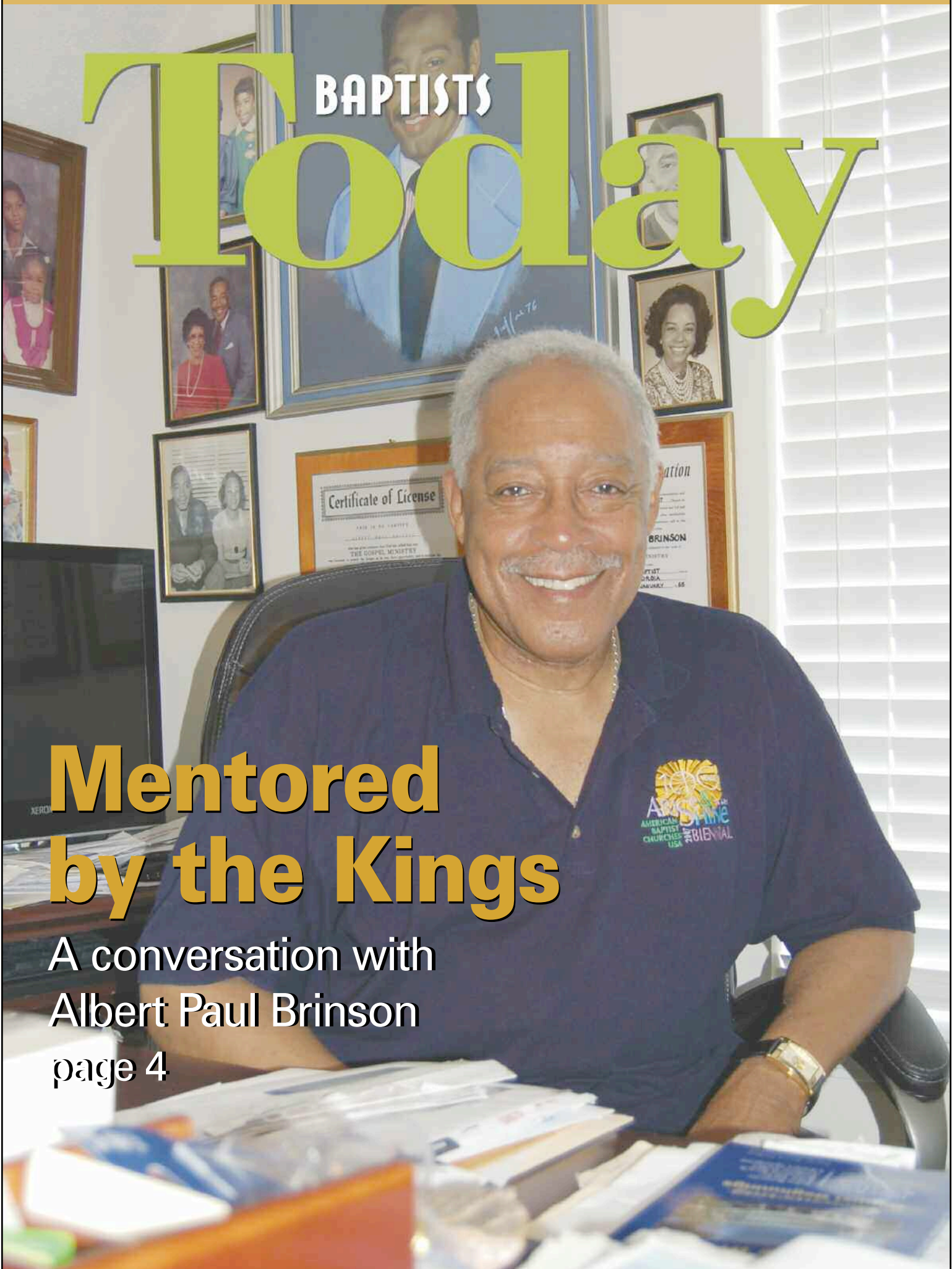


# BAPTISTS Today

## Mentored by the Kings

A conversation with  
Albert Paul Brinson  
page 4



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An autonomous national Baptist news journal



Cover photo by John Pierce. Baptist leader Albert Brinson was mentored by two Martin Luther Kings. **Page 4**

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A young Albert Brinson stands between his friends Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph David Abernathy in this newspaper photo.

# Mentored by the Kings

A conversation with Albert Paul Brinson

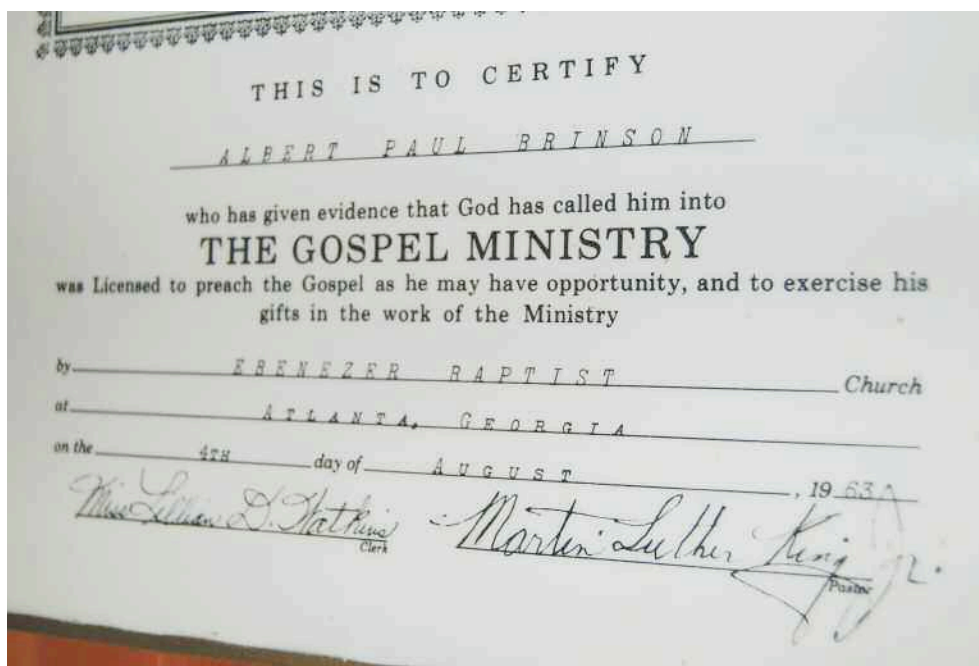
**C**ollege Park, Ga. — Dr. Albert Paul Brinson, 70, has come home after an illustrious Baptist career in pastoral ministry and denominational leadership — including the pastorate of Bank Street Memorial Baptist Church in Norfolk, Va., and working with the American Baptist Churches, USA, in mission support.

Home for Brinson is Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta's famed "Sweet Auburn" neighborhood where as a youngster he was embraced by

pastor Martin Luther King Sr. and his family.

"I love the city of Atlanta," said Brinson, noting that fellow church members today are surprised to learn that he lived in the middle of the congregation's most historic days.

Brinson grew up in Grady Homes, an Atlanta public housing project, where his father abandoned the family when Albert was about 7 years old. His mother was a steady and molding presence, often telling him: "Your life will never have meaning unless you give it to others."



Below: Albert Brinson points to a photo of “M.L.” King, who signed his license to ministry (shown at left).

“Rev. King Sr. became sort of my surrogate father,” said Brinson, adding that daughter Christine (Farris) and sons Martin Jr., and A.D. were like siblings to him.

As a student at Morehouse College, Brinson was a leader in the nonviolent protests of Atlanta’s public restaurants that would not serve black clients. He was recruited and trained by the legendary educator Dr. Benjamin Mays.

The Kings were influential in shaping his spiritual life and interpreting his ministry call that would require eventually giving up a groundbreaking career in the airlines industry.

*Baptists Today* editor John Pierce visited with Dr. Brinson in his College Park, Ga., home near the Atlanta airport. The following conversation is adapted from that interview.

**BT: From what I hear [classical music in background], you must have an appreciation for music?**

APB: I’m a nut when it comes to music. I’ve been a musician all my life.

**BT: What do you play?**

APB: I’ve been trained in singing — as a baritone. I play the baritone horn, the trumpet, the French horn and the alto horn. I still have my trumpet.

I went to Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic School — which is right in the midst of our King Center life and Ebenezer. I went there through the 8th grade before

going to public school in the 9th grade.

I was learning the trumpet because I wanted to be in the David T. Howard High School band. But they didn’t need any trumpets coming up.

So Vernon Jordan (later an advisor to President Clinton), who was two classes up from me, became a big brother, so to speak, and he played the baritone. Over the summer, he taught me how to play the baritone horn because he needed a baritone in his section. It was the same fingering, so I switched over.

**BT: So you grew up in that part of Atlanta?**

APB: I’m a Grady [Hospital] baby and grew up in Grady Homes — that is no longer there. The last of it was torn down last year.

I was baptized at Ebenezer in 1945. That whole area — of 10 or 12 blocks — was where we lived.

**BT: So you grew up under the ministry of “Daddy” King?**

APB: He’s the one that baptized me. I grew up in and out of their houses — and in their kitchen.

Christine, the oldest daughter, M.L. — you know him as Martin Luther King Jr. — and A.D. were always regular fixtures in my life, long before there was any tie to fame. They were like big brothers and sister.

Mrs. Alberta Williams King was a surrogate mother and a unique person. The loss of her life was such a tragic, unexpected thing.

Rev. King Sr. was with me through every moment of my life — every change — until 1982 when I went to Bank Street Memorial Church in Norfolk. He installed me there.

He had already been sick. He and my brother, Marvin, who works at Ebenezer now, flew up and he did the installation. Two years later he died — just after Dr. [Benjamin] Mays died in the spring.

See **BRINSON** page 14 >



# Quotation

“ r e m a r k s ”

“Parents will need to say ‘No’ to their children — and thus reinstate the proper order of authority in the family and douse the demon of entitlement.”

—RNS columnist Tom Ebrich on one response to a slow economy

“If they would like to ask us to leave the Southern Baptist Convention, I think that’s fine. I think our new minister is wonderful.”

—Gail Roper, a member of the First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., after the Georgia Baptist Convention approved a policy in November allowing leaders to reject mission funds from the congregation for calling a female pastor (Atlanta Journal-Constitution)

“It is my moral responsibility to lead the Tibetans till my death. My whole body and flesh is Tibetan.”

—The Dalai Lama, 73, concluding a six-day summit in late November on the future of Tibetan relations with China (RNS)

“We believe that every Texas Baptist deserves some time to consider the decision that for some may be easy, logical and simple and for others may be complex.”

—Stephen Hatfield, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Lewisville, Texas, on the deferred motion to change the name of the Baptist General Convention of Texas to the Texas Baptist Convention (ABP)

“We often focus on treating diseases that may give someone a few months, but by preventing smoking, you can give someone 10 or 15 years.”

—Ahmedin Jemal of the American Cancer Society on decreasing cancer cases and deaths (USA TODAY)

“I wish [Jesus] would ask, ‘Campolo — Virgin Birth: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree? Check one.’ But those are not the questions. [The questions are] ‘I was hungry, did you feed me? ... I was a stranger, did you make room for me?’”

—Tony Campolo speaking to Virginia Baptists (Religious Herald)

“What we’re seeing now is very scary.”

—Elaine Streno of the Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee on the increased demand for food from the 300 agencies in 18 counties that her group supplies (USA TODAY)

“With each passing year, strong evidence suggests that most of these remaining holdout state conventions are either gradually or enthusiastically falling in line with the Fundamentalist camp.”

—Mark Ray, lay leader in the First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ala., on what he calls “the second wave” of the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC still being played out in some state conventions (Baptist Studies Bulletin)

“... I pay about as much attention to what a rock ‘n’ roll artist says about religion as I do to what Rosie O’Donnell or Chuck Norris say about politics — and so should you.”

—Pastor Mike Ruffin who recently moved from The Hill Baptist Church in Augusta, Ga., to the First Baptist Church of Fitzgerald, Ga., concerning the Vatican’s forgiveness of John Lennon’s 1966 claim that the Beatles are “more popular than Jesus now” (ethicsdaily.com)

“I was created entrepreneurial ... but I also love the church.”

—Eric Bahme, pastor of Eastside Foursquare Church in Portland, Ore., a congregation that operates two hotels and a coffee shop called “Sacred Grounds” (RNS)

“If you ever want to hang out, grab some coffee or have lunch, I’m right down the street from your new house.”

—Amy Butler, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., in a blog as an open letter to Michelle Obama

“He just said God said she wasn’t driving right, and she needed to be taken off the road.”

—Lt. Kyle Coleman of the Bexar County, Texas, Sheriff’s Office on 52-year-old Michael Schwab’s explanation for plowing his speeding pickup into a slow-moving sedan (San Antonio Express-News)

## In the news, 25 years ago . . .

Southern Baptist Convention president Jimmy Draper’s suggestion of creating new “guidelines” of belief for Southern Baptists created a firestorm. Church historian Leon McBeth responded: “Although Jimmy says he does not want to use any statement in a creedal sense, I think the proposal would lend itself to being used in a brutal, medieval sense of a creed; ... some future president could use it as a witch hunt.”

—SBC Today, January 1984

# editorial

## Meeting or movement? You decide

By John Pierce

It has been nearly one year since the unprecedented Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant in Atlanta drew thousands of diverse Baptists from across North America for worship, learning, sharing and relationship building.

From conception to implementation to post-meeting follow-up, the most persistent question about the historic gathering was: Is this a meeting or a movement?

Organizers confessed that meetings can be planned but movements cannot.

Movements can come out of meetings, however, through rekindling the embers of hope and fanning the breezes of the Spirit that were present during that remarkable event.

The answer to this ongoing question — of meeting or movement — may be found this second year and beyond as several regional gatherings are now being planned.

The first is set for Birmingham, Ala., on Jan. 31 ([www.newbaptistcovenant.org](http://www.newbaptistcovenant.org)) with others to follow: April 2-4 in Kansas City, Mo.; April 8-9 in Chicago; April 24-25 in

Winston-Salem, N.C.; and Aug. 6-7 in Norman, Okla.

Jimmy Allen, who worked tirelessly in facilitating the big 2008 event, said preliminary planning is also taking place for regional gatherings in New York and California in 2010.

These regional meetings are ripe for building ongoing personal relationships and more lasting cooperative ministry efforts — simply due to proximity.

Baptist neighbors — who did not know each other before — may discover rich friendships and common passions about fulfilling the Gospel call — together — to reach out to those in their communities.

Such meetings may well lead to a significant spiritual movement, but only if they lead to trusting relationships and active cooperation beyond the events.



The challenge to all Baptists interested in this kind of openness is to look beyond the familiar. There are so many Baptists in other parts of the family — who share our beliefs and commitments — that we do not even know.

For example, how many Southern Baptists or former Southern Baptists now affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or the Alliance of Baptists reading this editorial were familiar with Dr. Albert Brinson — featured in the cover story on page 4?

If not, don't feel alone. I was introduced to him this year by Allen Abbott, an American Baptist and a *Baptists Today* director — even though Dr. Brinson lives in Georgia.

I invited Dr. Brinson to our Board of Directors meeting in September and heard the same thing from many of them: “Why have I never heard of this person?”

The short answer is that Dr. Brinson has served in African-American congregations and with the ethnically-diverse American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

We Baptists tend to move within our own circles. The New Baptist Covenant will become a movement when we routinely reach across racial, geographical and organizational lines and embrace fellow Baptists in ministry and personal relationships.

Pick the closest regional celebration and go. If one is not planned for your area, seek out some varied Baptists around you and see what interest they may have in putting one together.

Maybe, just maybe, Baptist Christians can become better known for their compassion and warm embrace of one another than for condemnation and division. Now, that would take a movement of the Spirit.

Meetings like the big celebration last winter may have changed many of those who attended. But a spiritual movement can lead those with changed hearts and fresh perspectives to bring ongoing change to places in which they live.

Meeting or movement? You decide. **BT**

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## 'STREET QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISTS'

Editor's note: This is the first article in a yearlong series titled "Street Questions about Baptists," in celebration of 400 years of the Baptist movement.

# 'So tell me, **why were Baptists born, anyway?**'

You may not expect this kind of answer, but it is what I honestly believe.

## **Baptists were born to be a voice for religious liberty.**

**L**et me defend that assertion with some history. In the Baptist heartland I've often heard people seriously question whether Baptists are Protestants.

In this Landmarkist theory Baptists go back to Jesus himself by way of persecuted groups independent of the Catholic Church and thence did not take part in the Protestant Reformation. The fatal flaw in that theory is twofold: All of those sects originated out of the Catholic Church, and they had no link to one another.

