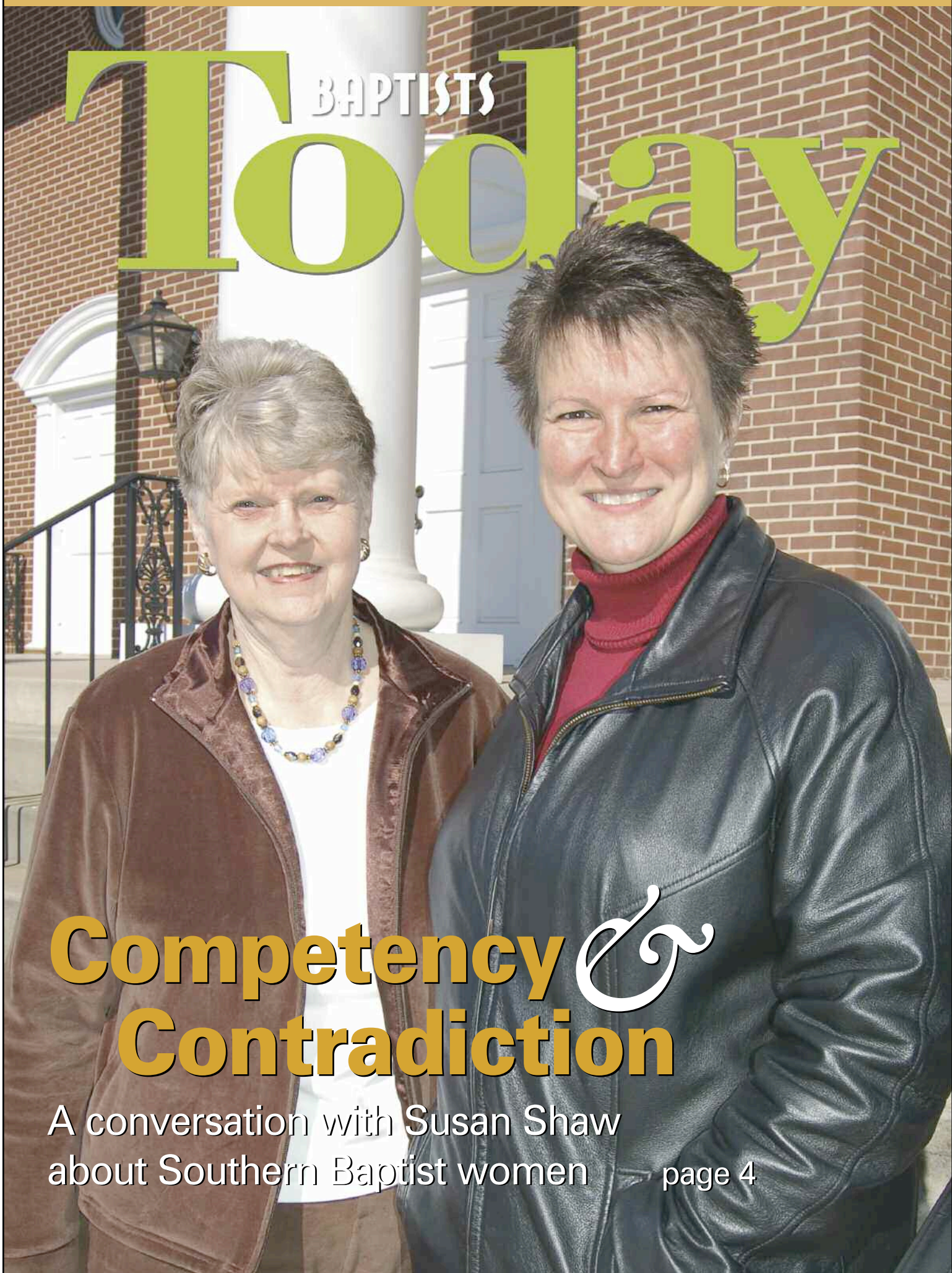
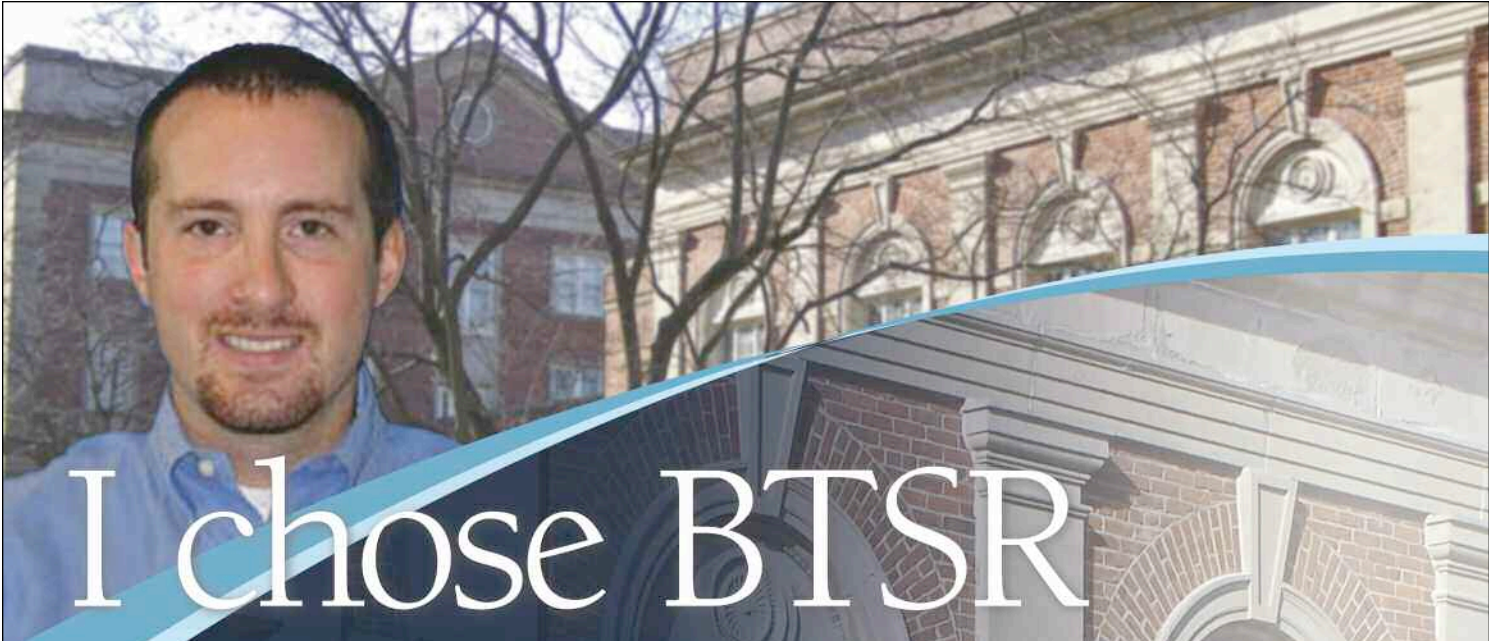


