

DOWN HOME: Agnostic & editor agree on thanks

November 16, 2007

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Sometimes, it's downright weird how people with widely divergent worldviews can come down in the same place.

But here I am, right beside [A.J. Jacobs](#).

He's the author of a best-selling book, *The Know-It-All*. I've been accused of knowing practically nothing.

He's an editor-at-large for a hoity-toity men's magazine, *Esquire*. I'm the editor of a Baptist newspaper 99.9999999 percent of the readers of *Esquire* never heard of.

EDITORIAL: Differences,

defamation & grace

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Differences, defamation & grace

A thoughtful reader recently sent me a letter lamenting the landslide of personal attacks and the torrent of abusive language that characterize Baptist life these days. He specifically cited the tone of several blogs. But he also could have pointed to many church business meetings, e-mail and telephone gossip about individuals and events in the Baptist General Convention of Texas, occasional pronouncements by outsiders about our convention, and far too many Baptist dinnertables where “roast preacher” is served up as if it were a local delicacy.



The problem, friends, is a growing inability to disagree agreeably. People no longer seem to understand they can disagree with each other without being angry at each other. They stumble over the concept of honest disagreement expressed in a spirit of goodwill.

I understand this phenomenon all too well. Almost every week, I hear from people who have severe problems with disagreement. They generally fall

into two categories. One group seems to love disagreeing, and hostility gets their juices flowing. They relish a good fight. The other group absolutely detests fighting and just wants everybody to get along. Problem is, they're so conditioned by the other crowd that they now think disagreement equals fighting. So, they dysfunctionally avoid expressing honest differences for fear of fighting. Both groups can't seem to comprehend that people, especially Christians, can disagree passionately and yet continue to love one another, care for each other, pray for the other.

Multiple factors account for this, but I blame talk radio. Call it the "Limbaughization" of America. Talk radio hosts practice "ritual defamation," explains former Texas pastor Bruce Prescott. It's a calculated political strategy—"defamation in retaliation for the real or imagined attitudes, opinions or beliefs of the victim, with the intention of silencing or neutralizing his or her influence, and/or making an example of them so as to discourage similar independence." They also like it because it's good for ratings. Americans have become so coarse and desensitized they're titillated by the pain and humiliation of others. Call it talk radio for a generation who grew up on *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and Friday the 13th. Many bloggers unwittingly (or maybe not) have picked up on this. After all, outlandish rhetoric drives up the hits. Never mind if the tone is so extreme it casts doubt upon the truthfulness of the content.

No executive director nominee

likely before year's end

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No executive director nominee likely before year's end

By John Hall

Texas Baptist Communications

DALLAS—A nominee for the next executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board is unlikely to be named before Jan. 1, the chairman of the search committee announced.

Ken Huggins, pastor of Elkins Lake Baptist Church in Huntsville who is leading the committee, said the first round of candidate interviews continues. Once that is finished, the committee will begin narrowing the field further. To do that, committee members will analyze strengths and weaknesses of the candidates and compare those with the characteristics they value for the position.

Faith Digest

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Faith Digest

Black Baptist prof told to choose college or church. Professor Denise Isom loves her work at Calvin College and her Grand Rapids church, Messiah Missionary Baptist. But her employer has told she must choose one or the other. The Calvin board has refused to exempt Isom from a rule that requires professors to attend a congregation with ties to the Christian Reformed Church. The issue sparked a student “prayer protest” and discussion about how the church-membership policies may hurt diversity on campus. Isom, an assistant professor of education since 2003, is black and her research focuses on race and education. She told the board she finally found what she was looking for at the predominantly black Messiah Missionary Baptist.

Religious activists lobby for changes in farm bill. Religious leaders led by the Bread for the World advocacy group have refused to endorse subsidies for large farm operations and demanded that senators pass an agriculture bill that supports small farmers, as well as the nation’s poor. The \$288 billion farm bill, reauthorized every five years, has come under attack this year from an array of groups for its large commodity payments, subsidizing production of wheat, rice, corn, cotton and soybeans. According to the Washington-based [Environmental Working Group](#), \$164.7 billion in commodity payments were made between 1995 and 2005—and 10 percent of subsidy recipients received 73 percent of the money. The group voiced support for several proposed amendments—one seeking a \$250,000 yearly cap on commodity payments to farmers; another cutting commodity payments and offering free revenue insurance for all farmers, with savings redirected to nutritional support programs.

Singer/songwriter shares life story through music

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Charlie Hall and his band.

Singer/songwriter shares life story through music

By Leann Callaway

Special to the Baptist Standard

ARLINGTON— While leading worship at this year's Focus Conference for students and Texas Baptist Youth Ministry Conclave, [Charlie Hall](#) shared his life story through songs.

Through times of soul-searching, personal struggles and trials, Hall offered a personal message to youth and college students.