A more accurate assessment of our story would characterize Baptists as Protestants of the Protestants or, at least, the Church of England. They emerged from among those who didn't think the reform under Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and James I (1603-1625) went far enough.

The Church, the "Puritans" insisted, was only "halfly reformed." They wanted a *real* reformation, like the ones in Geneva or Zürich or Strassburg. They didn't like Elizabeth's effort to steer a path between "Catholic substance" and "the Protestant principle" — so as to have the most inclusive church possible with focus on all worshipping according to the Book of Common Prayer.

Who were those "puritans"? Why did they find such a comprehensive approach objectionable?

For the most part the "puritans" consisted of the more ardent Protestants who had had to flee England during the restoration of Roman Catholicism under Mary Tudor (1553-1558). In cities that gave them refuge, especially John Calvin's Geneva, they witnessed models of reform they found more to their liking.

When they returned to England after

Mary's demise, they wanted their queen to pattern their church's and country's reform after Geneva's. Alas, they suffered great disappointment as the "Elizabeth settlement" unfolded.

As you might expect, they did not agree among themselves as to what "further reform" meant or how to pull it off. Some, Episcopal Puritans, sought modest changes in rites and rituals, clerical garb, observance of the Sabbath and things of that nature, and they expected those could be carried out without altering the polity of the Church of England.

Others, the Presbyterian Puritans, demanded more extensive shifts to bring the Church of England in line with the Church in Geneva, especially in replacing Episcopal polity with Presbyterian. A third group, the Independents and Separatists, had a more radical agenda. They were convinced that the Church of England could never be truly reformed except through forming separate or independent congregations devoted to cultivating truly saintly lives.

In time this more radical group gave birth, among others, to the first Baptists in England and, almost simultaneously, in the

American colonies. How?

In an era literally sizzling with competing ideas these separate and independent congregations engaged in lively debates about the nature and purpose of the church, polity, baptism, Lord's Supper, Christian life ... in brief, about everything.

What inspired such debates was the principle for reform they borrowed from reformers on the Continent: *We will attempt to do what scriptures enjoin.*

Had they kept their Bibles closed, they might have had more consensus and avoided some of the clash with the powers that be. Opening them soon got them in trouble.

*It was precisely insistence on an open Bible that birthed Baptists.* They were profoundly influenced by the example of the Apostles before the Jewish Sanhedrin as depicted by Luke.

"You judge whether it is right in the sight of God to obey you rather than God, for we cannot not speak about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20; my translation).

Just like the first Christians, the first Baptists operated on a conviction that the Spirit of God could guide them in their quest to do what scriptures mandated more truly than the established authorities either of State or Church or even theologians in Oxford or Cambridge. They believed that so strongly, they were willing to pay with their lives and livelihoods.

Queen Bess did not look favorably on "nonconformity" or "nonconformists," those unwilling to worship according to the Book of Common Prayer. She had Parliament pass Acts of Uniformity to enforce adherence.

Authorities then took action against Separatists or Congregationalists. Puritans



**E. Glenn Hinson** is Professor Emeritus of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. In retirement he teaches at Baptist Seminary of Kentucky.



hoped that would change when James VI of Scotland succeeded her as James I of England in 1603.

They presented him with a petition for changes signed by a thousand people. He granted only one of those — a plea for an authorized version of scriptures, the King James, published in 1611. He, too, insisted on conformity.

Among those who had to flee was a little band at Gainsborough led by John Smyth, a Cambridge M.A. With the financial backing of Thomas Helwys, a lawyer, this body fled to Amsterdam in 1608 and took up residence in a bakery owned by a Dutch Mennonite named Jan Munter.

They could have encountered Anabaptist views before they left England because we have evidence of Anabaptist presence as early as 1535. Now, however, they had more direct exposure.

Either late in 1608 or early in 1609, Smyth baptized himself and the others, thus cutting them off from other Separatists. When Smyth, doubting the validity of his self-baptism, applied to the Mennonites for acceptance into membership in 1610, Helwys

and eight others dissented and returned to England to form the first Baptist church on English soil at Spitalsfield.

Because we Baptists focus our beginnings on the baptism of these exiles, you may ask why I don't simply point to their view of baptism as the why of Baptists' birth. The reason is this: *Behind insistence on baptism of believers only stands the voluntary principle in religion, and from it emerges other central tenets.*

To be authentic and responsible, faith must be free. Coercion cannot make saints. Only voluntary obedience can do that.

An infant cannot give voluntary assent to faith. Why such strong stress on voluntary and not baptism itself as the real issue?

Because the issue of baptism was part of a larger theology they drew from the theology of John Calvin, namely, that God alone is Lord of the conscience. Early Baptists put their trust in the Spirit to guide believers and congregations to the Word of God found in the words of scripture.

They also thought of the church as a voluntary association of believers, insisted urgently on complete religious liberty, and

called for the separation of church and state.

Smyth spoke of the church as “a company of the faithful ... endowed with the power of Christ” and able to announce the word, administer the sacraments, appoint ministers, disclaim them and excommunicate offenders. Although his “Short Confession” did not speak about religious liberty and the separation of church and state, Thomas Helwys gave eloquent voice to them in *The Mystery of Iniquity* just a couple years later.

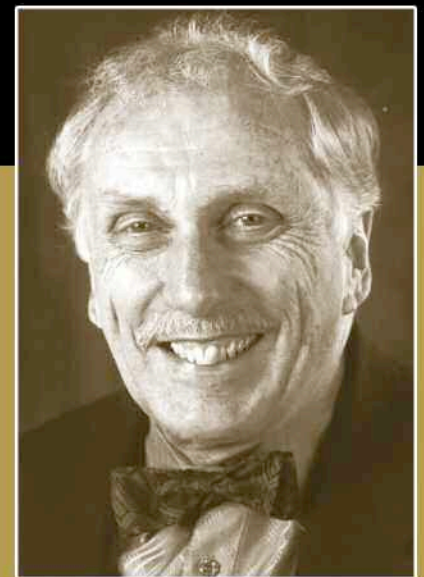
“The King is a mortal man and not God,” he declared. “Therefore, he has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them, and to set spiritual Lords over them.”

Roger Williams echoed him in the American colonies, calling for “a permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or Antichristian consciences and worships [to] be granted to all men in all nations and countries.” These should only be “fought against with that Sword which is only (in soul matters) able to conquer, to wit, the Sword of God's Spirit, the Word of God.”

I'll say it again: **Baptists were born to be a voice for religious liberty. BT**

# Mark your calendars!

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# Religion shaped 2008 in dramatic ways

By Kevin Eckstrom  
*Religion News Service*

Barack Obama may have chosen Joe Biden, and John McCain may have turned to Sarah Palin, but in the end the most sought-after running mate in the 2008 campaign never appeared on a single ballot.

God, it seems, couldn't be entirely wooed by either party.

The unprecedented and extraordinary prominence of religion in the 2008 election was easily the year's top religion story. Both parties battled hard for religious voters, and both were forced to distance themselves from outspoken clergy whose fiery rhetoric threatened to become a political liability.

In the end, the top prize went to Obama, the son of a Muslim-born father and an atheist mother, who spent much of the campaign fighting off persistent — and untrue — rumors that he was a closet Muslim. His party, after years of consistently losing churchgoers to Republicans, decisively won Catholics, Jews, black Protestants and made small but significant inroads among some evangelicals.

McCain, meanwhile, managed to shore up his dispirited base of religious conservatives, winning three out of four born-again or evangelical votes, but his troubled campaign could not overcome an onslaught of negative economic news that, in the end, trumped all other issues.

"It's very tempting but a bit dangerous to over-interpret what happened," said Luis Lugo, executive director of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. "Clearly Obama improved across all religious groups, but the economy just overwhelmed every other issue."

Still, the 2008 campaign was remarkable for the ways religion — or religious figures — played such a prominent role. Obama was forced to sever ties with his fiery pastor of 20 years, Jeremiah Wright of Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ, for sermons that were deemed racist, anti-American and at times downright bizarre. McCain, in turn, was forced to return the endorsements of Texas megachurch pastor John Hagee and Ohio's Rod Parsley.

Focus on the Family founder James Dobson tried to play kingmaker by first

saying he would not vote for McCain "under any circumstances" and later calling the Palin pick "God's answer" to prayer. Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, the candidate who proved most popular among religious conservatives and who won the Iowa Republican caucuses in January, failed to gain traction despite ads that dubbed him a "Christian leader."

Obama and Biden both faced strong opposition from Catholic leaders over their support of abortion rights. One American cardinal, James Stafford, called Obama's election "apocalyptic" and a South Carolina Catholic priest told Obama supporters to head to confession before receiving Communion.

All of that, Lugo said, shows that voters want their politicians to be at least somewhat religious — but prefer to make up their own minds, without the interference of politically outspoken clergy.

Yet one religious leader whose politics are fairly well-known — and not always embraced by the American public — received a 21-gun salute (literally) when he arrived at the White House in April for a six-day U.S. tour. When Pope Benedict XVI arrived for his first U.S. visit, many Catholics still clung to fond memories of his predecessor. But by the time he wrapped up his whirlwind spin around New York and Washington, Benedict left with higher approval ratings than when he arrived.

The pope surprised his U.S. flock with unexpected attention to the clergy sex abuse crisis. He told American bishops that the scandal had "sometimes been badly handled" and said they had a divine mandate to "bind up the wounds ... with loving concern to those so seriously wronged." He met privately with a small group of abuse victims and told a stadium Mass of 46,000 that "no words of mine could describe the pain and harm inflicted by such abuse."

Despite their loss at the polls, conservatives continued their winning streak on the volatile question of gay marriage in California (where the state Supreme Court voted to allow same-sex marriages in May), Arizona

and Florida.

A related fight over homosexuality continued to roil the Episcopal Church. In August, Episcopalians emerged from a once-a-decade summit of Anglican bishops in England relatively intact despite calls for discipline from conservative Anglican bishops, most of whom boycotted the three-week Lambeth Conference. That fragile unity will be tested in 2009, however, as conservatives move to establish a separate-but-equal province on U.S. soil.

The United Methodist Church voted to keep its traditional stance on homosexuality, maintaining rules that call homosexual activity "incompatible with Christian teaching." The Presbyterian Church (USA), meanwhile, voted to remove a constitutional rule that requires clergy to maintain "fidelity in marriage ... or chastity in singleness." However, a majority of local Presbyteries must approve the amendment, which may prove too high a hurdle.

Religion and secular law collided at a fundamentalist Mormon polygamist compound in Texas, and controversial sect leader Tony Alamo's compound in Arkansas, over charges of sexual abuse of minors. In Oregon and Wisconsin, three sets of parents were charged in the faith-healing deaths of children who were denied routine medical treatment.

Interfaith relations continued their difficult dance in 2008 as several high-level attempts at dialogue sought tentative common ground between the Muslim world and the largely Christian West.

At the same time, relations between the Vatican and Jewish groups remained tense after Benedict revised (but still allowed) a Good Friday prayer that God would "enlighten (Jews') hearts so that they may acknowledge Jesus Christ, the savior of all men."

The world lost some leading religious lights in 2008, including Mormon President Gordon Hinckley and philanthropist Sir John Templeton, both 95; Lutheran theologian Krister Stendahl at age 86; Transcendental Meditation guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, thought to be 91; and W. Deen Mohammed, 74, who broke with the racially tinged teachings of the Nation of Islam founded by his father. **BT**



Barack Obama

# Bush awarded for fight against AIDS

WASHINGTON (RNS) — President Bush was recognized Dec. 1 for his international efforts to effectively fight the spread of AIDS.

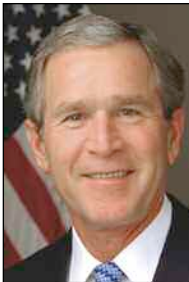
“No world leader has done more for world health than President George Bush,” said California megachurch pastor Rick Warren on the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day. “Literally millions of lives have been saved in the last five years.”

Bush was awarded the first “International Medal of PEACE” by Warren, the pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif. The ceremony was part of the Saddleback Church Civil Forum on Global Health held here at the Newseum and focused on the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

As of Sept. 30, the initiative has provided lifesaving antiretroviral treatments for more than 2.1 million people around the world with HIV/AIDS, including 2 million in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the White House.

The president proposed the program in January 2003 and has already put nearly \$19 billion into funding for treatments, according to the White House. It was reauthorized by Congress in July, giving an additional \$48 billion to ongoing efforts to combat the pandemic.

“We’re a better nation when we save lives,” Bush said. “I believe we can win a fight against anything when we put our minds to it.”



George W. Bush



Rick Warren

Bush and first lady Laura Bush also participated in a candid discussion with Warren and his wife, Kay, about the global AIDS crisis and the president’s AIDS program.

“I believe in ... this principle — to whom much is given, much is required,” President Bush said, adding that if a president did not attempt to fight the disease, “you have frankly disgraced the office.”

The “International Medal of PEACE” is given by the Global PEACE Coalition, a network of churches, businesses and individuals, organized by Warren and focused on solving humanitarian issues around the world.

Bush credited Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, former speechwriter Michael Gerson, and U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator Mark Dybul for putting the AIDS initiative into action.

“I don’t deserve an award. The people who make this policy work deserve the award,” Bush said.

The audience of more than 200 saw video messages thanking Bush for his work from several political leaders and activists, including former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Bill Gates and the musician Bono.

President-elect Obama also addressed the group in a pre-recorded video message.

“I salute President Bush for his leadership in crafting a plan for AIDS relief in Africa and backing it up with funding dedicated to saving lives and preventing the spread of the disease,” Obama said. “In my administration, we will continue this critical work to address the crisis around the world.”

Bush said the AIDS program, PEPFAR, is part of a larger “freedom agenda” of his administration and will be an integral part of his presidential library and policy center at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. **BT**

## Historic Anabaptist writings to be made available online

PRAGUE (ABP) — Writings of Balthasar Hubmaier, one of the most well known and respected Anabaptist theologians of the Reformation, will soon be available for online research, thanks to a project of European Baptist scholars.

The Institute of Baptist and Anabaptist Studies at International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic, and the German Baptist Seminary in Berlin recently announced that photographic reproductions of all of Hubmaier’s surviving works would be scanned into digital images and made available on the Internet.

IBTS Rector Keith Jones called it a long-term project likely to take six months to a year to digitize the more than 30 short and long pamphlets that together amount to about 800 images.

The only Anabaptist theologian to complete theological studies leading to a

doctor’s degree, Hubmaier is credited with winning many converts to the movement through his preaching and writing.

Original 16th-century prints of his writings are scattered throughout libraries all over Europe. Few copies survived 500 years of history that included systematic suppression of the Anabaptist movement during the 16th and 17th centuries and the destruction of World War II. Photographic images of the originals were produced in the 1930s by an initiative of the Baptist World Alliance.

Born about 1480 near Augsburg, Germany, Hubmaier became a Protestant influenced by writings of Martin Luther. He is best known for a public debate with Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli over infant baptism in 1525.

He was baptized on Easter in 1525 as an adherent of a movement nicknamed “Anabaptists” — or rebaptizers — by its

opponents. Attempts to suppress the movement by persecution — which included death by drowning in a cruel parody of its beliefs — backfired, as those killed were considered martyrs by their followers.

Imprisoned and tortured in Zurich, Hubmaier fled to Moravia, where he founded an influential Anabaptist congregation in Nikolsburg in 1526.

He produced more tracts — 18 in one year — than any other Anabaptist theologian. Most dealt with believer’s baptism.

Arrested by Roman Catholic authorities, tortured and tried for heresy, he was burned at the stake in Vienna March 10, 1528. Three days later his wife was drowned in the Danube.

Hubmaier is held in high esteem among many Baptists for his views on baptism, free will and the separation of church and state. **BT**

# Can a woman lead the black church?

By David Briggs  
*Religion News Service*

CLEVELAND — Imelda Ellison sits quietly in her pew as, one by one, dressed all in white, the members of the Emmanuel Women of Worship come down the center aisle.

Their heads held high, some 15 women step and sway, clapping and singing. For a few mesmerizing moments, the women's choir is the center of Sunday worship.

It's times like this when Ellison, a religious educator with a "burning" call to the ministry, envisions herself up front leading the flock in prayer.

But when the women take their seats near the pulpit, the male ministers seated on either side of Emmanuel Baptist Church's pastor take over the service.

The pastor, David Cobb Jr., started the women's choir six months ago to increase the visibility of women in the service, but his congregation is not ready for women ministers, he says.

Black women activists say change is long overdue in their struggle for equal opportunities in their church. They can be trustees and teachers and can even be ordained as deacons and ministers in some black churches.

But like many evangelical churches, many individual black congregations still ban female clergy. And even among churches that accept women ministers, it is rare for a woman to be a senior pastor.