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Competency & Contradiction

A conversation with Susan Shaw
about Southern Baptist women page 4



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Street Questions

"How could Martin Luther King Jr., Jimmy Carter, Jesse Helms and Jerry Falwell all be Baptists?"

By Bruce Gourley



Cover photo by John Pierce. Susan Shaw (right) explores the varied perspectives of Southern Baptist women — including her mother JoAnn Shaw (left) — in a new book. **Page 4**

welcome

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Competency & Contradiction

A conversation with Susan Shaw about Southern Baptist women

ROME, Ga. — Susan M. Shaw is director and associate professor of the Women Studies Program at Oregon State University where also she leads the Difference, Power and Discrimination Program.

Her most recent book, *God Speaks to Us, Too: Southern Baptist Women on Church, Home and Society* (2008, The University Press of Kentucky), is an intriguing combination of personal journey and in-depth research.

In addition to her own experiences as a “raised-right” Southern Baptist, Shaw interviewed a wide variety of women from ordained female ministers to those who embrace the official Southern Baptist Convention doctrinal position that only men are divinely permitted to lead homes and churches.

Among the 159 interviewees with current or past SBC affiliations were Julie Pennington-Russell, now pastor of the First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga., and Dorothy Kelley Patterson, wife of SBC leader Paige Patterson and a member of the committee that drafted the revised *Baptist Faith & Message* doctrinal statement calling for women to “submit graciously” to their husband’s authority and affirming that only men are biblically qualified to serve as pastors.

