

Texas Baptist Forum: Angry patriotism

July 18, 2008

Proper Loyalty

The church has developed an angry, in-your-face style of patriotism since 9-11. We must stand at attention when the flag goes by. We must say the words “under God” loudly and belligerently when reciting the pledge of allegiance. We must vote Republican!

We need to be careful not to cross the line into worship of Old Glory and America.

The last time I checked, Jesus didn't vote, never claimed he couldn't go about his Father's work because the wrong people headed the courts and the government, and got his tax payment from a fish. He is not a Republican, nor is he an American.

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

We need to question whether we are Americans who happen to be Christians. Or are we Christians—who just happen to be blessed by God also to be Americans?

Carolyn B. Edwards

Bandera

Church & state

Obviously, the First Amendment meant the U.S. Congress wasn't making any law establishing a national religion. That didn't say the church was not recognized.

Our Founding Fathers had gone through the required allegiance of a national religion in England and had fought to be able to worship as they pleased in a brand-new country.

Since Thomas Jefferson's time, we have had a great deal of controversy about separation of church and state. Yet we are known as a Judeo/Christian nation. Can we really kick the church out of state? We honor God who ordains nations of the world. God established the church through his Son, Jesus Christ; so who can kick Jesus out of state?

I've often wondered how many laughs God has had with this statement—separation of church and state. Evidently, God laughs at the world rulers a great deal. It even says so in Psalm 2:2-4: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together. Against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, 'Let us break the bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from me.' He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision."

Me? I have more of a tendency to look to God's word and laugh with him when a citizen, government official, or, yes, our Supreme Court, believes God can be controlled.

Joyce Brumley

Grand Prairie

'Less' than men

The Southern Baptist Convention can disallow affiliation with churches that hire women as pastors. But we cannot disallow affiliation with churches that hire or protect or pass on a minister who has been sexually abusive ([June 23](#)). We can't even keep a list of names.

Does this make any sense?

And then Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Bruce Ware stands in a Denton pulpit and tells people the two responses men can have to women who usurp their proper authority are abuse or acquiescence.

Psychological studies prove one of the things that makes abusive situations possible is the idea that women are "less" than men and should be relegated to the home.

And we wonder why our numbers are down.

Renaë Cobb

Allen

Lying e-mails

I identify all too well with Bob Schmeltekopf's letter regarding bogus e-mails ([July 7](#)). I was one of those who believed because the e-mail I received came from a Christian I respected, it must be true.

Thankfully, I chose to forward it to my son. He immediately notified me most of the e-mail was lies and provided me with websites to check future e-mails.

In almost two years we have been in a presidential campaign, I have

received dozens and dozens of political e-mails. So far, only one of those e-mails proved to be true.

It is sobering to me that Christians are being targeted and used in an attempt to influence the votes of our friends with misinformation and outright lies about the candidates.

Nancy Reynolds

Comanche

New VBS

I too remember the “old days” when Vacation Bible School was crafts, refreshments and Bible ([July 7](#)). I still have a couple of craft projects I did in VBS. Back then, our stimulation at home was limited to books, games and radio between chores. Today’s children have much more to stimulate their minds at home and church.

Crafts, refreshments and Bible stories will not hold today’s children’s attention. VBS has to be more of a production with scenery, videos and T-shirts to go with the Bible stories.

I started volunteering in VBS again five years ago after dropping out when my children got older. This year, we had workers from teenagers to octogenarians taking groups of children from “production” to “production.”

Three of the children in my group of six indicated they were ready to talk further about accepting Christ. Two others already had been baptized, and one child came from a Catholic home.

My experience disagrees with the statement that today’s VBS programs present a diluted faith, are less spiritual and are less effective in presenting

the gospel.

Charles McFatter

Semmes, Ala.

Online-Only Letters:

Diploma mills

I was teaching at Hong Kong Baptist Seminary and Hal Wingo, *Time-Life* correspondent in Hong Kong at the time, rang me up and ask if I knew anything about a Bible school that granted advanced higher education degrees in Hong Kong. *Life* magazine was doing a series on the diploma mills based in the United States but located around the world.

We drove out to the address on the brochure and found one of the few vacant lots in Hong Kong's New Territories. Nothing like what the Florida-based "church" organization promised.

That was many years ago, and such fraudulent schools still are pulling in the money and disrespecting the ministry. The unfortunate fact is the largest Baptist denomination now is led by a man who purchased his degrees from a diploma mill. At their June meeting, the Southern Baptist Convention elected as president "Dr." Johnny Hunt, a pastor with two dubious diplomas—one a doctorate—from a diploma mill called Covington Theological Seminary.

Having studied more than three years under men like Ray Summers, H.C. Brown, Jesse Northcutt, Robert Baker, Stewart Newman and Huber Drumright at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, I find it difficult to respect those who have not paid the price in real study to lead a church or convention.