Rather than continue to fight, many women with seminary degrees have switched to predominantly white mainline Protestant churches to find a place in the pulpit.

To be sure, there are success stories — there are three women bishops in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, for example. Yet they are mostly the exceptions. Many black churches such as Emmanuel still have all-male deacon boards to oversee the congregation's spiritual life.

Tradition and a literal interpretation of biblical texts urging women to be silent are part of the reason women have been kept from the front of the black church, observers say.

There are concerns that women clergy could undermine the historic role of pastors as important leadership models for black men. The issue is also about power and sexism, women say.



From left: Gertrude Taylor, David Buttram, and Imelda Ellison hold hands and pray at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Cleveland. Religion News Service photo by Tracy Boulian/*The Plain Dealer*.

"How can we say we love the Lord and we oppress women?" Ellison says.

In the late 1950s, an Emmanuel leader informed Doris Jamieson he would nominate her to be the only woman on the board of trustees, which oversees church finances and administration.

"But you got to learn to keep your mouth shut," Jamieson recalls being told.

Today, a third of the 12 trustees at Emmanuel are women. And women there, unlike at many other black churches, offer Communion. Visiting women ministers preach on Women's Day.

Cobb would like to find a more prominent role for women at his church. In the coming months, he plans to feature women at least monthly in the service in roles ranging from reading Scripture to leading congregational prayer.

"I want everybody in the church to know they can play an important part," Cobb says. "I don't want it to appear the only thing women can do is cook and hand out clothes."

Ellison teaches a new member class and is part of the youth ministry team at Emmanuel. More than a month ago, she asked Cobb if she could be a minister at Emmanuel.

Cobb says he has not made up his mind on women as senior pastors, but he sees

biblical support for women as associate clergy. "Women have just as much right to preach and serve in leadership positions in church as do men," he says.

But Cobb doubts his congregation — or more importantly, the deacons in their 60s, 70s and 80s who would vote on such a question — are ready to accept a female minister. So Cobb will treat Ellison as he would anyone making the request, by putting her under his supervision for two years to see if she is ready to be licensed as a minister.

Ellison, who is close to earning a bachelor's degree in religious studies from Ursuline College, explored other churches before returning to Emmanuel in 2005.

"God was saying this was where he wanted me to come," Ellison says. "It was very hard for me, really, to come back here, because I knew I wasn't going to be accepted."

Her struggle at Emmanuel is being played out throughout the black church, say experts like Bettye Collier-Thomas, author of the upcoming book *Jesus, Jobs and Justice: The History of African American Women and Religion*.

"What we're concerned about is full equality, and at this point we just don't see that," she said.

Continued on page 13 >

# On matter of the Trinity, Baptist worship largely settles for two out of three facets

By Ken Camp  
*Baptist Standard*

(ABP) — Hymns sung in most Baptist churches historically have been “More About Jesus” than about either God the Father or the Holy Spirit, several church music experts agree.

“From a Baptist perspective, I don’t think the hymnody has ever been Trinitarian,” said Clell Wright, director of choral activities and Logsdon professor of church music at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas.

It was shaped to a large degree by the revivalist movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries, he noted.

“By nature, the focus is on Jesus and his redeeming work,” Wright said. Consequently, when it comes to Baptist understanding of the Godhead as reflected in congregational song, “Our Trinity is more two-point-something rather than three,” said Terry York, associate professor of Christian ministry and church music at Baylor University’s School of Music and George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas.

“One way to gauge that is by looking at the index in the back of the hymnal under ‘Holy Spirit.’ Looking at the 1991 Baptist Hymnal [produced by the Southern Baptist Convention’s publishing arm], for instance, there’s not much there. And I was on the committee that put that

one together, for crying out loud.”

A quick glance at the recently released 2008 Baptist Hymnal reveals similar results, noted Lee Hinson, coordinator of church-music studies at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Okla.

“It has not changed much,” Hinson said. “We struggle with singing Trinitarian doctrine. There are several categories of things we free-churchers don’t do well in worship.... Dealing with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is one of them.”

York agreed, noting lack of emphasis on the Holy Spirit may reveal, in part, lack of clarity among Baptists about the Spirit’s role and about the doctrine of the Trinity in general.

“Baptist churches divide themselves in worship according to which Person of the Trinity gets the most emphasis,” he noted. Baptists who say they want to “worship the Father in the beauty of holiness” generally favor more formal, liturgical worship.

Baptists who want to “praise Jesus for who he is and what he has done” may tend toward a more revivalist and evangelistic worship style. Baptists who say they want “the Spirit to come down and bless us” often follow a less structured worship format.

“Generally, we are less than balanced,” York commented. “Few churches stand in the middle.”

Observers differ about whether the rising popularity of praise-and-worship

music translates into increased attention directed toward the Holy Spirit.

Wright sees a shift toward greater “recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit” in praise music. “So much of it in the last 15 to 20 years seems very pietistic, with a strong emphasis on personal worship,” he noted.

That emphasis represents a departure from the evangelistic and revivalist tradition that has marked Baptist worship, he added.

“Our Baptist heritage of music in the gospel tradition has defined who we are for a couple of hundred years,” Wright said.

Hinson sees a greater emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in Baptist worship, but he believes it is restricted to the youngest worship leaders.

“Millennials [roughly defined as the generation born in the 1980s and 1990s] want their worship to be free,” he said. Lyrics that stress the Holy Spirit exist, “but they’re not sung where the Boomers are in charge. They’re in the Wednesday night services where students lead worship.”

York, on the other hand, sees praise-and-worship lyrics focused primarily on Jesus, but worship leaders stressing the role of the Holy Spirit in leading them.

“They attribute being caught up in worship to the work of the Holy Spirit, who helps lead in the worship of Jesus,” he said. **BT**

➤ From page 12

With women making up approximately two-thirds of the people in pews at many black churches, some leaders worry about “the feminization” of the church, and say they need male role models to reach young black men.

Many black male clergy ban women from the pulpit based on Bible passages that emphasize female submission or the predominance of men in authority.

At nearby Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church in Cleveland, Milton

Bradford said the Bible teaches “a woman is never called to be in authority” in the church.

“It’s not what I say,” Bradford said. “It’s what the Bible says.”

The opposition of male pastors is a powerful barrier, Ellison says.

“It’s how the women have been taught. It’s how the men have been taught,” Ellison said.

This has led many black women to turn to predominantly white mainline churches such as the United Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Angela Lewis, pastor of St. Paul United

Methodist Church in Cleveland, remembers as a young woman repeatedly telling her Baptist pastor in Oklahoma that God was leading her into the ministry.

In making her case that God can use anyone, she pointed to the biblical story of a talking donkey that instructed the prophet Balaam.

“Yes, you’re right,” the pastor told her, “but the donkey was a male.”

The path Lewis took — first to Princeton Theological Seminary and then ordination in the United Methodist Church — is a familiar one. **BT**

➤ BRINSON from page 5

I've lived a blessed life. I'm looking at it in more or less retrospect now. When you're coming along, you don't think about contributions and all.

We came from an age where we were Negroes growing up in segregation. Even though we lived in Grady Homes projects, where we were considered "low rent" totally, we didn't know that.

There was never a moment when we didn't know we would go to college. The way to change everything was to be a good person, accept Christ as your savior, be at the church, go to school and always think of other people.

My mother always said: "It's never about yourself."

People have asked me over the years — and in recent years at a number of colleges and universities — about what produced Martin Luther King Jr. What special thing was it?

I can't really say; it was what we all received. That was all around us.

**BT: Was the church the center of the community?**

APB: The church was the center of everything. One block from us was Wheat Street Baptist Church, where Dr. William Holmes Borders was pastor — another powerful influence. Whatever happened at one church, the other churches supported it.

Liberty Baptist Church, where later Dr. [Melvin] Watson was pastor before going to Morehouse, was back up the hill. Zion Baptist Church was a block up and over two blocks. All the churches were related. Big Bethel AME down on Butler Street was the largest of the churches, and Wheat Street was the largest Baptist church.

Our lives centered in the church. If you know anything about black history ... the singers, performers, actors and actresses all go back to church. I started my public speaking in church. It was cultivated as I went on.

We all learned to speak in church. M.L., the oratory he used, came from all of this.

He used to sneak out of Ebenezer — with A.D., who was the youngest King, and William Bell, who was M.L.'s good friend —

and go down to Wheat Street and get up in the balcony and listen to Rev. Borders. He was drama at its best.

For the Negro in the segregated South, the church was it. It taught us music. I sang my first solo from *Elijah*, the Mendelssohn aria. We did the *Messiah*.

**BT: So you credit the church for being a broader influence than just religious training?**

APB: Yes, the church was the beginning of all of that. Then, if you wanted the best education, you went to Catholic school. There was one Catholic school for Negroes in Atlanta — Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic School.

Our teachers were called the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. Their mission was "to teach Negroes and Indians." They got me on both of them.

You'll laugh at this, but the tuition was 35 cents for Catholics per week and 50 cents for Protestants. And that was a struggle — a lot of money.

I sit with kids at universities now — most of them white kids — and they can't believe it when I tell them about the situation back then. For them it just doesn't make sense.

Well, we know it doesn't [make sense], but that wasn't the point.

As you said, the church was the center of the community — and the community was our parent. In our court in Grady Homes, if you did something wrong and your parent wasn't around, your neighbor would get you.

**BT: How did all of that exposure to church shape your ministry calling?**

APB: All of my life the church has been my center, but ministry was not in the picture. That's the funny thing about it.

I never wanted to be a "cullored" preacher. (Now "cullored" is not a color, but a condition.)

**BT: What did you want to be?**

APB: I was going to be a journalist. Writing is my natural gift. I like to work with words.

At Morehouse I was an English major. When I got out, I was a public school teacher

in English and literature for the 7th grade.

But people used to tease me because I was always with Rev. King Sr. I literally learned how to perfect my driving between Atlanta and Montgomery when M.L. was down there.

Rev. King Sr. had an old pink station wagon with wood panels. We'd ride along and play a game called "Dog!"

Going to Montgomery when the bus boycott was on, I remember the vivid images of the women walking and people in the streets — not riding the buses.

In talking about that period, it's kind of strange because it was the right thing. There was no fear.

But what really began to move me toward ministry was in 1960 — my senior year. I was one of the students, after the sit-ins started in South Carolina, who felt like Atlanta schools ought to do something.

About 13 of us over at Morehouse and Clark [University] at that time started talking in private about the fact that we ought to do this. We went to Dr. Mays and he went to Dr. [Rufus] Clements, who was president of Atlanta University at the time, and Dr. [James P.] Brawley was at Clark, and Dr. [Albert] Manley was at Spelman [College], and Dr. Harry Richardson at ITC (Interdenominational Theological Center).

We had the largest Negro consortium of colleges and universities in the country. So we wanted to do something exceptional.

We planned and worked and placed a full ad in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* called "The Appeal for Human Rights." We worked on that document for nights locked up in the administration building. No one knew what we were doing. We were sworn to secrecy.

We brought in the president and vice president of the student body from each of the colleges. So rather than go out and sit in, we first published this document — which is in the Congressional Record today — called "The Appeal for Human Rights."

In that document we spoke of everything that dealt with segregation and unjust conditions in the life of the Negro here in the South. The news of it was all over the country.

Sen. Jacob Javits, I'll never forget it, who was a Republican in upstate New York, and a whole bunch of others, felt this was a most



Albert Brinson said newspaper photographs like this one made him the "poster boy" of the Atlanta student sit-ins in the 1960s.

Montgomery when he was?)

It was the most exciting time because of the spirit and commitment. It also makes us think about the disgust we see with what so many of our young kids do today. They don't understand; they are not concerned about each other.

All of us — who came along in my period and made the sacrifice — were out there for three reasons. We, first of all, believed we had a mandate from Jesus Christ that we are all God's children and we should love one another.

The second thing was the United States Constitution. It guaranteed that all persons are created equal.

The third thing was to dare to believe and to commit ourselves to carrying out those kind of things. It was no biggie! That was just what you lived.

**BT: What years were you at Morehouse?**

APB: I started Morehouse in '57 and graduated in January of '61. I was a student leader in the class of '60. But in that last semester we were going to jail and doing other things. So I went back and took one course and graduated in January of '61.

My own journey [was shaped by] the Montgomery experience and then the excitement to organize that student movement.

We knew exactly who was going [to sit in] and where. To show you how clever it was, the press was tipped off about 10 minutes before it took place. I ended up being the poster boy for the "Atlanta Negro sit-ins."

I had my group of nine people, all of us dressed in our suits and ties and with our haircuts, and the ladies in their best dresses. We went and sat down at the restaurant directly across from the Union Station and the *Atlanta Journal*.

We knew it was just ahead of when people would be coming in for lunch. It had all been timed.

When we came in, the people on the stools turned to look at us. People started peering in the windows.

The waitress came up and snatched the salt-and-pepper shakers off the table. But we sat down and didn't say anything. We had

brilliant document to come from students. Some folks wrote that students couldn't do that. But the [college presidents] advised us, but they did not write it.

Five or six days later, at 11:30 a.m., at 10 [restaurants] in Atlanta, we all simultaneously entered these restaurants that had been scouted out for us to know when the most people would be coming in.

We had practiced nonviolence with white students from Georgia Tech and Emory University. We did without eating for a few days and stayed up all that evening.

They would kick us and spit on us and call us "nigger." We learned how to protect ourselves because you are most vulnerable when you have not eaten and are tired.

So we launched it ... and there was no violence or anger. We just prayed.

I had plenty of classmates around me who did not know anything was going on. We couldn't afford to let it leak out. That's why it was blessed.

(Certain periods in history are certainly blessed and guided by God. For example, how could Martin Luther King have been in

one spokesman for each group, and I was the spokesman for our group of nine.

Finally a big black police paddy wagon pulled up. I was sitting in front of this big wall of glass and people started coming out of all the businesses around. All of the sudden there were white faces — that's what I saw, but there must have been some colored people somewhere.

The police didn't know exactly what to do. This big red officer got out and just walked around looking at me. The manager came to me and said: "You've been told you can't sit here. We don't serve you here. Do you intend to get up or are you going to be arrested?"

I said: "We intend to stay here until we are served." That's what we were taught to say.

The police were talking back and forth on their walkie-talkies. The red officer with all the stripes came in; he was a big man. While the manager was talking to me, the officer was getting information on his walkie-talkie that this was happening all over the area. So they didn't know what to do.

#### **BT: This was in 1960?**

APB: Yes, March of 1960. Then [the officer] said to me: "What are your intentions?"

I said: "We intend to sit here until we are served." So he arrested us. We went out and they had the big old box flash cameras back then. I'll show you the pictures.

When we got down to the police station on Decatur Street, there were wagons with the other folks coming in. That night a lot of us were in a cellblock together. We had been in there all day from about 12 noon.

We didn't know what was going on on the outside. Some of us had brought books to study or to just read. We prayed that they'd take care of us.

About 9:00 or 9:30 that night we were standing and looking out into this hallway when Rev. King Sr. came down there with a couple of other men. He saw me and smiled. I heard they were getting ready to post bail for some of us.

He said: "I'll take E.D. King, Otis Moss and Albert Brinson. That's my property bail. If I can take anymore, you let me know."

Those moments are vividly clear.

#### **BT: With what were you charged?**

APB: Trespassing. But that sort of thing began the whole thrust among students in Atlanta — the protest against Rich's. Probably one of the most famous ones, that included me hundreds of times, was the protest against A&P chain stores, the Atlantic and Pacific Tea Co.

That was the beginning of how I got to ministry. I graduated and began supply teaching because it was the middle of the school year.

I had married in November 1960, on the heels of all of this other stuff that was going on... I was chairman of the Appeal for Human Rights Committee on Communications, and my assistant was Julian Bond. The letters that went out all across the country to get support had to be cut on stencils.

In September of '61, I got a permanent job teaching and taught into '63. During the Birmingham demonstrations — with Bull Connor, the dogs and the hoses — I went back and forth. I was a public school teacher and could have been fired if caught doing things like that.

The Holy Week and weekend when M.L. wrote the Birmingham jail letter was one of the most powerful moments in my life ... I wasn't the same after that.

There was plotting by the Ku Klux Klan and Police Chief Bull Connor — they weren't going along with any of this. They were sick of these Negroes tearing up the town and park.

There had been a march planned for Holy Week. Little children, on Good Friday, would be out of school. Little girls were going to be in their nice little dresses and little boys in their Sunday best to march on Good Friday into the park.

On Wednesday, I think it was, I'm down there with Rev. King Sr. — as usual. We go to the A.G. Gaston Motel in Birmingham — the only really quality Negro motel at that time — with a "U" around a court.