Shaw is a graduate of Berry College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where she earned two graduate degrees. She was ordained as a Southern Baptist minister.

Shaw taught at California Baptist University and other SBC-related schools before going to Oregon State in the mid-’90s



Oregon State professor Susan Shaw (right), stands before her “home church,” West Rome Baptist in Rome, Ga., with her mother, JoAnn Shaw.

where she joined a United Church of Christ congregation. However, she aborted an effort to have her ordination transferred to the UCC — choosing instead to remain a “Baptist minister in exile.”

Baptists Today editor John Pierce caught up with Shaw while in Georgia for a visit with her family. The following conversation is adapted from that interview.

BT: Why was this the right time to do this book?

SMS: I think I had been away from Southern Baptists long enough to have some perspective on my own experiences with what has happened in the convention. The controversy and all the things that happened at Southern Seminary played rather largely in that.

I left Southern Baptists in '96, I believe it was, and joined a UCC congregation in Portland. I had some time for perspective and I think, in some ways, it was cathartic.

I needed to go back and do that. And, as I said in the book's preface, my friend Paula Sheridan said: “Somebody needs to tell our story.”

I wondered about how to do this. Do I do it in a creative way? Is it a novel or a play? I thought, no. Given the kind of women's study work I do — it's interviewing these women and making sense out of it.

Professionally, I'm at a place in my career where this kind of book makes sense too. It's integration of women's studies and religion studies. It let me pull all of that together.

BT: How did you balance or find the proper detachment that you needed professionally from your own personal journey?

SMS: I talked to people who were close to me — like my best friend who had been at Southern Seminary at the same time. I bounced a lot of stuff off of her.

I also talked to my colleagues at Oregon State who don't know the first thing about Southern Baptists to make sure I was making sense. I wanted it to be something Southern Baptists would enjoy but would also speak to a larger audience.

It was important to keep bouncing things off people. I did several speaking gigs

while doing the research and used that as a way to draw attention to the conclusions I was drawing and to see if people agreed or disagreed — if it made sense to them.

It was really helpful to have input from a lot of different people so I wouldn't be trapped in my own little way of telling the story. Then I was traveling around talking to a lot of people — and reading a lot of Baptist history and Baptist theology.

BT: I was impressed by the degree of Baptist history and doctrine included in the book. An outsider will get a better understanding of what Baptists are like. Otherwise, it wouldn't make sense to them.

SMS: There had been a lot more of that, but the book manuscript was too long. So [The University Press of] Kentucky cut a hundred pages of my manuscript. Some Baptist history went by the wayside.

BT: How is your book different from other treatments of this subject?

SMS: I think by putting women at the center it makes it different from a lot of them. Then I think it is different from like [David] Morgan's book [*Southern Baptist Sisters*], which is very much a history. He draws a lot from the historic documents — which I used.

But I have these new interviews. I think it is also different because I talked to lay women in all sorts of churches and to a lot of women in ministry. And I talked to people who are on all sides of the issues.

I went from the co-pastors [April Baker and Amy Mears] of Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville to Dorothy Patterson. That's pretty wide theology.

BT: This may seem obvious to many, but it needs to be stated. How did the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention impact women?

SMS: Particularly for moderate Baptist women who went to seminary in the '70s, '80s and early '90s, it is an absolute central piece of their identity. When I talk to them it still figures very large in their self-understanding — so it is pretty important.

For laywomen, it varies. If they were in a church that was politically active, then they are much more aware of it and have stronger

feelings about it.

If they were in churches that were distant from [the controversy], they kind of knew of it but didn't think it affected them much. But I think it affects them in ways they don't know, though, because of the shifts made in what is coming out of LifeWay now and the mission boards.

It has had a profound effect on women. Momma told me that the [Georgia Baptist] Convention has decided not to take any money from First Baptist Church of Decatur or any other church that has a woman pastor.

It also affects the women at the seminaries now. I think the women at the six Southern Baptist seminaries now are perfectly happy with what's there. But they are having a very different experience than we did.

From my perspective, having grown up in a fundamentalist congregation and then gone to Southern Seminary and felt it to be such a liberating experience, I feel great sadness that these women aren't going to hear that there are other options. They are not going to understand that there is more than one way to look at these issues. That's pretty sad to me.

