



Freedom of Conscience: A Baptist/Humanist Dialogue

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For many years, both Baptists and humanists have been embroiled in heated controversy in the public square. Fundamentalist Baptists have leveled strong charges against humanists, especially secular humanists, accusing them of undermining the moral and social fabric of America. And secular humanists have, in turn, accused some Baptists of betraying democracy and working to establish a theocracy. Can there be common ground between Baptists and humanists?

At a historic dialogue convened at the University of Richmond, Virginia, Baptist and secular humanist scholars in theology, history, philosophy, and the social sciences, came together to define shared concerns and common values. The dialogue focused on major areas of concern: academic freedom; social, political, and religious tolerance; biblical scholarship; separation of church and state; the social agenda of the Christian Coalition and the Southern Baptist Convention; the danger of militant fundamentalism; freedom of conscience and the historic and current role of American Baptists; as well as the plight of pluralistic democracy.

The result of that historic meeting is *Freedom of Conscience: A Baptist/Humanist Dialogue*, which includes essays by Robert S. Alley, Joe Barnhart, Vern L. Bullough, Bernard C. Farr, George H. Shriver, Paul D. Simmons, George D. Smith, and Dan O. Via. The book concludes with "In Defense of Freedom of Conscience," a cooperative Baptist/Secular Humanist Declaration, authorized by twenty-two distinguished humanist and Baptist leaders.

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