Up on the left side of the motel on the second floor you could look down on the court and see the cars and the reporters from everywhere. I was in the room with people like Wyatt Tee Walker, Fred Shuttlesworth and Ralph Abernathy — who had just gone to West Hunter [Street Baptist Church].

Everybody was talking about this being a

dangerous thing. They had issued an injunction and Bull Connor had gotten around saying he would not be responsible for the safety of the children and that they would put everybody in jail.

We had crowded in this room and M.L. Jr. was sort of stretched back on the bed. He looked around and listened to everything. People were talking about how we can't do this now because it is too much of a risk. He didn't say anything.

Ralph would say: "I can't go to jail now because Easter Sunday is coming." You know, a pastor doesn't miss Easter Sunday — and this was his first one too.

Other people talked about the danger. Finally, M.L. got up off the bed and there was a little face bowl [where he washed his face]. He had not said anything.

Then he said how he had listened to all the people in the room and he understood all their feelings. Then he went around the room and told them: "I understand, but I've got to go because I gave my word."

After that, the whole movement changed. Everybody started listening to what he said. The decision had been made.

But the bail money got to be chief thing; they didn't have much money. I think it was Wyatt who got Harry Belafonte on the phone in California.

(I'll never forget when we did the march from Selma to Montgomery in '65. Of all people, Charlton Heston [and others] flew to Atlanta and stayed overnight at St. Jude's, a Catholic hospital outside of Montgomery. Their whole grounds were fenced in and the march had come that far. These were people who had helped raise money.)

But, that Friday when the march started in Birmingham, I did not go. It was planned. I went to the Sixteenth Street [Baptist] Church and stayed on the steps. I've got pictures of me standing there with my shades on — because I was a public school teacher.

But that was the day they took Ralph and M.L. off to jail. All the stories that surround it: Coretta coming down, the Kennedys interceding, the letter that came from the jail.

When we came back here [to Atlanta], I sat down with myself.

I had always been teased by people in the church: "When is Rev. King going to call



you? ... You know you're going to be a preacher."

I said: "Heck, no. Over my dead body."

But I knew deep down inside there was a pull on my life. I couldn't explain it or deal with it. I didn't even know how to talk about it until May or June of that same year — 1963. I had not said anything about it to my wife or my buddies.

But this thing sort of got me. So I went over to 562 Johnson Avenue — that's the house that M.L. and Coretta lived in that the church provided after the Kings came back here.

Coretta was sitting on the steps and I was looking for M.L. Jr., and asked if he was here. She said he was coming in on a plane that evening about 7:00.

"... You can pick Martin up if you will," she said.

So I went out to the airport — it was not the first time I'd picked him up. So he wasn't surprised.

We were driving back home and they were working on the road, so we drove slowly. He was kind of slouching down in the car, and it was getting dark.

I said: "I've got to talk about something, but I don't even know how to begin this conversation ..."

He said: "I know what the conversation is, Albert. I've been knowing this for a long time."

I didn't go home after taking him home — it had to have been after 1:30 in the morning. I told him about how I never wanted to be a "cullored" preacher. We used to joke about that because a lot of times black ministers weren't trained.

We had gone to Morehouse and Dr. Mays [an educator] was the inspiration, the model.

M.L. started talking to me about his own decision — about how he didn't want to do the same thing. But we talked about how God calls and equips us to do things.

We laughed and talked about things. But he and I were having a conversation about changing my whole life.

My wife had told me that she didn't marry a minister. And I was already in the Atlanta Public School System — on a fast track to become a principal in five years.

M.L. said: "Remember, it is never

because of you. God always uses us in spite of us. We always come up short."

That was the one ensuring thing that helped me in my decision.

Before I went home he had already looked in his calendar and told me: "I'll have to talk to [President] Harry Richardson about getting you into ITC in September — and you'll have to give up your job."

I said: "M.L., I was about to move on up in the Board of Education. Now I'm leaving here with no job and going to seminary."

We had prayer and talked, and I finally went home. At that time I lived right behind Rev. King Sr.

On the first Sunday in August 1963, I stood in Ebenezer that night — and the church was packed — and preached my first sermon. M.L. presented me to the church, and it's all still on reel-to-reel tape.

I was licensed that night and became an intern with him and his dad. It solved a problem since everybody wanted to come to Ebenezer [as an intern] then. He could say: "I have somebody."

Rev. King Sr. was getting older, so M.L. took me personally under his hand.

#### **BT: He was how much older than you?**

APB: Nine or 10 years. And Christine, the oldest, is 81 now ... and is still my "sister." I spoke at her 80th birthday celebration.

Anyway, my ministry was launched and it began a series of things until he died in '68.

I went to ITC ... and then to NYU in a Ph.D. program. I dropped out when our last child was coming. Then when I was at Bank Street Memorial Church in Norfolk, I went into the [Doctor of Ministry] program at Boston University.

Then United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, organized what they called Proctor Fellows. Dr. Samuel Proctor, who was from Bank Street Church and was one of my mentors, would personally assemble about 16-18 people from around the country to come and do a D.Min. together.

Each of us would be called in because of special interests in ministry. In that group were Otis Moss, Charles Adams and — you're going to laugh — Jeremiah Wright.

#### **BT: You are right about the many connections.**

APB: I've lived long enough to believe that things just don't happen. In my second year in seminary I took a job with Eastern Airlines during the time the SCLC was trying to break down the barriers of getting qualified black people into positions.

The airlines industry didn't have any Negroes here in the South who did anything except carry baggage. Ralph Ross, one of my classmates who became a decorated chaplain and is now pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Miami, became the first Negro to be hired as a customer service agent.

In those days we dressed exactly like the pilots except our trim was silver and theirs was brass. No Negro had done anything like that.

Ralph told me there was no way they wouldn't hire me. So I did it on a dare.

I was working at Ebenezer then, and Rev. King Sr. was a stern man. If he saw you talking at church, he said: "Albert!" He'd do it to his own son. That's the way he was in the old days.

I thought: "Maybe I need to do something else." So when Eastern hired me, I became the second Negro hired as a customer service agent.

They offered me the chance to go full time in '67 and make more money than I'd ever made in my life. I said, "This will tell me if I really want to pastor."

I already had my seminary degree. But I ended up training agents and opened the door for a lot of others.

*[NOTE: Through an earlier contact made at Ebenezer, Brinson was invited to preach at Antioch Baptist Church of Corona in Queens, N.Y., where the pastor was near retirement.]*

APB: By that time, I had my Eastern schedule any way I wanted it. So I went up Saturday and preached the next morning.

They kept on talking about how much the people would love for me to come. So I talked to Rev. King Sr. and Mrs. King — and then she told M.L. about it.

So M.L. comes to the airport on his way to Memphis and asks if I'm in. He had come in before and asked for me.

Now, Eastern was in the process of offering me a job as the first Negro to be hired in management at the headquarters down on Biscayne Boulevard in Miami, Fla. M.L. had gotten the word — not about that — but about the church in New York.

We sat down in the lounge and he said: “Albert, the Lord called you to preach. You can’t be going up there to that little church. I’ve got other things for you to do. I told you about my thoughts for your future.”

And he had, but I kept them to myself. Then I told him about what Eastern was doing.

He said: “That’s out of the question. If you want a church now, I’ve got plenty of places to get you in.”

I said, “OK, I’ll talk to you when you come back.”

It’s April 4, 1968, and Memphis is an hour behind us. I was working the main concourse where all the business flights come in around 5:00 and connect.

It was storming and these mostly white businessmen were complaining. Many times people called me “nigger.” But one thing I could say about Eastern is the supervisors stood up for me.

And the greatest support I found was from those agents I’d trained, and they were all white. We got to know each other personally — and we’re talking about the 1960s in redneck Georgia.

Ed Martin, a black friend from Ohio — along with a guy who worked up in control — came up and said: “Al, come here. We just got word that Dr. King has been shot in Memphis.”

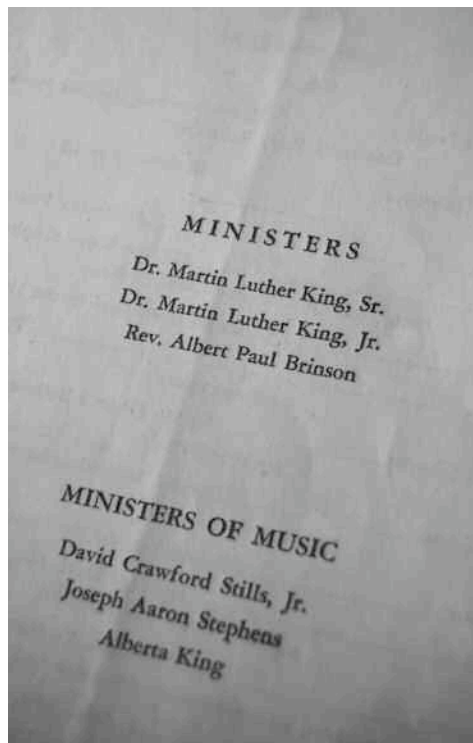
I said: “Oh, Lord.”

Meanwhile, people were sitting in the gatehouse who couldn’t get out because of the storm. So I went outside the gatehouse where there was a little roofing over me.

I said: “Lord, please don’t let him die.” But at the same time I knew he was dead. I just knew it.

In 1963 when John F. Kennedy was killed, M.L. said: “If they will do that to him, you know what they will do to me.” But nobody had an idea he would go five years later.

Then, in what had to have been less than 15 minutes, somebody said M.L. had died. For some reason, I ran across to concourse A in the pouring rain. When I



A printed Order of Worship from Ebenezer Baptist Church lists the ministers.

opened the door, standing right there in front of me were Coretta and Christine and some others.

I didn’t say anything to them. I turned around and ran back across that same concourse. I didn’t know what to do. They were taking her into the lounge to tell her he had died.

**BT: It is amazing that you had those encounters at the airport on that day.**

APB: Bobby Kennedy chartered an American Airlines Electra — an old prop plane with four engines, and first class was in the tail of it. This is two days or so after the death and they are bringing the body back home.

Everything was shut down. But Eastern allowed me the privilege of going out fully dressed in my uniform. When I saw the plane turn to come in, I saluted it.

I walked around to the tail of the plane where the body was taken off and rolled down on the belt. It was the strangest thing, and for a long time I couldn’t talk about it.

Then, at the funeral, I helped with the VIPs. When they brought the body and family out, I decided not to walk in the processional but to wait and drive the other way [to the burial].

I’m in the church, but most people had gone out in the processional. But Bobby Kennedy remained on the front row where he was crying.

Charles Evers, the brother of Medgar

Evers [civil rights activist killed in Mississippi in 1963], came and sat next to him. Both of them embraced and cried. It was a silent moment in history.

**BT: That had to make an impact on you.**

APB: At the end of April, I agreed to become pastor of the New York church on weekends. I told Eastern I would no longer be interested in the position in Miami.

I told the church I could not move up there until the end of the summer; I’d go back and forth on weekends with Eastern.

In June, Bobby Kennedy was campaigning for president. Eastern wanted me to handle him.

When he got ready to [leave Atlanta], I walked out on the concourse with him and he got on a plane that ultimately ended up in Los Angeles where he was killed.

**BT: When you took the pastorate in New York and finally moved, did you resign from Eastern?**

APB: Yes, and I was there [New York] a few months short of 12 years. Then I took the position as the minister of mission support for American Baptist Churches of the South — at that time a 16-state area. So I got the chance to move back home [Atlanta] and bring my three children.

Then after three years, in 1982, I was called to Bank Street Memorial Baptist Church in Norfolk. After nine years, I went to American Baptist Churches in Valley Forge [in] mission support.

Then I retired in 2004 and went back to Virginia Beach. But I wanted to come back home and be in my home church. At Ebenezer, I’m an old icon now.

**BT: How did you get connected with American Baptists?**

APB: Martin England, a representative with [ABC’s Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board] came to Ebenezer in the ‘60s to meet with Rev. King Sr. He talked about how we needed to work together.

“The churches can’t be separate,” he said. **BT**

# 2009 Formations Commentary

Bible Study resources for the adult Formations lessons available from Smyth & Helwys Publishing ([www.helwys.com](http://www.helwys.com))

**LESSONS FOR:  
Sunday, Feb. 8-  
Feb 22, 2009**

Written by Jim Dant,  
pastor of Highland Hills  
Baptist Church in Macon,  
Ga.



**Feb. 8, 2009**

## When all seems lost

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14

Only the end of the world is the end of the world. There had been moments in Israel's history that felt like the end of the world, however.

In the days of Joseph, when Israel was nothing more than an extended family, a seven-year famine ravaged the land. Jacob, whose name had been changed to Israel, sent his sons to Egypt to barter for grain. This lengthy story that ends the book of Genesis records Jacob's repetitive fear that his son's lives and his life would end in grief. But, only the end of the world is the end of the world. His lost son, Joseph, had risen to the role of prime minister in Egypt. Under Joseph's leadership, good stewardship during seven years of plenty had provided food for the world. Israel's family and the families of the world were saved. It was the end of life as they knew it, but it wasn't the end of the world.

Centuries later, a subsequent pharaoh rose to power in Egypt who did not remember Joseph. This new pharaoh enslaved, oppressed and began a systemic genocide of the Israelites. It seemed like the end of the world. But, only the end of the world is the end of the world. It was, however, the end of life as the Israelites knew it. Under the leadership of Moses, wilderness wandering took the place of Egyptian existence and life

moved on.

In the years that followed, life as the Israelites knew it changed numerous times. They transitioned from the leadership of judges to the guidance of a monarchy. They saw the decline of a united kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon to the divided reality of post-civil strife. They defended themselves against the Philistines, Canaanites and Assyrians. Every change felt like the end of the world, but only the end of the world is the end of the world. In each case it was simply the end of life as they had known it, and life moved on.

Jeremiah's world was not a pleasant one. He watched — through tears — as the kingdom of Judah, the city of Jerusalem and even the temple were destroyed. He grieved as the Babylonians carried captive his fellow Israelites. With the loss of home and freedom, it seemed the end of the world. But only the end of the world is the end of the world. With the rubble of Jerusalem at his feet, Jeremiah penned a letter to his exiled companions. What did he suggest they do when all seemed lost?

In verses 4-7, the exiled Israelites are instructed to keep living; to build, garden, eat, marry and multiply. They are encouraged to seek the welfare of the foreign city where they are forced to dwell. They are, in essence, encouraged to live. They are challenged to find a way to exist and flourish as God's children in a context contrary to their faith. Life has ended as they knew it, but it isn't the end of the world.

A woman, recently widowed, shared a conversation she had with her therapist. Feeling paralyzed by the depth of her grief, the woman sorrowfully asked her therapist, "What am I going to do? What am I going to do?" Her therapist responded, "Ask yourself what you would be doing at this very moment if your husband's death had not occurred — working, gardening, painting or

exercising. Then, go and do it." The therapist wisely encouraged her client to keep living.

Jeremiah also encouraged the captives to keep hoping. In verses 8-11, the true plans of God are juxtaposed with the inaccurate proclamations of other prophets and diviners. It is strongly implied that their preaching is void of hope, while in reality, God's plans are filled with hope. While exile would be a lengthy reality, it would not be the end; there was hope. Only the end of the world is the end of the world.

A retired minister is a member of our congregation. Several months ago he celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ordination. I asked him, "If you could sum up your preaching in one word, what would that word be?" His response was immediate: "Hope."

One of my friends is fond of saying, "Never stop hoping. And when you have nothing to hope for, then hope for hope. But never stop hoping. Because when we stop hoping, we die."

And finally Jeremiah encouraged the exiles to keep trusting. Evident throughout the text of his message is the pervasive presence of God. In fact, the position of this particular chapter of the Book of Jeremiah is telling. Following chapter 29, our focal text, are chapters 30-32 — a section often called the Book of Comforts. These words of comfort encouraged the Israelites (and us) to focus attention on God's presence when enduring the struggles of life. Our tendency is to indulge in the "idolatry of crisis." The crisis becomes the center of our life, dictating our movements and decisions. Rather, the crisis should turn us toward God. Crises give us opportunity to faithfully assert God's continued power and presence in our lives. The difficult times provide opportunities for trust.

Only the end of the world is the end of the world. Every other struggle has an end. So keep living, keep hoping and keep trusting.



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Feb. 15, 2009

## When doing right brings hardship

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Life is relentless. It just keeps coming at us day after day, month after month, joy after joy and crisis after crisis. The proverbial “when it rains it pours” is a reality of which too many of us are keenly aware. It’s no wonder that Rabbi Harold Kushner’s best-seller *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* continues to disappear from bookstore shelves. We are doing our best at the job of being human, but life is relentless.

