

Texas Baptist Forum_110104

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Hostility toward religion

Perhaps the reason so many Americans believe that church-state separation has become "too severe" (Oct. 4) is that it has become an excuse for government-sponsored hostility toward religious expression, in spite of constitutional protections.

E-mail the editor at *-Marv Knox*

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Thomas Jefferson's famous "wall" represented his own opinion in 1802. The Supreme Court did not use Jefferson's phrase in reference to the First Amendment until 1879, and it was not elevated to constitutional authority until 1947. Since then, it has been used as the basis for government-sponsored hostility toward religion, religious expression and religious practice.

I'm not advocating a return to the excesses of the 17th and 18th centuries, against which the framers of the Constitution wrote the First Amendment. I just want an end to the overt hostility that our governments at all levels frequently demonstrate toward what has become the unwanted stepchild of civil rights-freedom of religion.

Glenn Goodrum

League City

Founding Fathers' faith

I'm surprised when Jerry Falwell and others proclaim our nation's founders intended to build a nation "under God." Historians indicate many Founding Fathers were Deists who generally rejected the divinity of Jesus. Consider these quotes:

- ◆ Thomas Paine—"I do not believe the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church or by any church that I know of."

- ◆ Benjamin Franklin—"As for Jesus of Nazareth, I believe that his morals and religion are the best the world will ever see, but I have some doubts about his divinity."

- ◆ Thomas Jefferson—"The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the mind of Jupiter."

- ◆ John Adams—"In the formation of the American governments ... it will never be pretended that any persons employed in that service had interviews with the gods or were in any way under the influence of heaven. ... These governments were conceived merely by use of the reason and senses. ... The government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."

The weight of the evidence supports the conclusion that this nation was designed by secularists motivated by reason rather than by faith.

Charles Lee Evans

Fort Worth

Church-state separation

I believe church and state should continue to be separate entities. That was how our forefathers established our nation, and I think it's a good one.

President Bush scares me when he says, "It is our duty to be faithful to the Almighty and to spread freedom." Some countries aren't ready for democracy; let them grow into it on their own. Iran's young generation is a good example. They are paving the way for future democracy.

The same philosophy goes for stem-cell research, abortion and gay marriage. People may not personally agree with these things, but it shouldn't be up to our government to enforce a law banning them.

Ironically enough, the Bible states that we are to educate and be a good example of Christ, not to force anyone into becoming a Christian. God is the ultimate Judge.

Marie Hartzfeld

Flower Mound

Politics & pulpits

The content of recent letters to the editor and the comments about the online poll regarding church-state separation make a collective point against preaching politics from the pulpit.

If our pastors would preach the truth from the Bible, then voting Christians would be informed enough to make their own correct decisions. Pastoral endorsements of politicians are for those people who are so unsure of Christian teachings they honestly do not know who or what they should vote for.

The content and tone of these letters and comments also demonstrate why church and state must be kept separate. History also teaches this same principle.

Charles McFatter

Semmes, Ala.

Baptists' northern origin

I had to chuckle over the belief of at least one Texas Baptist that Southern Baptists were the first to introduce Baptist churches to the North, namely Minnesota and Wisconsin (Sept. 20).

It's entirely the other way around! The first Baptists in the South came from Kittery, Maine. When William Screven was persecuted for preaching against infant baptism, he took part of his flock with him to South Carolina and established the First Baptist Church in Charleston as early as 1670.

John Moulis

Augusta, Maine

Prophetic voice

A cry went out through the land. A prophetic voice was silenced. Henlee Barnette, who died recently, was a great American, a great Baptist, but most importantly, a faithful and bold Christian.

Barnette, who taught Christian ethics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., was often the subject of ecclesiastical and political criticism. FBI files reveal he was investigated for his leadership in the civil rights movement and the anti-war protests of the Vietnam era.

He spoke out against racism, war mongering, genderism and fundamentalism. He was, like the ancient prophets of God, an advocate for the poor.

He was a great American, a proud son of the South, an outspoken Baptist who put Christ above all other allegiances. Who will pick up the torch in these days when so many who speak in the name of Christ are mere defenders of the status quo and chaplains of materialism?

He now walks with God. May his mantle not lie too long in the dust.

Raymond Bailey

Waco

Convention asset

The members of Greater St. Stephen First Baptist Church in Fort Worth support our pastor, Michael Bell, 1,000 percent and endorse his candidacy for first vice president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Our nationally renowned pastor is an asset to the convention. Few persons possess his cross-cultural credibility and legitimacy.

That is why Gary Dyer's letter (Oct. 4) was so disappointing. He didn't consider that most African-American churches are dually aligned, accounting for membership in at least two, sometimes more, conventions.

Dyer is unfamiliar with African-American church dynamics and our responsibilities to a community facing interlocking crises of racism and classism. Our church gives thousands of dollars to missions. It subsidizes educational and health needs of families. We hope a church that subscribes to the liberating mandate of Luke 4:18 would not be demeaned for taking seriously the Great Commission.

Since Dyer is unaware of what we give to cancer research, HIV/AIDS, sickle-cell anemia, diabetes, heart disease and the like, he, and those who are likeminded, should consider the truth that different cultures are authentically different in emphases, priorities and financial profiles.