D.C. congregation gives homeless a ride to church

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D.C. congregation gives homeless a ride to church

By Beckie Supiano

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Jill Peddycord and Gary Bradley bow their heads and pray in the front seats of a white van parked outside [Metropolitan Baptist Church](#) in the nation's capital.

Peddycord asks for God's blessing as they begin the weekly rounds of Metropolitan's transportation ministry.

Christian leaders urge

compassion in debate regarding immigration

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Christian leaders urge compassion in debate regarding immigration

By Heather Donckels

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—The faith community needs to help bridge the gap between immigrants and a society that often rejects them, representatives of [Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform](#) said last week.

“We call on people of faith to stand with immigrants as fellow human beings deserving of God’s love and to advocate for effective immigration policies consistent with our history as a nation,” said James Winkler, who heads the United Methodists’ Board of Church and Society.

JEZEBEL: Did the Bibleâ€™s bad

girl get a bad rap?

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Did the Bible's bad girl get a bad rap?

By Heather Donckels

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Few historical characters rival Jezebel for negative stereotypes. Today, “she’s a household word for badness,” one scholar said. Culturally, she’s portrayed as a brash, sexually provocative woman wearing too much make-up, another observed.

So in her new book, author Lesley Hazleton strives to set aside stereotypes and cultural images and show whom Jezebel, one of history’s most infamous women, really was.

Texas Baptist Forum

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Texas Baptist Forum

Confession & churches

As a minister to youth, I was perplexed by Marv Knox's approval of a forced public confession by two teenagers ([Oct. 15](#)). I would support these young people if they chose to confess their sin publicly. But forced confession is not true confession, just as forced conversion is not true conversion.

- [Jump to online-only letters below](#)

Letters are welcomed. Send them to marvknox@baptiststandard.com; 250 words maximum.



“Hell is the crazy cousin that Protestants keep locking in the basement. ... A lot of people don't want to talk about hell and engage it because if there is a hell, there's a possibility they are going there.”

Greg Stier

President of Dare 2 Share Ministries, an evangelical youth ministry in Denver (*The Washington Times/RNS*)

“There's another church in our community that doesn't have a baptistery, and that pastor and I were talking. He has five folks. I have three. I told him we might want to wait just a little bit, and I've never had to do that.”

Brian Harris

Pastor of Rock Springs Baptist Church in Rock Springs, S.C., on the drought that has prevented church members from filling up their baptistery and delayed the baptism of new members (*WYFF4.com/RNS*)

“When I was growing up, denominations were a big deal. I don't see that today. In our church, we have Baptists, Methodists, Jewish people—all kinds of people. I think a lot of those walls have come down.”

Joel Osteen

Houston megachurch pastor and author (*USA Today/RNS*)

I also fear many churches would not have reacted as this church did. Instead of humble acceptance of these young people, forced confessions often create communities that reject, despise, humiliate and condemn sinners, even repentant ones.

I find it alarming that while Jesus, in John 8, refused to humiliate the woman, loving her even in her sin (“neither do I condemn you”) and yet still confronted her sin (“go and sin no more”), often our attitude is to condemn as the Pharisees did.

Churches, volunteer receive LifeCall missions recognition

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Churches, volunteer receive LifeCall missions recognition

A longtime Texas Baptist missions volunteer and five churches recently received LifeCall Missions honors.

Sue Low received the LifeCall Missions lifetime achievement award in a presentation at Hampton Road Baptist Church in DeSoto. Low, 91, began ministry in jails and prisons more than 70 years ago and continued until failing eyesight limited her abilities last year.

For many years, she made twice-weekly visits to the Lew Sterrett Justice Center in downtown Dallas—a practice she and her late husband, Asa, initiated and she continued after his death in 1996.

In 1998, the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board recognized her as Mission Service Corps volunteer of the year. She was commissioned as a Mission Service Corps volunteer in 1994 and as a LifeCall volunteer 10 years later.

Couple offers hard-to-place children a family where everyone fits right in

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Robert
and
Sheila
Lee play
with
Jazmine,
7, Nico, 6,
and Kylie,
2, in their
front
lawn. The
adoption
was
expected
to be
completed
Nov.
16—the
day
before
National
Adoption
Day.

Couple offers hard-to-place children a family where everyone fits right in

By Analiz González

Buckner International

LUBBOCK—Robert and Sheila Lee waited until their four children reached their teens and 20s before starting over with a younger batch—Jazmine, 7, Nico, 6, and Kylie, 2.

The couple brought the three foster children home in March and April of 2005. The plan was to foster them through Buckner, then let them move on.



**It's a bird, it's a plane,
it's a superhero in a
burqa?**

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It's a bird, it's a plane, it's ... a superhero in a burqa?

By Beckie Supiano

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON—Move over, Fantastic Four. There's a new team of superheroes in town.

Meet Jabbar the Powerful, a Hulk-like strong man, and Noora the Light, who can create holograms. Darr the Afflicter wields powerful pain waves. One hero, The Hidden, wears a burqa.