Life was relentless for the Christians in Corinth. Of all the first-century church locales with which we are familiar, Corinth was perhaps the most boisterous. It was a seaside city that served as the capital of Achaia. It was a bustling center of economy, politics and religious plurality. Shops and temples dotted the landscape and influenced the mindset of the masses. The cosmopolitan nature of this ancient city reflected — as much as any other biblical city — our American cultural context. It was a setting that challenged the ethic and ethos of the Christian disciple.

Given the multiple challenges the early Christians faced in this city, conversations between Paul and the church at Corinth were frequent. Within the two letters preserved in our New Testament, there is evidence of at least three letters written by Paul to the Corinthians, as well as several other “verbal reports” exchanged (1 Cor. 1:11).

Typically, Paul’s words to the Corinthians are characterized as harsh. A quick glance through the early chapters of the two recorded letters finds Paul admonishing them for their divisiveness, sexual immorality, litigations, worship practices and much more. But as we near the end of this correspondence, the tone softens and becomes more encouraging. Understanding the pressures these early Christians were enduring in a culture that was counter to their convictions, Paul lovingly translates their pain into piety. He defines for them — interprets for them — the suffering of the saints.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, Paul tells the church that it is through suffering that the

source of our strength is identified. We are “clay jars,” as he puts it, and the extraordinary power we sense within ourselves belongs exclusively to God.

Those of us who spend time in “Anonymous” programs (Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Al-anon, Overeaters Anonymous, etc.) quickly become familiar with the Twelve Steps. The first three of these steps set the foundation for our recovery from dependence and/or codependence: 1) We admitted we were powerless and that our lives had become unmanageable, 2) came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity, and 3) made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him. In these programs we are immediately led to the idea that sobriety and serenity are gifts from God; they cannot be achieved in our own strength. We learn quickly that we are clay and only God can serve as the source of our strength.

According to Paul, in verses 13-15, suffering provides opportunity for our profession of resurrection faith to be affirmed. In his words, “... the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus ...” Suffering with Christ assures us of being raised with Christ. The validating resurrection experience of Jesus is truly ours to share.

In the little rural church where I worshipped during my formative childhood years, we only had an order of service for the morning worship service. In the evenings, it was more of a free-for-all. Our volunteer music director would stand before the handful of worshippers and say, “Okay, you pick’em.” This was our cue to call out the names or page number of hymns we wanted to sing. It seemed to be the same hymns every Sunday evening: “When We All Get to Heaven,” “In the Sweet By and By,” “When the Roll is Called Up Yonder” and, of course, “Victory in Jesus.” The poor farming and mill community in which I was raised clung faithfully to the notion that resurrection faith was real. They believed (and sang) that the realities of this world — the sufferings of this world — were not the final reality. I’ve heard their perspective criticized through the years. They’ve often been relegated to the mindless masses that allow religion to become the proverbial opiate and “the sweet by and by” an anesthetic for their

pain. I, however, prefer to believe that they simply trusted in the resurrection faith they professed. That’s what saintly suffering can do for you.

And finally, Paul asserts that suffering allows the greater matters of life to take precedent. While our “outer nature” may be diminishing, the greater matter — our “inner nature” — is being nourished. I wish it were not so, but few of us give great attention to our spiritual lives in time of plenty. When “things” are going well, we tend to focus on the “things.” It’s not until things go sour that our focus is shifted to what really matters. How many times has a crisis driven us to prayer? How many times have we promised to be more God-conscious when the crisis passes? How many times have we drifted back into a comfortable distance from God? Need drives us to our knees. It seems to be part of the human condition.

The wilderness was where Moses achieved intimacy with God, where the Israelites received the laws of God, where Habakkuk found the joyful strength of God, where Jesus faced down the enemy of God and where numerous saints have claimed to encounter God. We, and the Corinthians, are no different. Rain causes us to seek shelter. When the rain — and life — are relentless, we seek a constant shelter in the arms of God.

Feb. 22, 2009

## When disaster threatens

2 Chronicles 20:1-12

I grew up watching westerns. My first cinematic experience was Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments*, and my second venture to the big screen was to see Clint Eastwood in *Two Mules for Sister Sara*. In my youth I was unaware of Cecil’s subsequent work, but I was well aware of the seemingly infinite footage of film that held the western-clad Eastwood. I watched them all — over and over again. Eventually I expanded my experience of the genre to include the past theatrical achievements of John Wayne and a few lesser-known cowpokes.

I readily admit Native Americans were rarely depicted accurately in these films. They were typically characterized as murderous and prone to savagery. Only a small



minority (usually one rare redskin per film) befriended and became a trusted companion to “the white man.” The rest were feared. In fact, when they came barreling down the mountains, in mass, astride their ponies, with spear in hand, the cowboys would frantically scream to their fellow pilgrims, “Circle the wagons!” Like I said, it’s an inaccurate depiction of Native Americans. But, it’s a fairly accurate observation of the human response to threat. Circle the wagons.

In 2 Chronicles 20:1-12, King Jehoshaphat — one of the righteous kings of Judah — learns that a coalition of the Moabites, Ammonites and Edomites are coming against him in battle. Individually, any one of these bordering tribes was a formidable enemy for the children of Israel. There had been scathing skirmishes with each of these tribes before. This time, however, the neighboring nemeses on Judah’s eastern border were attacking in mass. Jehoshaphat did what any good cowboy would do. He screamed, “Circle the wagons!” The king’s summons sounds like a cry for the assembling of soldiers. Jehoshaphat’s command, however, was not a mobilization for war. The reader of 2 Chronicles is shocked to realize the king was gathering the people for worship.

Jehoshaphat led Judah to find strength in the gathering of worship. In verse 3, the king proclaims a fast. In verses 4-5, the people are assembled at the temple. In the face of disaster, weapons are nowhere to be found, but the people of God have gathered to pray.

Corporate worship has the dual blessing of bringing us into the presence of God and into the presence of other people. It is a common tendency for people to isolate themselves when fearful or threatened. The isolation often escalates the fear. Being in the presence of others, however, relaxes the grip of fear. A threat shared is a threat — to some degree — diminished.

Fear and threat can also lead to doubt. Is God really there? Does God really care? Will God be faithful in protecting us? When our faith is weak, those gathered for worship express faith for us. They prop us up and propel us toward a hope that for the moment seems out of reach. The words of faith that we’ve been hesitant to speak are spoken for us and with us in worship.

I’ve often defined worship as the place I go to say and hear the things I believe even when I’m not sure I still believe them. It is these words that compose the corpus of Jehoshaphat’s gathering. Why?

Jehoshaphat knew that Judah would find strength in the liturgy of worship. So, in verses 6-12, we hear the liturgy and prayers of God’s people. At first glance they seem to be a reminder to God of his identity and past action. In truth, they are reminders to the people of Judah concerning God’s identity and power. That’s the way liturgy works. We praise God and recount God’s mighty acts, not because God needs to hear it, but because we need to hear it.

Jehoshaphat’s prayer recalls God’s actions in the life of early Israel. It was through God’s presence and power that Israel had escaped the oppressive confines of Egypt, survived the decades of wandering the wilderness and eventually conquered the inhabitants of the land of Canaan — the land of promise. This particular chapter in Israel’s history became the liturgical content of many of that nation’s prayers and prophetic utterances. Elements of the Exodus and conquest of Canaan are embedded in numerous psalms and the preaching of almost every Old Testament prophet. Recalling these acts, in the words of public worship, give us strength for the threats on the horizon.

The stories of God’s presence and power are woven within the fabric of our worship hymns, anthems, prayers and sermons. The events of Christmas, Epiphany, Crucifixion and Resurrection are repetitively recalled each Sunday — not for God’s benefit, but for ours.

I do miss the testimonies of my childhood. Not quite what one would call formal liturgy, frequently someone in our rural congregation would stand and share a word of testimony. Their shared words revolved around their initial salvation or some other saving moment in their life. The words were usually accompanied by tears and followed by hugs and amen’s from the congregation. They were wonderful reminders of the presence and power of God for those of us who faced any measure of fear or threat. It was the church gathered — the wagons circled — and praying. **BT**

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2009

# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month  
by Bo Prosser



## Church — it's about relationships

**R**ecently, a colleague and I were lamenting the challenges of congregational leadership. With the unstable economic climate, the seeming conflicting values of believers and the ambiguity of our culture, leading a church seems more difficult than ever. For many, church is just about the delivery of religious goods and services; about providing quality religious entertainment. But for me, church is about relationships.

For years my mission statement has been “People go, where they know, they’ve been prepared for and are cared for.” The church’s focus must continue to be on people and connecting people to other people. One of our jobs as church leaders is to foster connecting points for multiple relationships to form, develop and deepen. The church leader who tries to be the hub of all relationships will soon burn out, act out or become irrelevant.

The following hints may help you to shift your focus from a provider of religious goods, services and “warm fuzzies” to a network of meaningful personal relationships grounded in Christ.

**Pay attention to people.** In church work we can easily become distracted with the “crowds.” Jesus saw individuals. Jesus listened. Jesus noticed when one person touched the hem of his garment. We would do well to be as focused. Certainly there are pressures of time, of trying to touch as many people as possible. Yet, as we focus on individuals, we learn more about their life situations, their hopes and their dreams. Soon, we are able to help them build friendships with people having similar situations and interests.

**Be a less-anxious presence.** The church is not immune to anxiety. People are looking to us to calm their fears, to reassure them of God’s presence in the midst of their fears. We must work at keeping our faith strong so that we are not infected by the anxiety of others. When anxious, most people turn inward and begin thinking selfishly. This attitude cannot define the state of any local congregation. We can be aware of the anxiety without giving in to it. As we stay above the fray, we can lead people into positive relationships that will give them courage and confidence for living bravely.

**Listen, listen, listen.** Too often we hear what people are saying, but we don’t internalize what is being said. We act like we are being attentive when we are only formulating our response to what is being said. We feign attention while we are merely thinking about the next meeting or the next person in line. We need to take time to listen actively; to focus on the person speaking, not what is going on around us; to keep eye contact with the speaker. If the conversation needs more time, we can invite the person to continue at another time.

**Communicate, communicate, communicate.** Our job as leaders is to articulate the mission of the congregation. As we communicate the “calling” of our church, people gravitate to share in the work. Too often, leaders focus on the morale of the church and try to infuse “warm fuzzy” programs to make people feel good about their church. The mission has to come first. As we clearly articulate what God is calling us to do, the mission becomes clearer, the morale goes higher and trust grows deeper.

**Deepen your own spiritual life.** As leaders, participate in prayer practices and disciplines that lead to spiritual depth, and invite your congregation into similar practices and disciplines. As the community of faith prays together, people grow closer to God and to one another. Nothing can take the place of a praying congregation.

**Be careful of offering easy responses or quick solutions.** Challenging times are rarely resolved. Be honest and reassuring. Foster relationship-building activities for sharing. Talk openly about challenges and questions. Help people understand that many of the challenges facing us as a country and as congregational leaders will not be repaired quickly, but that we are on a journey toward healing and repair. This is a time for preaching on faithfulness and on relational solutions.

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Troubling times call for relationships that offer stability and confidence. Church leaders can be the models for faith and hope. Cutting budgets and providing more or different programs may help in the short run. But for the longer and more lasting view, meaningful relationships are still the key. **BT**

### Resources

Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*

(www.greenleaf.org)

Hendrix, *Nothing Never Happens*

(www.helwys.com)

Prosser et. al., *Building Blocks for Sunday*

*School Growth* (www.helwys.com)

Companions in Christ materials

(www.upperroom.org)

THE RESOURCE PAGE is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month’s page was written by Bo Prosser, Coordinator of Congregational Life for Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Resource Page Archives are now available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.

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Highland Park Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, is accepting recommendations and applications for an **associate pastor for youth and student ministry**. We are seeking a minister to join a ministry team and an active laity. This position would have an emphasis on guiding the spiritual development of an active youth group with additional responsibilities assisting the ministry team with the implementation of a church-wide Christian education and spiritual formation program and building a college student outreach ministry. HPBC is a progressive, Christ-filled congregation with 400 members and affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist General Convention of Texas. To learn more about the church, visit [www.highlandparkbaptist.org](http://www.highlandparkbaptist.org). To submit recommendations or applications, contact: Rusty Shelton and Sarah Macias at [hpbcyouth@gmail.com](mailto:hpbcyouth@gmail.com) or Associate Pastor Search Committee, Highland Park Baptist Church, 5206 Balcones Dr., Austin, TX 78731.

Salem Avenue Baptist Church of Rolla, Mo., is seeking a full-time **minister of students**. This minister would work with 7th grade-college. Rolla is a town of 17,000 located between St. Louis and Springfield, and is the home of the Missouri Science and Technology University. It is one of many churches, predominantly SBC-affiliated, located in the area. Submit résumés to: [office@salemavebaptist-church.org](mailto:office@salemavebaptist-church.org) or Personnel Committee, Salem Avenue Baptist Church, 1501 E. Hwy. 72, Rolla, MO 65401. ([www.salemavebaptistchurch.org](http://www.salemavebaptistchurch.org))

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Résumés and nominations by January 31:

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# in the know

*Keeping up with people, places and events*

## PEOPLE

**John J. Cook** is pastor of Snyder Memorial Baptist Church in Fayetteville, N.C.

**Rob Fox** will begin work Feb. 1 as a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field coordinator. Fox currently serves as pastor of Mt. Hermon Baptist Church in Milford, Va., and as director of the ministry fund and interim director of communications at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education.

**Rendell Hipp** is minister of education and discipleship at First Baptist Church of Hickory, N.C.

**Tammy Jo Jackson**, pastor of children and their parents, was ordained by the Holmewood Baptist Church of Kansas City, Mo., on Nov. 16. Jackson is the owner of Healing Grace Counseling Center and a licensed psychologist who maintains her own practice of counseling while also serving the church in ministry. She is a third-year student at Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

**Misael Marriaga** is the Hispanic pastor at The Memorial Baptist Church in Greenville, N.C.

**Frank Pollard** died Nov. 30. Pollard twice served as pastor of First Baptist Church in Jackson, Miss., for a combined total of 22 years. Between his stints in Jackson he served as pastor of First Baptist Church in San Antonio and as president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. He also was a past president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. *Time* magazine once named Pollard one of seven "Outstanding Protestant Preachers in America."

**Lee Prophitt** is minister of youth at Ardmore Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C.

**Lance Rogerson** is youth pastor at Winter Park Baptist Church in Wilmington, N.C.

**Robert R. Soileau**, professor of theology at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary from 1957-1968, died Oct. 29. After leaving NOBTS, Soileau was a long-time professor at Louisiana State University.

## PLACES

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Campbell University Divinity School have partnered to provide certification in preschool and children's ministry. The short-term intensive courses have been offered in North Carolina and Virginia, and will be offered in Georgia in the fall of 2009. The Atlanta session will be held at the Ignatius House, a Jesuit retreat center, where students will gather twice a semester for three days. For information, contact Jana Kinnersley at [kinnersleyjana@yahoo.com](mailto:kinnersleyjana@yahoo.com) or (706) 224-3779.

To assist churches in celebrating the 400th anniversary of Baptist beginnings, the Baptist History and Heritage Society and the Center for Baptist Studies at Mercer University will distribute 12 complimentary bulletin inserts. The inserts will feature stories of Baptist founders and leaders, and will also focus briefly on a Baptist principle or development in Baptist life. To receive the inserts, e-mail Pam Durso at [pamdurso@baptisthistory.org](mailto:pamdurso@baptisthistory.org).

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# the lighter side

## The secret life of preachers

By Brett Younger

**T**here's more going on in your pastor's head than you imagine. On Sunday morning, your minister's thoughts are as busy as a beehive, spaghetti junction or WalMart on the day after Christmas. During some worship services it sounds like this inside your preacher's brain:

*Mary Ann brought her adorable baby to worship again. I wish she would start crying now instead of during the sermon. I can never sing this hymn without thinking, "On a hill far away stood an old Chevrolet." It's fun to sing this one like Bob Dylan. It's always interesting when the youth minister prays. I wonder what the record is for the most times saying "like" and "just" in a single prayer. When we recite the Lord's Prayer it sounds like the voice on my GPS. Why does the offering feel like a Nielsen rating? When I said the youth could usher I didn't expect suits and ties, but who wears sandals in January? I wish I could wear sandals.*

*Why don't women wear hats to church anymore? I should eat breakfast before I get here. Two Krispy Kremes during Sunday school is probably a bad idea. I see the third-grade Sunday school teacher gave out jawbreakers again. I wish I had a jawbreaker. I thought this part of the sermon would go better. Maybe the sound system isn't working. I should have kept the joke about the priest and the rabbi to myself. I need to remember to ask Ashley about the note Sam just handed her. Maybe I should ask her right now. Look at that guy looking at his watch. I'll be so glad when football season is over. I wonder who's playing today. Should ministers pull for the Saints? I need to put the introduction and conclusion closer together next week. I'd like to see how John the Baptist would react to a cell phone ringing. Why did I decide to preach on Jesus' baptism? It really is confusing. I'm glad my congregation can't tell what I'm thinking when I'm preaching.*

Some Sundays, pastors think like air traffic controllers a week after a crash, but on the best Sundays, nothing is more holy than the prayers that fill the preacher's head.

