage critics and be clear. We have a “secular” government. Only people, not nations, can be accurately described as “Christian.” Though “separation of church and state” is by no means complete and certainly it does not require a separation of religious voices from political engagement, we must never fail to recognize the important distinctions between the institutions of each. Nor should we fail to respond to each new attempt to blur the lines, whether in a political campaign or a congregational conversation.

Jeffrey Haggray, executive director/minister of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention and former BJC Board Chair, has served as pastor and in various leadership posts in Baptist life. He spoke about the challenges faced at the church level of being politically engaged and upholding church-state principles. He discussed some aspects of the Baptist tradition, such as prophetic preaching and evangelism that can challenge the responsibilities of maintaining the integrity of churches and respecting religious diversity. He noted, however, that there are some good models of how to represent the best of the Baptist tradition, including respect for the separation of church and state.

The excitement of the attendees was palpable, and I suspect will be contagious. We look forward to being a part of it and extending the vision far beyond Atlanta.

“Our work is built on theological commitments to ‘soul freedom’ and respect for the voluntary nature of religion.”

3 spring interns begin work at the Baptist Joint Committee

This spring, the Baptist Joint Committee welcomed three new interns.



Chapman



Eisel



Harder

Rachel Chapman, of Bedford, Texas, is a senior English and political science pre-law major in the Douglas MacArthur Academy of Freedom at Howard Payne University.

She is the daughter of Rod and Kim Chapman.

Catherine Eisel, of Macon, Ga., is a December 2007 *magna cum laude* graduate of Shorter College, where she majored in English and minored in international studies.

She is the daughter of Rick and Charlotte Eisel.

Joel Harder, of Waco, Texas, will graduate from Baylor University in May 2008 with a Master of Social Work with a specialization in church social work.

Harder graduated from the University of North Texas as a political science major in August 2005.

He is the son of Mike and Ann Harder.

Deadline nears for 2008 High School Religious Liberty Essay Contest

WASHINGTON — To engage high school students in church-state issues and to generate interest from a wide range of Baptists, the BJC has launched the 2008 Religious Liberty High School Essay Contest.

Open to all Baptist high school students in the classes of 2008 and 2009, the contest offers a grand prize of \$1,000 and a trip to Washington, D.C. Second prize is \$500, and third prize is \$100.

Winners will be announced in the summer of 2008 and will be featured in the BJC's flagship publication, *Report from the Capital*. The grand prize winner will also be recognized at the BJC board meeting in Washington, D.C., on October 6, 2008. Judges reserve the right to present no awards or to reduce the number of awards if an insufficient number of deserving entries are received.

The 2008 topic asks students to discuss the relevance of religious faith to politics, including whether and to what extent faith should be an election issue in 2008. Essays must be between 700 and 1,000 words. All essays must be postmarked by March 3, 2008.

Essays that do not meet the minimum qualifications will not be judged. To download a registration form and a promotional flier, visit www.bjconline.org/contest. For more information, contact Phallan Davis at 202-544-4226 or e-mail her at pdavis@BJCOnline.org.

William & Mary president resigns after cross controversy

Following public criticism over the removal of a chapel cross and a racy campus show, the president of the College

of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Va., resigned Feb. 12.

The resignation of Gene R. Nichol, who had led the public university since 2005, comes after he was told on Sunday that his contract would not be renewed in July.

In 2006, William & Mary removed a cross from permanent display in the campus chapel, a move criticized by some alumni and conservative activists. One donor threatened to withhold a multimillion-dollar pledge.

Under a compromise, the cross was later kept in a display case and was to be placed on the altar by request.

Nichol defended those decisions, saying that it was necessary for a chapel "used regularly for secular college events — both voluntary and mandatory — in order to help Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and other religious minorities feel more meaningfully included as members of our broad community."

The former president tied his actions to the legacy of William & Mary alumnus Thomas Jefferson, who, Nichol said, "argued for a 'wall of separation between church and state.'"

William & Mary's Board of Visitors said the decision not to extend Nichol's contract "was not in any way based on ideology or any single public controversy."

— RNS

Grassley to write to ministries not cooperating with him

WASHINGTON — Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, is planning to send additional letters to the evangelical ministries that have not fully responded to his inquiry into their finances.

Grassley, who is the top-ranking Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, has asked six prominent ministries for financial details to determine if they are following rules for tax-exempt organizations.

"Sen. Grassley is preparing follow-up letters to send to the ministries that have raised concerns or not responded to his inquiries so far," said Jill Gerber, press secretary for Grassley's committee.

"It's been extremely rare for tax-exempt groups to decline to cooperate with his requests for information."

His office reported that it has received materials from just two of the six ministries: Joyce Meyer Ministries in Fenton, Mo., and Kenneth Copeland Ministries in Newark, Texas.

Creflo Dollar Ministries in College Park, Ga., and Bishop Eddie Long's New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Ga., have refused to submit financial records, which Grassley first requested last November.

Without Walls International Church in Tampa, Fla., has sought additional time to respond. And Benny Hinn Ministries in Grapevine, Texas, exchanged messages with the office in December but had not been in further contact.

Rusty Leonard, the CEO of MinistryWatch.com, dismissed criticism that Grassley's inquiry could lead to additional government regulation of ministries as "absolutely spurious" and urged cooperation.

— RNS