

Think for yourself

August 3, 2009

Here's a letter that reflects a perspective I sometimes hear from readers:

"I am a new Baptist, a member of First Baptist Church, ..., Texas.

"A few weeks ago my introduction to the *Baptist Standard* was an [article](#) brought to my Sunday school class relating that a prominent Baptist (Wiley Drake, a former Southern Baptist Convention vice president) was advocating that we pray for the death of President Obama. While no fan of our current president, my Bible tells me to respect and honor those in authority over us and to pray for them. I found it shocking that this article was in the publication with no commentary opposing that attitude.

"Today I was shocked further by learning that an [article](#) was published regarding the Episcopal bishop (Katharine Jefforts Schori) who stated that people are presumptuous to state that they can be saved. Again, there was no commentary to refute her statements. Her attitude is totally unbiblical, and Southern Baptists proclaim that they believe totally in the Bible.

"So, where is the biblical position in the official publication of my church? I am upset about this. I would appreciate your response so I can understand your position. ..."

Good questions

I'm always grateful to receive letters from readers who wonder how and why we make decisions. For 30 years as a Baptist journalist, I've been talked *about* and talked *to*. No doubt, the members of this woman's Sunday school class were talking about me. So, I'm grateful she decided to talk to me.

I hope and pray she'll go back to church and pass along my answers to her question. Here's part of my response to her letter:

"Like you, I found Wiley Drake's comments abominable and Katharine Jefforts Schori's speech just plain wrong. But let me offer several reasons why we do not publish rebuttals for these and every other comment that appears in the pages of the *Baptist Standard*.

Four answers

"**First**, the *Baptist Standard* is a newspaper, not a journal of commentary and critique. The nature of a newspaper is to report the facts about significant events. Of course, we publish two pages of commentary in each issue. But a newspaper does not, by nature, publish the editor's comments on every article in the publication.

"For Baptists, the **second** reason is a corollary to the first. For 400 years, Baptists have championed the twin doctrines of soul competency and the priesthood of all believers. We believe God endows each individual with a mind and a discerning spirit, and we trust our readers to gather the information, consider it themselves and draw their own conclusions. We don't need to tell them what to think. Like you, the vast majority—if not all—of our readers most likely concluded Drake's views do not reflect the Spirit of Christ and Schori is theologically mistaken.

"**Third**, because of our biblical/doctrinal principles, Baptists do not practice top-down ecclesiology. We don't have a bishop or someone at the 'top' who tells other Baptists what to think. If the *Standard* felt obliged to publish the 'correct' answer to everything, we would be mimicking the kind of hierarchical practices—think Roman Catholics and a pope—we have rejected in others.

"And finally, the **fourth** reason relates to the other three. Because Baptists affirm soul freedom and liberty of thought and conscience, we don't agree

on all things. In fact, we don't share unanimous thinking on many issues. So, if the *Standard* sought to tell our readers what to think on all issues, the newspaper most likely would not have survived 120 years and, perhaps, the Baptist General Convention of Texas itself would not have survived."