*God, they showed up again. If I wasn't the pastor, I'm not sure I would show up every Sunday. Annie Mae is here if I ever need to be reminded that I'm not the best Christian in the room. It must take Jim 30 minutes to maneuver his walker from his car to his pew, but he's always here. I can't believe Sandy made it after the horrible week she had. Her son is an alcoholic and her husband is no help, but she never misses worship. This room is filled with saints who keep coming to church to give themselves to your grace.*

*Thank you, God.*

*Singing was one of your best ideas. "So I'll cherish the old, rugged cross." Cherishing crosses is no easy thing.*

*God, make your kingdom come and your will be done in this congregation.*

*Forgive me for ever taking worship for granted. Make me discontented with my apathy and grateful for the love that covers us all.*

*Thank you, God.*

*I'm glad the sermon isn't limited to what I know — and that these gracious people understand that. It's easy to see why you love them. Some of them are listening so intently for your word.*

*I can almost picture the dove and hear you saying, "You are my beloved children with whom I am well pleased."*

*If I'm going to be a good pastor for these good people, I need to give myself to you again.*

*Thank you, God.*

On the best Sundays, God speaks not only through the preacher, but also to the preacher — more than we imagine. **BT**

—Brett Younger is associate professor of preaching at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology.



Illustration by Scott Brooks

# Gospel music's most successful artist not slowing down after 50-plus years

Bill Gaither may not be an A-list celebrity, but over a half century he has sold 20 million recordings and 20 million DVDs — more than any other gospel performer.

And the impact of this musical legend far exceeds mere sales figures.

He and his wife Gloria have written more than 600 songs, including one immortalized by Elvis (“He Touched Me”) and others published in hymnals used in churches around the world (“Because He Lives”).

If he wanted to rest on his laurels, Gaither certainly has enough accolades and money to do so. But at 72, he’s still busy writing, recording and traveling with his Homecoming tour.

Friends ask Gaither if he plans to slow down any time soon.

“Retire? And do what?” he asks in his signature soothing baritone voice during a phone interview from his Indiana office.

“If I had to sing high C’s every night, or play keyboard at a high level, it would be better to back off. By myself, I’m not really that fantastic. But what I do is bring together talent. And I’ll continue to do that gladly.”

Gaither was a college student in 1956 when he formed The Bill Gaither Trio with a brother and sister. After he married, Gloria became his primary partner in life, songwriting and performing. The Trio recorded more than 40 albums and filled arenas nationwide.

In 1980, he founded the Gaither Vocal Band. The quartet’s 30 albums feature everything from old-timey Southern gospel chestnuts to pop-based contemporary songs.

No one has been more successful than Gaither at bridging the often-contentious divide that separates Christian music’s traditionalists from its harder-rocking contemporary fans.

“Christian music is about a theology and

a message and can’t be pinned down by any one style,” he says. “Over the centuries that message has been wrapped in a lot of different styles. The wrapper is always changing, but the basic message is always going to stay. I don’t think God really cares about the wrapper, but he cares very much about the content.”

Through the Vocal Band and other activities, Gaither has also promoted and mentored some of the most popular Christian artists of the past four decades, including Sandi Patti, Larnelle Harris, Carman, Steve Green, Don Francisco, Michael English, David Phelps, Russ Taff and Mark Lowry.

“It sounds (like a) cliché, but he really is in a category all by himself,” said John W. Styll, president and CEO of the Gospel Music Association, who credits Gaither with “single-handedly re-energizing” Southern gospel, the genre he’s called home for the most recent phase of his career.

Gaither was working on “Homecoming,” the Vocal Band’s 1991 album when he stumbled across the formula that has proved remarkably — and unexpectedly — successful.

He invited about a dozen gospel music pioneers to join in on the classic song, “Where Could I Go But to the Lord.” After the recording session, the singers ate fried chicken and gathered around a piano to shoot a music video. Before they knew it, someone started playing the piano and the singers all joined in.

Gaither says three hours had passed before the singing finally stopped and he realized the video camera had captured nearly an hour of the impromptu session. Four minutes were used for the music video. The remaining footage gave birth to a Homecoming phenomenon that has spawned dozens of CDs, more than 60 DVDs, broadcasts on more than a dozen cable outlets like TNT and a popular concert tour that in 2004 out-

sold tours by Rod Stewart, Elton John and Fleetwood Mac.

“My lands,” Gaither said. “Across the board, the response was amazing.”

The Homecoming tours and products have been a boon for Gaither Music Company, the Alexandria, Ind.-based firm that includes a recording studio and company, concert booking, television production, copyright management, retail store, recording studio and a telemarketing department. A separate company publishes *Homecoming Magazine* and a radio show.

Homecoming’s success has also provided steady work for a revolving roster of musicians and singers. And Gaither has plowed some of his earnings into the Gospel Music Trust Fund, which supports aging or ailing artists. In 1991 the fund had about \$20,000 in its bank account; today it is worth nearly \$3 million.

Gaither is surprised by the popularity of the Homecoming franchise, which he attributes to the sense of community and shared collective memory the music creates among both the artists and fans.

“The Christian church has often been guilty of neglecting its history,” Gaither said. “But if you show me a person who does not know where he’s been, I’ll show you someone who does not know where he is going. The result is spiritual arrogance. What we’re trying to do with the music we sing at the Homecoming concerts is salvage the best of the past.”

There’s so much good music to choose from that Gaither says he struggles to bring each concert to an end.

“Every night my job is to see how I can keep this thing to under four hours,” he says. “There is so much talent. I want to be fair to the artists who are there.”

Asked if he thinks his success over half a century is due to talent, smarts or luck, Gaither says, “It’s a combination of all the above. And we have been truly blessed by God in a special way. He is smiling on us and we are very happy for that.” **BT**



Bill Gaither

# Ensuring the future of *Baptists Today*

Bill Greenhaw supports what he believes is important. That is why the longtime subscriber of *Baptists Today* designated a gift to the publication in his estate plans.

“As Baptists, we need a paper that is open, objective and far-reaching in its coverage and honesty, not pushing an agenda. So much of the religious news out there today is slanted. *Baptists Today* is diverse and not only covers Baptist life but also reaches outside of Baptists to other denominations and even other religions,” explained Greenhaw,

who is serving his third term on the publication’s Board of Directors.

“A publication of this caliber has to have support in order to continue this kind of coverage,” he said. “If you believe in something strongly enough, you want to do what you can to see that it has a lasting effect. That’s



Bill Greenhaw

why I came to the point of doing special gifts.”

He considers the gift he designated in his estate plans to be a “natural progression” of his continuing strong support of *Baptists Today*.

“This was a way of doing something after my lifetime that in some small way would ensure not just the survival, but the continuation of *Baptists Today* as a force in Baptist life,” added the retired educational administrator. **BT**

## Charitable Remainder Trust: A Way to Give

If you are thinking about an estate or major gift to help ensure the future of *Baptists Today*, a **Charitable Remainder Trust** is a funding method to consider. It provides you an opportunity to support *Baptists Today* while retaining an income from the gift during your lifetime. Also, it can offer significant tax benefits.

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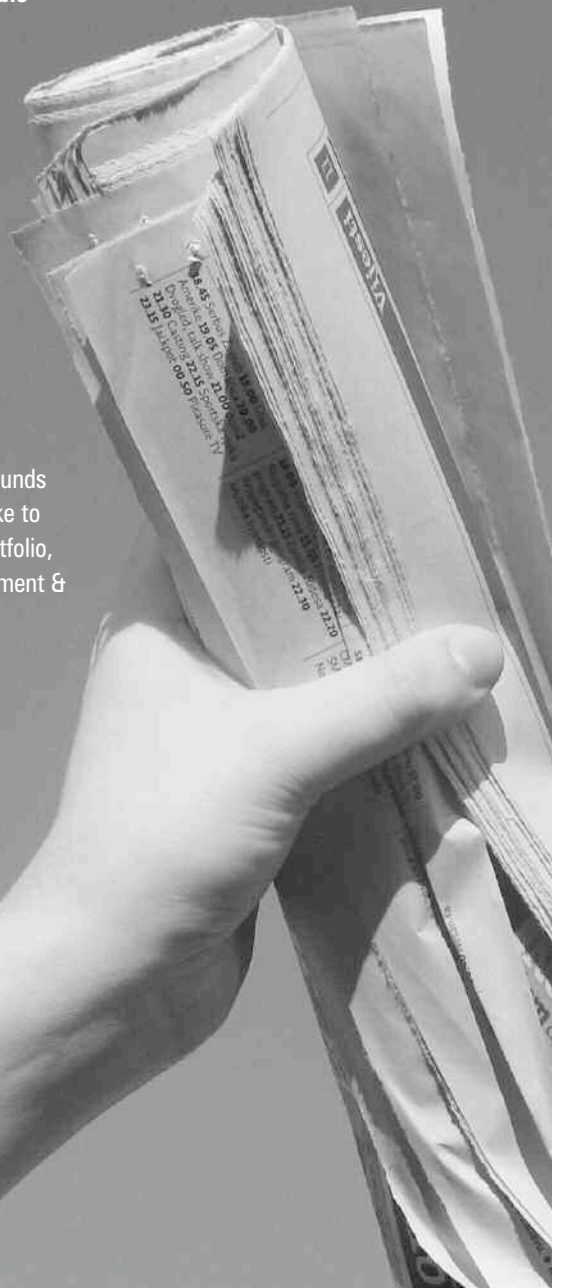
Certain selected assets can offer additional tax benefits. You will avoid capital gains tax on donated appreciated assets because remainder trusts are tax-exempt, while also receiving an income tax deduction for the current value of the remainder interest that the charity is expected to receive in the future. Assets used to fund remainder trusts are no longer a part of the estate, thereby later reducing subsequent estate taxes.

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## guest commentary

# Tough lessons for tough times

By Barry Howard

**S**ome months ago a couple of the savvy business owners in our church indicated to me their concern that we were overdue a severe market correction. In other words the “bull” would become a “bear,” and probably persist as a fairly “wimpy bear” for awhile.

Now it is becoming apparent to many of us that we are not only experiencing a “market correction,” but also are at the uncomfortable beginning of a “culture correction.”

While much of our discomfort is caused by the symptoms — market volatility, unemployment, personal and corporate budget reductions — at some point we must deal with the root of the problem.

Vance Havner once asked, “What good is it to keep tearing down the web if you’re going to do nothing about the spider?”

My pastoral observations are somewhat naïve and certainly lack the expertise of an economist or a sociologist, but from where I sit, the following concerns seem conspicuously obvious:

1. Many people have adopted unattainable or unsustainable standard-of-living goals that are often incongruent with their faith, values and productivity.
2. Many people are experiencing great distress and anxiety as a result of the quest to achieve their desirable standard of living by utilizing excessive credit transactions. This personal crunch disrupts families and ultimately contributes to the overall corporate crisis.
3. Many people feel trapped and hopeless in their personal financial dilemma or in their current business venture or vocation, with little or no hope for the future.



For further thought and reflection, I propose that a quick return to market normalcy, continued access to easy credit, and continued lifestyles of accumulation and acquisition — factors that might relieve the tension of the moment — actually only postpone the inevitable.

We must adopt life goals and management strategies that enable us to live with meaning and purpose, and embrace a way of life that minimizes anxiety, elevates passion and enhances relationships.

The teachings of the Bible and the initiatives of Christ are constantly reformatting my lifestyle, calling me to leave behind the errant ways of my past so that I might live more authentically, more passionately and more faithfully.

As I reflect on the tough times many of us are experiencing, I invite you to think with me about the life-changing lessons we can learn in tough times. For starters, consider some of the following suggestions:

- Seize the current season of adversity as an opportunity to upgrade the way you approach life, order your priorities and live out your faith.

- Base your sense of self-worth and your self-esteem on the love and uniqueness God has given you, not on your status or your “net worth.”
- Adopt a lifestyle of “living within your means,” avoiding unnecessary credit and making informed purchasing and investing decisions.
- Teach your children to make life decisions based on faith and values, not by subscribing to default cultural trends.
- Be prepared to assist with vocational networking or to engage in vocational transitioning and retraining.
- With a nonpartisan disposition, pray for the current and future leaders of our communities, states and nation that they may act with extraordinary wisdom and discernment.
- Invest your gifts and passions in proactive service in the church and community, always working toward the greater good of the whole body.
- Share from your blessings with others who may have greater needs and a lesser portion.
- In seasons of prosperity and seasons of adversity, honor God with all of your assets — your tithe, your time and your talent.
- Practice the biblical principles of Sabbath (ceasing periodically from industry and anxiety to rest and worship) and jubilee (releasing your grip on property in order to rotate, revitalize and restore).

This season of economic adversity could be remembered as the toughest time since the Great Depression. But out of that depression came those persons Tom Brokaw has described as “the greatest generation.”

Perhaps God could teach us a few life-changing lessons during these tough times that will shape us into more responsible citizens, more respectable parents, more competent leaders, more productive workers and more effective servants than we’ve ever been before. **BT**

—Barry Howard is pastor of the First Baptist Church of Pensacola, Fla.

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## Fragile freedoms and Baptist higher education

By Tony W. Cartledge,  
posted Nov. 11, 2008  
[www.tonycartledge.com](http://www.tonycartledge.com)

During a fall fellowship dinner sponsored by Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina, Wingate University president Jerry McGee took a cue from Walter Shurden's famous analysis of Baptist life's "Four Fragile Freedoms" by suggesting that Baptist higher education also depends on four fragile freedoms that are not negotiable.

McGee spoke in behalf of five universities and a college that had seen a new relationship with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina approved during its annual session earlier in the day.

The first, he said, is academic freedom. There's no such thing as "Presbyterian biology" or a "Methodist map" or "Baptist English" in higher education, he said.

"We must seek the truth wherever it may lead us, even if we do not like where it leads us."

There is a difference between education and indoctrination, he said: academic freedom is essential.

Faith identification is a second fragile freedom for Baptist schools, McGee said. Wingate, like other N.C. Baptist schools, has been "nurtured and supported by Baptists throughout our existence, and we have no intention of moving from that heritage," he said.

When a former student complained that the new change in relationship between the schools and the Baptist State Convention (BSC) would move Wingate away from the convention, McGee said, he explained that "the new relationship is the only way we can continue to have a relationship with the Baptists of N.C."

A third fragile freedom, McGee said, is trustee selection. For many years the schools steadfastly cooperated with the BSC in choosing trustees, McGee said.

"As limiting as it was, we were able to make it work because the committee on nominations was willing to work with us."

When the committee began to impose its will on the process by imposing conditions based on the committee members and not in consultation with the colleges, he said, the process was no longer workable. The new relationship, in which the schools surrender direct funding but choose their own directors, "allows us to be more Baptist than we've ever been before," he said.

McGee named cooperation as the fourth fragile freedom of Baptist higher education.

"We will cooperate with Baptists of North Carolina not because we are being forced to cooperate or paid to cooperate, but because we want to cooperate," he said.

Such voluntary cooperation does not label some as right and some as wrong, but allows the construction of a "big tent" that includes Baptists of different stripes and types.

Wingate, he said, "will continue to cooperate with the Baptists of North Carolina, not because of any mandate, but because we choose to. It represents a fragile freedom that we will honor — but only in a manner that respects everyone's freedom." **BT**

## Isolation and irrelevancy

By John Pierce, posted Nov. 12, 2008  
[www.bteditor.blogspot.com](http://www.bteditor.blogspot.com)

In another deliberate and continuous move toward isolation and irrelevancy, the Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC) approved a policy [Nov. 11] that gives leadership the right to reject cooperation with congregations deemed to be out of line with Southern Baptists' ever-narrowing doctrine.

Though broadly defined, the policy has a single purpose: to appease the fundamentalist brothers who want to take a slap

at the First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., for daring to call a female pastor.

Baptist congregations in Georgia can call an idiot, a bigot or even a crook — apparently — as long as the pastor is male. But a competent and called female pastor — like Julie Pennington-Russell — is considered an offense.

"What about local church autonomy?" you ask.

Well, conventions are autonomous too. And the GBC's most recent use of its freedom is consistent with the irrational, far-right fundamentalism that captured the state association of churches

several years ago.

