

Voices: Why I, and maybe you, write for the Baptist Standard

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This fall marks my two-year anniversary writing regularly for the *Baptist Standard*, particularly in their “Texas Baptist Voices” column. This occasion has prompted me to reflect on why I do this. Why do I write for the *Standard*?

It certainly is not for riches or fame. I have not become wealthy by doing this, nor do I anticipate ever becoming so. Have I become famous? Maybe somewhat more famous for a niche audience, but not to the point of being able to claim any sort of celebrity status for myself. But even if I were to gain wealth and fame by doing this, that would not be my main motivation.

So, why do I write?

“That without which I could not live”

Although I started writing for the *Standard* two years ago, I first was published as a writer nearly a decade ago. During my senior year in high school, I served as an editorial intern at a local newspaper in my hometown for a few months, during which time I had the opportunity to write a handful of opinion columns.

When I was preparing to start college, my primary career aspiration was to become a journalist. This sense of vocational calling stemmed from my passion for writing, particularly nonfiction writing that focused on contemporary issues in religion, politics, culture, etc. While my career goals have shifted somewhat in the intervening years, that passion remains.

Several years ago, I first heard a piece of [writing advice](#) from the late Christopher Hitchens that deeply resonated with me: “If you want to write, it must be the thing not that you want to do or would like to do; it must be the thing you feel you have to do. It must be that without which you could not live.”

The irony is not lost on me that I, a Christian, have taken such inspiration from another writer who perhaps is most well-known for his passionate opposition to all forms of religion. But as Augustine said, “All truth is God’s truth.” Hitchens himself might have enjoyed the irony.

I never would claim the title of prophet for myself, but I also resonate with the words of Jeremiah: “Within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (20:9 NRSV). For years, I have felt an irrepressible urge to write and speak publicly on matters I consider important.

My (desperate) need for an editor

For several years, my primary outlet for the “fire shut up in my bones” was social media. By my senior year of college, I had mastered the Facebook jeremiad. I also had mastered the art of losing friends and alienating people on social media. I still stand by many of the opinions I expressed on Facebook over the years, but I regret much of *how* I expressed those views.

While I was home on break from seminary a few years ago, my pastor from college ate lunch with me, and we talked about my incendiary social media habits. He told me I was passionate, articulate and sometimes even right in the things I posted to social media. But he and I both agreed Facebook and similar platforms simply are not the best medium for the kind of discourse I was trying to engage.

He suggested if there were subjects about which I simply could not help

but say something, I should consider reaching out to different publications and pitching opinion pieces. This approach would force me to slow down, think more carefully about what I want to say, and let an editor hold me accountable for what I write. It also would grant me a wider audience.

After returning to seminary that fall, I took his advice. Through some connections with a few friends, I got in touch with Eric Black at the *Baptist Standard*, and the rest is history.

There have been more than a few occasions when Eric has saved me from publishing something that would needlessly hurt someone else—and my reputation and career. He also has helped me sharpen my writing skills in general and build a portfolio that could provide a foundation for further writing at an expanded number of publications.

How to write for the *Baptist Standard*

Perhaps you, too, have a fire shut up in your bones and would like to know how you can write an opinion article for the *Standard*. Here are a few tips and suggestions that have helped me over the last two years.

Your primary contact person will be Editor Eric Black, naturally. He has written a helpful [editorial](#) describing the *Standard's* criteria for determining what they will publish. If you [email him](#) with an article proposal and he expresses interest, you can proceed with writing and submitting your piece.

Common word processing software like Microsoft Word is all you need to write and format your article. Articles need to be single-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, 1-inch margins and no more than 1,000 words; 750 words is ideal. Your word count does not include your title, byline, section headers or bio.

It is helpful for paragraphs to be 3-4 lines in length. This makes for easier online reading. You also will want to break your article up into sections, each beginning with a section heading in bolded text.

Citations are simple. Include the title, creator(s) and page numbers, if applicable. Include a hyperlink if the source is available online.

Do you have a fire shut up in your bones? Is there a subject you are passionate about and must express? Then writing an article for the *Baptist Standard* might be a great option for you.

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