

The Baptist Standard and Kennedy's election

December 6, 2013

I served as associate editor of the *Baptist Standard* under Editor David M. Gardner until E.S. James became the editor a few years later. Both Gardner and James were noted for their emphasis on the separation of church and state; both were quick to defend the Baptist position of a free church in a free state.



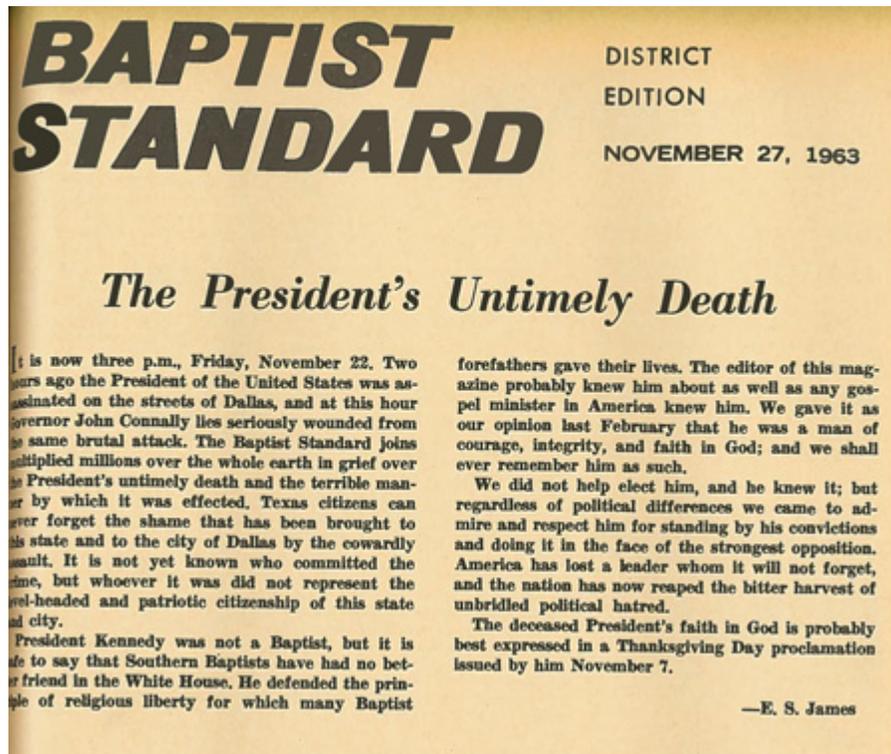
The *Baptist Standard* is celebrating its 125th



anniversary this month. The most famous experience of James' strong editorship came during the presidential campaign of 1960, when Democrat John F. Kennedy faced Republican Richard M. Nixon. The issue of church/state separation became important, primarily because Kennedy was a Roman Catholic. His opponents claimed he would be under the control of the pope and would favor the appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican state. Kennedy, however, publicly took the position of separation of church and state. Kennedy said he would not appoint an ambassador to the Vatican. Nixon, wanting to counter the

Roman Catholic vote for Kennedy, said he would appoint an ambassador.

During the campaign, Kennedy flew to Houston, inviting ministers of all denominations to the meeting, and James was among those who attended. At the meeting, Kennedy promised not to appoint an ambassador to the Vatican and said he would hold to the position of separation of church and



state.

The *Baptist Standard* edition published the week following President Kennedy's assassination. It was a clear statement that impressed James. Because of Kennedy's and Nixon's stands, James wrote both candidates, asking each to state for publication their positions on the matter.

Kennedy was quick to reply, and James immediately published the statement. Nixon did not reply. James was careful not to appear to be endorsing Kennedy, but the absence of Nixon's position and the Baptist church/state emphasis no doubt conveyed a strong message. Texas became a swing state in the election and voted strongly for Kennedy. Later, President Kennedy invited James to the White House.

I had moved in 1959 to Atlanta to serve as director of editorial services for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Don McGregor, a close friend, succeeded me as the associate editor at the Standard. I could not resist asking him one day if he knew for whom James had actually voted. He quickly answered: "Nixon."

(An excerpt from [*From Zion to Atlanta: Memoirs*](#) by Walker L. Knight)

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