Britt Towery

San Angelo

Get rid of nuclear weapons

It was a monumental mistake for the United States to invade and occupy Iraq. For the United States or Israel to conduct a strike on Iran would only worsen the problems in the Middle East.

Why should the international community of nations allow America to possess thousands of nuclear weapons while Iran cannot even have one? The invention of the atomic bomb was an evil act, and it was wrong to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The time is now for all nations possessing nuclear weapons to destroy them and strive for ways to promote peace without having to threaten other countries. Is America's trust really in God, as our currency says it is, or is it in our mighty arsenal of nuclear weapons? Is God pleased when nations spend billions and billions of dollars on weapons while much of the world's people are hungry and live in poverty?

We must choose this day whom we will serve—God, or money and military power. Why should God bless any nation that produces nuclear weapons?

Paul L. Whiteley Sr.

Louisville, Ky.

Pew Poll asked wrong question

I liked what you wrote about the Pew poll ([July 7](#)). The problem I have with the “confusing” question is that it's the wrong question to ask.

To me, eternal life is when the soul does not just pass away, so all people have eternal life. As born-again Southern Baptists, we always see “eternal life” as going to be with the Lord when this life is over. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Jesus is telling us how to have eternal life with him in heaven, not eternal life in general.

I felt the question should have spoken of heaven specifically. My first thought after reading the question was that everyone will have eternal life, because everyone’s soul will live forever. Only those who have trusted in Jesus Christ will get to spend it with him. Everyone else will have eternal life, but they will be separated from God.

Others also felt the wording of “many religions” was confusing, but for me it is the “Eternal Life” part of the question that I can see confusing people. I could see myself voting yes to the question in the way they worded it, because I feel the answer to their question is yes.

All religions do lead to eternal life—heaven or hell. Only a relationship with Jesus Christ and him being Lord of your life leads to heaven.

Jonathan Rogers

Grand Prairie

Cease from wars and "witch hunts"

There are few meetings like a Southern Baptist Convention ([June 23](#)). Many things are voted on, but our nonbinding resolutions will not enslave its members. Not all of our Christian friends can make that claim. Our new president stated “radical change” is needed to stop the decline in membership. Amen to that. What changes do we need?

There is some evidence to indicate we are a denomination run by grumpy old men. One report from the convention speaks of purging members. Our church did that last year, and I don't recommend it. I suspect that the father of the Prodigal Son would feel the same way.

Also mentioned are new requirements for service on SBC committees, commissions and boards with piercing questions for candidates bordering on inquisition. Why treat such distinguished people as if they were on trial, with the burden of proof of their righteousness on their own shoulders?

With our previously known condemnations of Disney, Harry Potter, Halloween and public education widely documented and promoted, is it any wonder many of our grown sons and daughters attend non-Baptist churches? That would help explain our fall in baptisms.

Yes, let's go for "radical change." Stop waging wars we can't win in public and cease all witch hunting within our own ranks.

John Townsend

Memphis, Tenn.

The loss of joyful singing

Two things contribute to the loss of joyful singing in churches.

- The high volume of the song leader overwhelms any singing of the congregation. Instead of a song leader, the person becomes a solo performer. If sound is a vibration touching the ear, then lip reading is the only way to hear the congregation sing. The shared experience of singing and worship are lost.
- Repetition empties the mind. Reminds me of "Rabbit Ain't Got no Tail at

All” for endless verses saying the same thing. “Tell me the story of Jesus” and “He bled and died for me” will touch and stay in hearts long after repetitive new songs are forgotten.

I agree with Hulitt Gloer: Music is the main way we get the gospel into people’s hearts. Hymns sung in church not only teach theology, but also develop character. “Jesus loves the little children, all the children in the world; red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight” shaped my views on race relations at an early age. Congregational singing penetrates the hearts of worshippers in ways sermons cannot.

In missing the old songs, I feel like the captured Jews being told to sing, but they could not. How sweet it is if the song leader steps back and there are voices. The Jews are no longer captives; they’re singing.

Why have we settled for second best?

Rex Ray

Bonham

VBS not diluted

I respectfully disagree with the Mick Tahaney’s claim that, because Vacation Bible School has made some changes in its presentation since the 1950s, we have diluted faith and ineffective witnessing ([July 7](#)).

Our church is medium-sized, and our VBS usually runs about 125 in the evening. We added T-shirts and other things in order to attract as many students as possible.

I assisted in the fourth grade class, and I saw nothing that did not enhance learning options for the students.

Our public schools can no more teach in a '50s atmosphere than we can in our churches.

As for the cost, we always share our supplies with churches with less resources. This year was very unusual. We have several schoolteachers who are wanting leftover supplies for their classrooms this fall.

I have always felt that VBS is the best opportunity a church can have for reaching our community for Christ. And after all, that should always be what we are about.

Betty Westbrook

Murphy

What do you think? Send letters to Editor Marv Knox by mail: P.O. Box 660267, Dallas 75266-0267; or by e-mail: marvknox@baptiststandard.com.