In reality, the GBC did the Decatur congregation a big favor. The tragedy is that many other congregations that see this (and other GBC actions) as nonsense will continue to support such heavy-handedness in the name of "missions."

Southern Baptists apologized for their defense and advancement of slavery a mere 150 years after abolition. Perhaps Georgia Baptists will want to pencil in 2158 on the denominational calendar as a good time to apologize to women — and people of all gender who think.

That is, if they are still in business. **BT**



## Martha Stearns Marshall Women's Preaching Month: February 2009

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Reviews by Jackie Riley

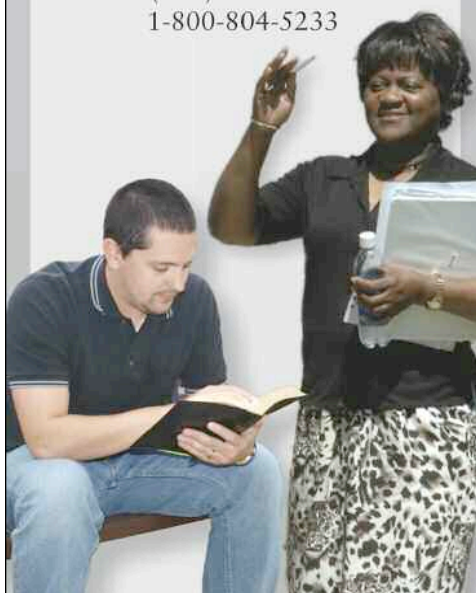


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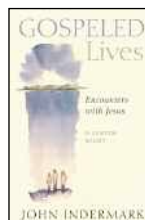


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Emphasizing the role of community and interrelatedness in the process of transformation, Vestal speaks with passion in this volume that combines personal testimony and theology with an introduction to Christianity. With years of experience as a pastor and now as the executive coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship — a movement that emphasizes the theme of Vestal’s book — he is well qualified to write.

To accomplish his objective of interpreting the Christian gospel “in ways that can be appreciated and understood by both people in the church and those outside the church,” Vestal offers topics such as the basics of Christianity, prayer, personal transformation, Christian community, human suffering, Christ-likeness and the Christian social ethic. The level of writing and depth of thought should appeal to the educated and/or seeker types who tend to label Christianity as simplistic.

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Kenneth Briggs

“Forgiveness is available as a tool, a blessing, a process of conversion that can be brought into play when the powder kegs of hatred and revenge are lit. It is a choice that is not much used; yet, ... it holds enormous riches for our bodies, minds, and souls. It is the path seldom taken that actually leads to a better place ...”



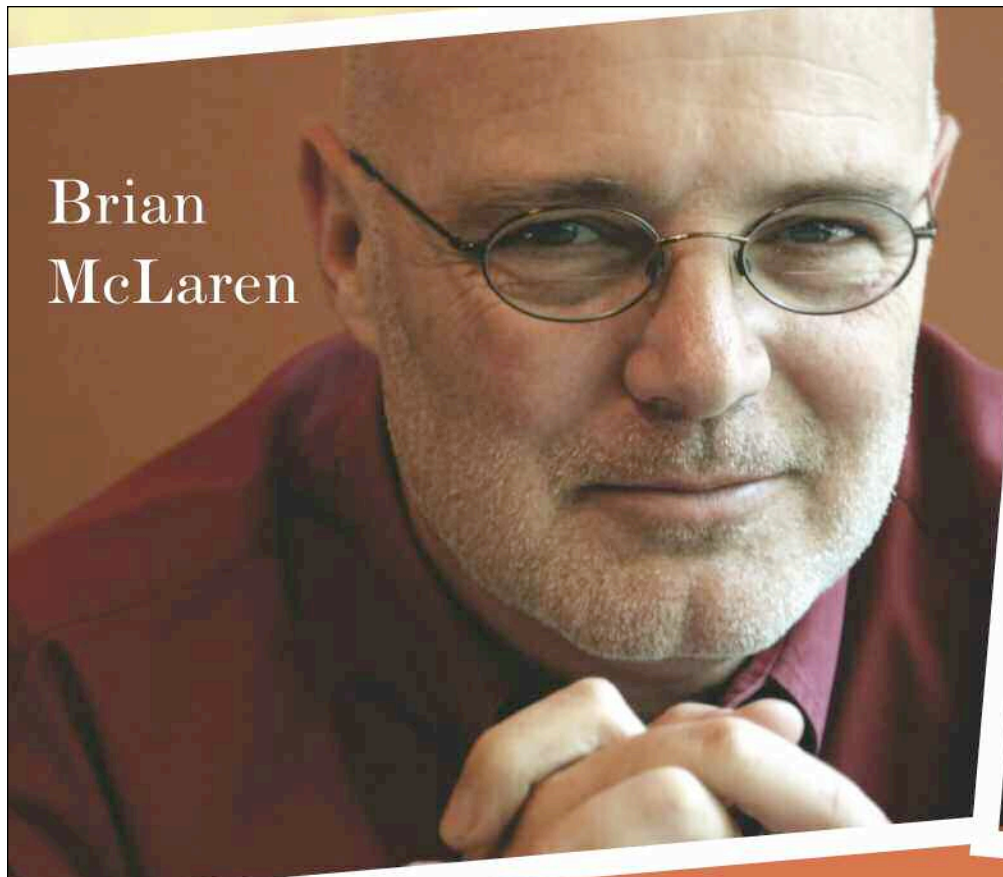
We are all familiar with the religious understanding of forgiveness, but its implications are far reaching into secular fields such as the social sciences, health and politics as evidenced in *The Power of Forgiveness*.

This volume, a uniquely designed companion piece to the PBS documentary of the same title from Journey Films, presents open-ended discussion on a variety of subjects including the inability to forgive, potential transformation as a result of forgiving, challenges to forgiving, the relationship between justice and forgiveness, mutual guilt and blame versus mutual forgiveness, and forgiveness as indispensable to the survival of a nation.

Though presented in a meditative style, the text can be a bit unsettling at times through the presentation of different faith perspectives and/or secular philosophies and the interviews with psychologists, psychotherapists, clergy and a Holocaust survivor.

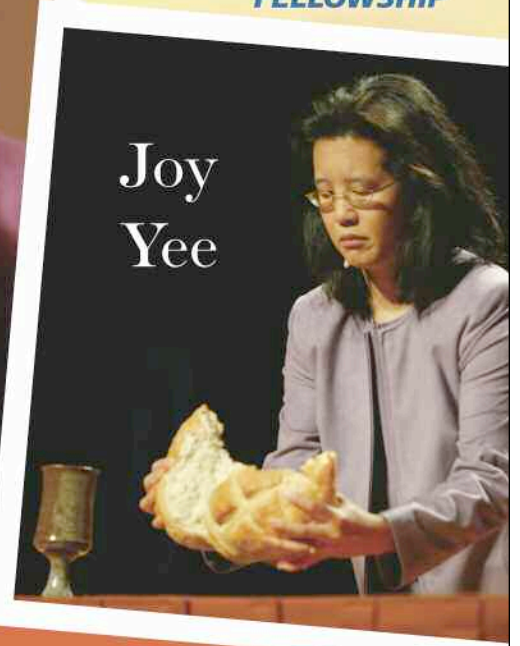
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### True Survivor IX

Bo Prosser, CBF's coordinator for congregational life, leads this ninth annual conference for Christian educators, featuring breakout sessions, ministry network gatherings, new resources, and discussions about best practices. For registration, lodging and schedule information, visit [www.thefellowship.info/truesurvivor](http://www.thefellowship.info/truesurvivor).



### Current Retreat for Young Baptists

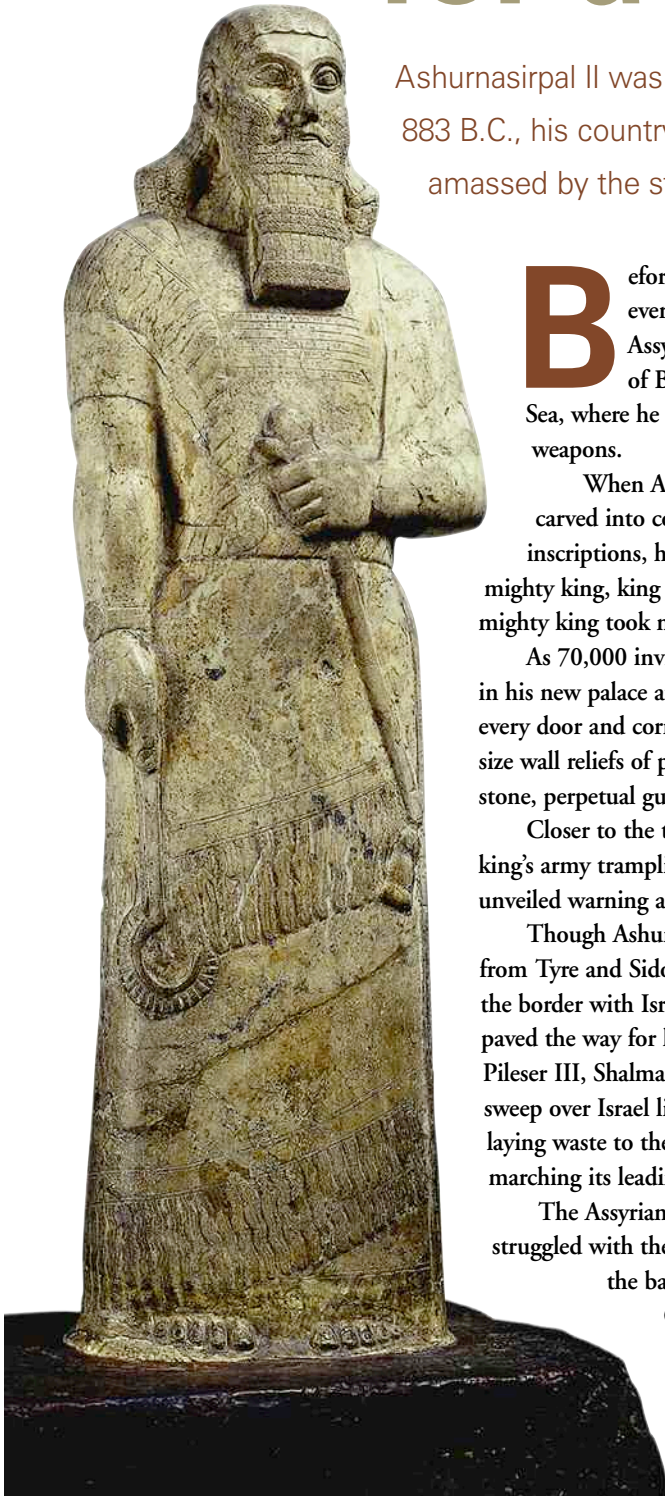
Join with other young ministers, leaders and seminary students for fellowship, networking and worship. Be sure to ask about the discount for seminary students. Amy Butler, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., will lead in worship. For registration, lodging and schedule information, visit [www.thefellowship.info/currentretreat](http://www.thefellowship.info/currentretreat).



# ancient lessons for a new year



Ashurnasirpal II was not a humble man. When he mounted the Assyrian throne in 883 B.C., his country had been whittled away to a mere shadow of the empire amassed by the strong and ambitious kings of the 13th century.



**B**efore his death in 859 B.C., however, Ashurnasirpal had expanded Assyrian might from the border of Babylon to the Mediterranean Sea, where he claims to have washed his weapons.

When Ashurnasirpal had his name carved into countless commemorative inscriptions, he called himself “great king, mighty king, king of the universe.” Even so, the mighty king took no chances.

As 70,000 invited guests arrived for a party in his new palace at Kalhu, they discovered that every door and corner was flanked by near life-size wall reliefs of protective spirits carved in stone, perpetual guardians against demons.

Closer to the throne, massive reliefs of the king’s army trampling their opponents sent an unveiled warning against insurrection.

Though Ashurnasirpal demanded tribute from Tyre and Sidon, his armies stopped near the border with Israel. Their forays, however, paved the way for later kings such as Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser V, and Sargon II to sweep over Israel like a sharp desert wind, laying waste to the kingdom of Israel and marching its leading citizens into exile.

The Assyrians, like the Babylonians who struggled with them for supremacy, are among the baddest of the bad guys in the Old Testament. Yet, their desire for secure borders and expanding influence was little different from the empire-building efforts of David and Solomon,

or of Egyptian monarchs to the south.

Recently, an exhibit of Neo-Assyrian artifacts from the British Museum on display at Boston’s Museum of Fine Art has offered visitors a more appreciative look at the eastern invaders described in the Old Testament as a wicked nation used by God to punish recalcitrant Israel.

For those steeped in the Bible, the connections are omnipresent. While standing inches from a massive wall panel from Sargon’s palace in dur-Sharrukin, one wonders if Israelites taken captive in 722 B.C. may have been required to help saw the stone from the quarry, or drag it to the king’s new palace, or even to carve images that were designed to be both decorative and propagandistic.

Did the powerful Ashurbanipal (668-631 B.C.), perhaps Assyria’s greatest king, employ Hebrew artisans to carve the protective spirits that guarded the doorways of his new palace in Nineveh or to fashion massive murals such as the Battle of Til-Tuba, which commemorates his victory over the Elamites?

That particular relief, described in the exhibit catalog as “arguably the finest large-scale example in Assyrian art,” depicts a chaotic battlefield scene in which an Elamite king named Teumann and his son Tamarritu appear in multiple stages of defeat: their chariot crashes, they run but are surrounded by Assyrian soldiers, their heads are sliced from their bodies with short knives and then carried by the hair for presentation to Ashurbanipal.

Other wall reliefs from various periods portray similar scenes of violence: siege engines, like ancient tanks, overwhelm the defenses of cities.

Above: This image of Ashurnasirpal stood in the temple of Ishtar in Nimrud, reminding the warrior goddess of the king’s devotion. Trustees of the British Museum ME118871. Top: This peaceful image of lions in a garden from Ashurbanipal’s palace in Nineveh reveals the Assyrians’ love for beauty as well as gore. Gypsum, 645-640 B.C., Trustees of the British Museum ME 118914. Both photos courtesy Boston Museum of Fine Arts.





This relief portrays enemies swimming across the Euphrates in an effort to escape Assyrian archers. Two of the men are clutching animal skins used as floats, blowing into them as they swim. From Ashurnasirpal's palace in Nimrud, 875-860 B.C. Trustees of the British Museum, courtesy Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Defeated enemies are impaled on poles for public display, frequently beheaded, trampled by horses. Rebels are forced to grind the bones of their ancestors into powder.

Life could be hard in ancient Iraq. Ashurnasirpal's palace in Kalhu (the biblical Calah) is now called Nimrud. Sargon's new buildings in dur-Sharrukin were near contemporary Khorsabad.

Ashurbanipal's legendary city of Nineveh was just outside modern Mosul — all clustered near the Euphrates River in northern Iraq.

The region is still haunted by the same sort of violence and the same use of gruesome symbols: the impact of a beheading is even more immediate when broadcast on the Internet rather than being carved into a large panel of gypsum.

Cruelty is no stranger to that part of the world — or, for that matter, to any part of the world. Atrocities abound.

Larry Berman, an Egyptologist by trade and curator of the ancient Near Eastern exhibits at the Museum of Fine Art, hesitated when asked what contemporary folk might learn from the ancients. Looking around at the impressive artistry of the Assyrians who lived nearly 3,000 years ago, he noted first that one doesn't need a lot of modern technology to accomplish great things.

After a moment's reflection, he said people can always learn from history.

Standing amid majestic wall reliefs, intricate ivory carvings and neatly inscribed cuneiform tablets, he observed that "people are people" — people who have always wanted to express themselves through language and art

and other ways. When studying their accomplishments, their art and their attitudes toward others, he said, "you learn more about what makes you human."

Humans, it seems, are eternally capable of both heartless violence and tender sentiment, of lavish lifestyles and spiritual searching. Humans have always been afraid of the dark

and what it holds.


They have always sought to control their environment and sometimes, their neighbors. They are capable of callous savagery and tenacious beauty — and they have the ability to choose which it will be.

In this season of the new year, perhaps that's a point worth pondering. **BT**

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BUA celebrates multiculturalism and has students from 19 nations represented in its small student body.

## Texas school ‘unlike any other in Baptist life’

SAN ANTONIO, Texas — Multiculturalism feels at home on the campus of the Baptist University of the Americas (BUA).

**“W**e are training Hispanic church leaders, but also leadership that understands culture,” said René Maciel, who assumed the BUA presidency in August 2007 after 26 years in Baptist higher education at Hardin-Simmons and Baylor universities. “We really hope to train a student who can adapt to any culture God may call a person.”