Our Bible suggests such differences are not bad, negative or insidious. As our pastor says, "Our differences suggest God has an appreciation for variety."

Unfortunately, some still feel they must misuse the word of God to buttress their parochial perspectives.

Our church will continue to grow in financial and prayer support for the BGCT. We look forward to the election of Michael Bell as its first vice president.

Hervey Bolden

Deacon chairman

Greater St. Stephen FBC

Fort Worth

Highest commodity

I was struck by the letter concerning the nomination of Michael Bell and the amount of his church's Cooperative Program gifts. The gentleman's remarks demonstrated the chasms that exists between many churches in our denomination.

Investigation of Greater St. Stephen First Baptist Church would have revealed an explanation for the giving amount.

I am sure the concerned brother was not aware that Greater St. Stephen

Church is located in one of the poorest sections of Fort Worth.

I am sure the writer was not aware of the fact the members of the church are indigenous to that church, unlike other churches whose membership is often comprised of people who live outside the inner-city area.

I am sure the writer was unaware of the fact Greater St. Stephen Church ministers to those people who may not be welcomed in some of our “silk stocking” churches. Many of the people would not be accepted in some of our more affluent dominant-ethnic cultural church settings.

I am sure the writer has zero knowledge of the number of men and women who have been rescued from the streets because of the ministry of Greater St. Stephen Church.

Unfortunately, poor people do not possess a great amount of monetary capital, but they are precious in God's sight.

Moreover, when serving in high-crime areas with high unemployment, the highest commodity is measured by the size of the people's heart, not their bank account.

C.M. Singleton

Fort Worth

Healthy dialogue

Your article about the debate over the meaning of “priesthood of the believer” (Oct. 18) was thoughtful and well-balanced.

David Jeffrey has made good use of his academic freedom to prompt a healthy and intellectually engaging dialogue about one of our distinct doctrines. As a Latino, I cherish the opportunity to go to God without the

aid of an earthly priest; but I also have been reminded that I read and interpret Scripture in the context of my local congregation and the church throughout the ages.

Carlos Colón-Quintana

Hewitt

Academic freedom

I am writing with reference to your fine article on academic freedom at Baylor (Oct. 18). Ironically, the Faculty Senate has been the greatest threat to my academic freedom at Baylor, not the administration.

At the Faculty Senate website is posted a list of leadership issues at Baylor University. Included in this list is “hiring of additional proponents of Intelligent Design despite the Polanyi Institute debacle and in the face of continued profound faculty opposition.” I am a proponent of Intelligent Design (see for example <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/bradley/docs/scievidence.html>). According to the Faculty Senate, I should not have been hired at Baylor. The Faculty Senate practices the very ideological narrowness for which they criticize the administration. I have also been a subject of discussion at a Faculty Senate meeting for the same reason (Nov. 19, 2002).

It is incredible that the faculty senate at a Christian university would seek to “blackball” me, despite my impeccable qualifications, because I have the audacity to believe that God designed our universe and that evidence of this can be seen in nature. Ironically, during my 24 years at Texas A&M University in mechanical engineering, I was never discriminated against because of my work in Intelligent Design.

Is it any wonder that the administration sometimes feels obliged to ignore

input from the Faculty Senate? I should add that I have fallen in love with Baylor students and colleagues in my department during my first two years, and am thankful to God to be able to contribute to Baylor 2012.

Walter L. Bradley

Waco

Innocent blood

While serving in Iraq as a military chaplain, I get the Baptist Standard weeks late. I read with interest a letter that stated: "God's word has not changed to conform to society and never will. God has a lot to say about the shedding of innocent blood" (Aug. 23).

I pray all Baptist Christians will be mindful that innocent blood is shed by the hundreds and thousands during the course of human conflict. Our political parties are far from monolithic with regards to the sanctity of human life and our Savior's call to correct practice of our faith.

Like in biblical times, the sword strikes the innocent every day in places like Afghanistan, Iraq and Russia. Neither political party has moral high ground with respect to the taking of innocents and the sanctity of human life.

David D. Dinkins

La Marque

Iraq's spiritual warfare

Much has been written in this paper about the war with Iraq, but nothing has been written about the greater spiritual war that has been going on in

this country for the last 50 years. This war is described in Ephesians 6:14 and is against the powers of the dark world and against the forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ONLINE ONLY

The hottest issue in this war for us is abortion and homosexuality. Both of these are forbidden by God and have serious consequences for the nations that disobey. These are issues that have eternal value.

We are on the brink of a crisis. Voters decide what God will do for or to America. Which will our choice be? Will we choose the good or the evil? May God have mercy on America for the millions of babies we have murdered and our sexual immorality.

Mildred Bevan

Burleson

Can he justify his vote?

J.J. Harryman referred to himself as a "yellow-dog Democrat" (Oct. 18). I have never heard that expression before. He's a child of the King!

ONLINE ONLY

But I have a big question for him: How can you vote for people that go along with homosexuality and same-sex marriage? My Bible says it's an abomination to God! These same people believe in abortion. Doesn't one of the Ten Commandments state, "Thou shalt not kill"?

Can he justify his vote and his belief in?

Mona Carol Workman

Boerne

Stationed in Iraq

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.