Texas Baptists formed BUA in 1947 as the Mexican Baptist Bible Institute to train Hispanic church leaders. The current name was approved in 2003 when, under the leadership of former president Albert Reyes, the school began offering a B.A. in biblical/theological studies.

An associate’s degree in cross-cultural studies was added in 2006 and, more recently, bachelor degrees in Spanish and cross-cultural business leadership.

Maciel said the school reaches out to students who might otherwise never set foot on a college campus.

“We reach out, seek and draw the poor, the left out, the cultural students who have a dream of an education,” said Maciel, “... and they become incredible students.”

While expanding its offerings, the school has not moved away from the vital role of

training Hispanic ministers. And, graduates are not just staying in Texas anymore.

“Nationally the need and demand for trained Hispanic leaders is exploding, as evidenced by the steady stream of recruiters from California to North Carolina and from Minnesota to Mobile,” said Craig Bird, vice president for university relations. “Where can churches and conventions turn for help in evangelizing the Hispanics around them other than the only school training the people they need?”

Hispanics represent the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S., said Mario Ramos, associate professor of biblical/theological studies, calling BUA “unlike any other [school] in Baptist life.”

“Our campus is what the world is going to be like in the future — multicultural,” said Ramos. “How do we Christians communicate and serve the world that is increasingly complex? The answer, I hope, lies in what we are trying to help our students do today.”

President Maciel said BUA provides a “culturally affirming environment” for Hispanics. This comfort is evident daily, added Mary Ranjel, director of admissions and campus relations, who has worked at BUA for 32 years.



President René Maciel



Mary Ranjel

“Even the vocabulary is different,” she said. “On what other college campus can the word *hermano* or *hermana* (brother or sister) be used on a daily basis as it refers to a classmate, a professor or a staff member? At BUA, we are all *hermanos*.”

In recent years the campus has become increasingly diverse with students coming from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. One needs to

look no further than the welcome party for new students entering BUA last fall term.

“The president of the student council is from Mexico; he oversaw the group’s preparations,” Ranjel explained. “The photographer is from Brazil; the young lady in charge of decorations is from Hungary ... and the young man helping with audiovisual equipment is from Guatemala.”

BUA has 174 full-time students with many others studying in related on- and off-campus programs. Students represent 19 different nations, said Maciel.

“That’s what this school is all about: touching different students’ lives, not only culturally, but socially,” he added. “This university is a ministry.”

Maciel said his biggest challenge is to build a dependable financial base for the school that nearly closed for financial reasons twice in its six-decade history. He is also seeking the “next gigantic step” of accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

“This school is needed,” said the enthusiastic president, pointing to a Pew Forum study projecting that the population of Hispanics in the U.S. will triple by 2050. “It tells us how important it is to have trained

Hispanic pastors.”

Vice president Bird said he hopes Baptists in Texas and beyond will recognize that BUA is “poised to provide the next generation of spiritual leaders who understand how to translate the Gospel into the marketplaces of the nations.”

Testimonies are abundant, said Bird, but one of his favorites comes from a young man who came to BUA as a new Christian — following a life of gangs and drugs.

“He was a high school dropout whose pastor literally bullied him into enrolling at BUA. He was 100 percent certain he could not make it. Like many of our students, he would not have qualified for admission to other schools. But he found some professors who believed in him and some students who befriended and disciplined him.

“He got his G.E.D., entered the B.A. program in theology and biblical studies, and is now a dean’s list student. He is asking if we can offer advanced Greek.

“Meanwhile, he is leading a church plant in a Hispanic pocket of north San Antonio while making occasional visits back to his parents’ home in Mexico to share the Gospel with his relatives. His most used phrase is, ‘God is good.’” **BT**



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# laughter & tears

## Pastor's celebration signals Blacksburg's healing ways

BLACKSBURG, Va. —They laughed until they cried. Then they laughed some more.

**A** surprise celebration was held Oct. 17 to honor pastor Tommy McDearis of Blacksburg Baptist Church for his 30 years of pastoral ministry. It also revealed how the community that witnessed unspeakable tragedy a year and a half earlier is dealing with its grief.

McDearis also serves as chaplain for the Blacksburg Police Department and assisted officers and families during the



Tommy McDearis

April 16, 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech — across the street from the church — that took 32 innocent lives.

While that tragedy was not the focus of this celebration, it is a defining event that could not be ignored

by a community still healing and seeking to move on.

Two leaders of the local police force were among the 10 guests invited to roast and toast the honoree.

“Tommy is one of us,” Blacksburg Police Chief Kim Crannis said appreciatively.

“On the grass of Norris Hall, the first phone call I made was to Tommy McDearis,” said police captain Bruce Bradbery, among the first to arrive on the scene that cold April day. “... We went through a lot; ... we’ve seen violence at its worst; we’ve walked the halls of death together.”

On a much lighter note, Bradbery, a member of Blacksburg Baptist Church, joked with his pastor that some people had



A memorial at Virginia Tech pays tribute to the lives lost on April 16, 2007.

traveled long distances to the surprise celebration because Charlotte Smith, music minister and organizer of the event, “said they could make fun of you.”

He also told of receiving a formal complaint from the medical examiner’s office after the April 16 tragedy. It claimed an officer had used harsh and inappropriate language toward someone in the examiner’s office.

With a smile, Bradbery said he scanned the complaint document and saw “McDearis” listed as the offensive officer.

“He’s not an officer,” Bradbery responded. “He’s the chaplain!”

In his unnecessary defense, McDearis explained that someone in the medical examiner’s office wanted to wait until the next morning to release names of some of

the victims of the tragic shooting.

When a rational explanation that distraught parents were awaiting news of their children’s fate didn’t work, McDearis said he “had a prayer meeting” with the examiner.

Later, Bradbery released copies of the report around town with a sense of pride that his pastor had been the one against whom the complaint had been registered.

However, the celebration focused on the broad effectiveness of McDearis’ ministry — not solely on the most demanding and defining point in his 30-year pastoral career.

Friends from childhood and college years poked fun and paid tribute. Pastoral colleagues added jabs and affirmations.

Virginia Baptist leader John Upton affirmed McDearis as a highly respected mentor of young ministers. Ben Jamison, a young pastor who trained under Tommy’s tutelage, gave testimony to that fact.

Jamison joked that McDearis typically responded to a young minister’s question or inexperience with compassionate words like: “That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard ... Are you demon possessed?”

Then, if necessary, he would meet for hours to help the young minister clarify his thinking, Jamison said.

Upton said his own son, who served an internship at Blacksburg Baptist Church, is a skeptic when it comes to pastors, but excludes Tommy from his suspicions and charges. **BT**

*Disclosure: As a close friend for more than 30 years, I was pleased to be a participant in the October celebration of Tommy McDearis’ ministry. My primary role at this event was as a roaster, not reporter. But the implications of this celebration seemed worthy of sharing. JDP*

# N.Y. cathedral rededicated after devastating 2001 fire

(RNS) — New York City's landmark Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine was rededicated Nov. 30, nearly seven years after an electrical fire severely damaged what is called the world's largest Gothic cathedral.

More than 3,000 people attended the ceremony, including New York Sens. Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer, Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, and Catholic Cardinal Edward Egan.

"The rededication of this magnificent cathedral church speaks to all of us with such a wonderful sense of not only resurrection and renewal but of a recognition that through all that we have come together there is a constant sense of resilience arising from this cathedral in this great city," Clinton said, according to published reports.

In December 2001, just two months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a six-alarm fire ignited in a gift shop located in the cathedral's north transept. Numerous works of art,

The cathedral is one of the largest Anglican churches in the world.

including tapestries, statuettes and stained-glass windows throughout the 600-foot-long cathedral were damaged by the fire and water. It cost \$41 million to repair the cathedral and remove soot from its enormous interior.

Construction on St. John's began in 1892, and the interior was dedicated in 1941, but after the interruption of two world wars, parts of the cathedral remain unfinished.

Still, the cathedral, one of the largest Anglican churches in the world, remains a Manhattan landmark.

"Cathedrals are planted down to stay and span history," said James Kowalski, dean of St. John the Divine, according to published reports. "This cathedral has done that and engaged its culture, this city, our nation, the world." **BT**

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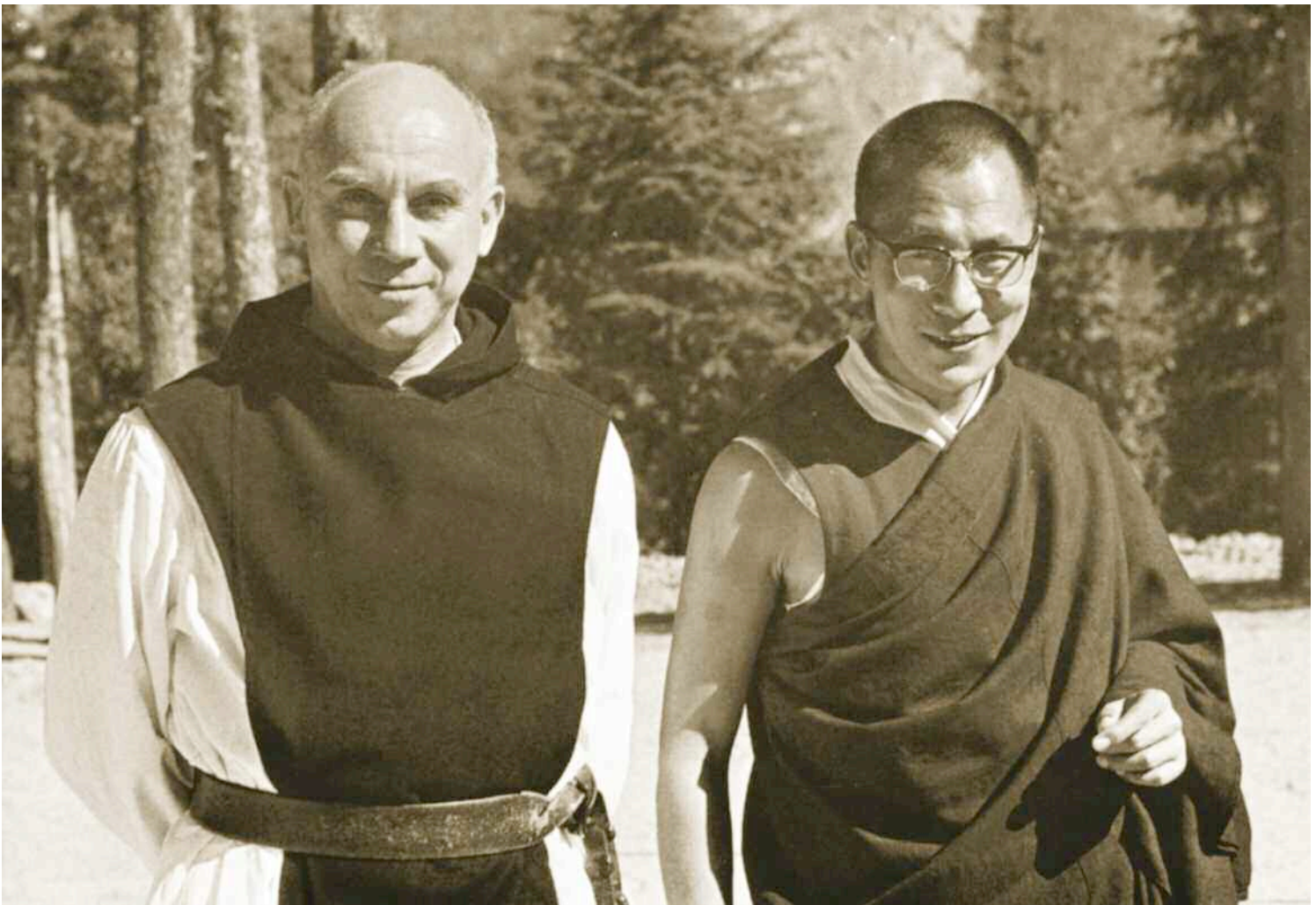
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Trappist monk Thomas Merton, seen here with the Dalai Lama, is considered one of the most influential spiritual writers of the 20th century. Merton died in 1968 while attending a monastic conference in Bangkok, Thailand. Religion News Service photo used with permission of the Merton Legacy Trust and the Merton Center at Bellarmine University.

## 40 years later

Decades after his death, the legacy of Thomas Merton looms large

**T**RAPPIST, Ky. — Many Roman Catholics and others honored the life of Trappist monk Thomas Merton last month, who died 40 years ago on Dec. 10, 1968, in a freak electrocution accident.

Merton, who influenced generations of believers with both his monastic lifestyle and his prodigious writings — some 60 books were published during his lifetime, and about as many in the 40 years since his death — is especially noted for bringing spirituality to the laity.

A documentary on Merton's life and legacy, *Soul Searching: The Journey of Thomas Merton*, aired in December on PBS stations nationwide.

“The essence of Merton's spirituality is, I think,

the humanity of it, that he really speaks to ordinary people,” said Paul Pearson, director and archivist of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Ky.

“He knows so well the great classics of Christian spirituality, but he can interpret them in a way that people in our world today can understand and relate to.”

At the time Merton rose to prominence, the church was still firmly hierarchical.

“Spirituality really belonged to the monks and nuns and bishops and what have you,” Pearson said, “whereas your ordinary lay person went to Mass on Sundays, the Mass was in Latin, they said the rosary, and that was the extent of it. And Merton, I think,

Merton's fame allowed him to correspond with presidents and popes and Nobel Prize winners but as his public reputation grew, he retreated further and further into solitude and silence.

really opened up the whole realm of contemplation and spirituality for people.”

Merton's own spiritual journey was complex and ongoing.

He was an aspiring writer and had, by his own account, lived a rootless and hedonistic life. He converted to Catholicism in 1941 and shortly thereafter arrived at the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani in the hills outside of Louisville. In 1948, when he was 33, he published his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, an overnight best-seller now considered a Christian classic.

Brother Paul Quenon, a monk at Gethsemani, received his spiritual direction from Merton and remembers his approach.

“He doesn't think of the whole world as, you know, monks,” Quenon told the PBS program *Religion & Ethics News Weekly*. “But on the other hand, he can talk to the monk in each person. He sees it as a deep enough thing, that somehow everybody has the capacity to come to the same intensity and depth of experience of God.”

Sister Suzanne Zuercher, a Benedictine nun who has studied Merton's life, found her vocation in part through Merton's writings.

“I knew I needed to be in monastic life,” Zuercher said. “I knew he was some-



one who spoke to me as no had ever spoken to me. He's funny, he's profound, he's human, he's down to earth, he's practical, he's concrete.”

Merton's fame allowed him to correspond with presidents and popes and Nobel Prize winners but as his public reputation grew, he retreated further and further into solitude and silence. Later, his abbot gave Merton permission to live for lengths of time as a hermit in a small cottage about a half-mile from the monastery.

“For him,” Quenon said, “praying was just to abide in the presence, in the presence of the Lord.”

In the 1960s, Merton's spiritual journey found him taking on the issues of the day — civil rights, materialism, the nuclear arms race and the Vietnam War. His superiors blocked the publication of some of his most strident anti-war writings.

“As he changed from the world-denying monk to the world-embracing monk of the '60s, people began to think, ‘Why should he be writing on these issues? He's away in a monastery. What does he know about them?’” Pearson said.

In 1966, when he was 51, and while recovering from back surgery in a Louisville hospital, Merton met and fell in love with a young student nurse.

“It was very brief. It was very intense.

It was very passionate,” Zuercher said. “He sometimes felt he had abandoned his vows, and at other times he felt he was living the vows of growth and fulfillment.”

The two would sometimes meet clandestinely in secluded parts of the monastery grounds but within a matter of weeks, the relationship was over. Still, Merton had been changed.

“From that time on he never thought of himself as being unloved or unlovable, and he himself learned to love in this relationship; it was the part of himself that he always felt had been underdeveloped,” Zuercher said.

Merton rededicated himself to his monastic life but as he did so, his spiritual journey took another turn as he became interested in Buddhism and Asian monasticism. In 1968, he received permission to attend a conference on monasticism in Bangkok, Thailand.

Merton was electrocuted in his Bangkok hotel room after touching a fan with faulty wiring. Since then, Merton's reputation and influence have continued to grow. Scholars have published some 60 more of his books, including seven volumes of his personal journals.

As a monk, Merton left behind just a few personal possessions — his work shirt, a cup, boots and his eyeglasses.

“With the death of Thomas Merton,” Pearson said, “we lost one of the great Catholic voices, one of the great prophetic figures within the Catholic Church, and I think that's why his books are still selling, why they're still being translated, because that message is as relevant today as when he wrote it.” **BT**

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