BT: This may be the most important question because it deals with what I think is the most important part of the book. What is the “contradiction” you identify within Southern Baptist women?

SMS: I think it is really on one hand the sense [that] we are submissive, weak, gentle — we are servants — and then the reality that we all know is true. They run the churches, run the families and do what they want to do. It's the steel magnolia.

I don't think it's anything new in our thinking about particularly Southern women. But I think it is made more apparent in conversations with them.

For me, that pretty much gets linked to the Baptist theology that provides theological support for exactly what they are doing.

Because my experience with these women shows that they will say that they are submissive and that somebody else is the leader, but if they think God has told them to do something it does not matter what anybody else says.

I think this has given them this huge space where they negotiate agency even



See SHAW page 14 >

Quotation

“ r e m a r k s ”

“Silencing dissent is just about the most un-American, and un-Christian, thing imaginable. Our Constitution was written by a host of rowdy and intelligent dissenters. And nearly every hero of our faith started off as a dissenter.”

—Jim Evans, pastor of First Baptist Church of Auburn, Ala. (*EthicsDaily.com*)

“Somehow a number of Christian voters have been convinced that Christianity is about denying rights to people who don’t believe like we do. Jesus was never into that.”

—Columnist Jeannie Babb Taylor (Catoosa County, Ga., News)

“Global water poverty means that 2.5 billion people lack access to clean drinking water or safe sanitation. The harsh reality is that every 15 seconds a child dies somewhere around the globe because a preventable water-borne disease drains them of fluid.”

—Colleen Burroughs, executive vice president of Passport, Inc. (*ABP*)

“History shows us, through often bitter experience, that government attempts to ‘help’ religion — even in ways that may seem benign — usually end up sapping the strength and vitality from our houses of worship. A free church in a free state has worked well for more than 200 years. Such a successful formula need not be harmed.”

—Thomas A. Summers, a retired United Methodist minister in Columbia, S.C., opposing state license plates with Christian symbols and the words ‘I believe’ (*RNS*)

“Our church is deeply humbled and deeply grateful to accept him as one of our own.”

—Pastor Don Wilton of First Baptist Church of Spartanburg, S.C., to WSPA-TV on the decision of 90-year-old evangelist Billy Graham to move his longtime membership there from the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas (*BP*)

“When we consider that Jesus spoke more about money and its use than he did about grace, salvation, heaven or any other topic, we are left asking why churches ignore or avoid dealing with unjust economic arrangements.”

—Miguel De La Torre, associate professor of social ethics at Iliff School of Theology in Denver (*ABP*)

“I am convinced that the most serious error of religious leaders in the past is that of appealing to the Bible as a text book of science; the error of looking to the scriptures for information about astronomy, geology, physics, biology and other sciences ... The focus of the Bible is the essential knowledge and understanding needed to enable human beings to know God as he wants to be known and to live life in a meaningful and lasting relationship with him.”

—Veteran pastor D. Perry Ginn, in the inaugural address (“*Christian Faith and Modern Science*”) given last September to launch a lecture series he and his wife Betty established at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology

“It’s something I’ll live with the rest of my life.”

—Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair telling Yale University students in December that he is ready to accept history’s judgments on the decision to topple Saddam Hussein (*RNS*)

“I hope I’ve heard the Lord. I spend time praying and asking for wisdom. If there’s a mistake, it’s not his fault. It’s mine.”

—Christian broadcaster Pat Robertson on predictions for 2009 that include a quick stock market rebound accompanied by ‘hyperinflation’ (*ABP*)

“While Glenn’s social views are compatible with many Christian views, his beliefs in Mormonism are not. Clearly, Mormonism is a cult.”

—A press release from Focus on the Family explaining why an interview with conservative television host Glenn Beck, a Mormon, was pulled from the organization’s web site (*RNS*)

“I’ve concluded that I am a follower, but I’m not a very good one. If you get serious about the Bible, it will really mess you up.”

—Retired megachurch pastor Ed Dobson, 58, who committed to living as much like Jesus as possible for one year after reading A.J. Jacob’s book, *The Year of Living Biblically* (*RNS*)

In the news, 25 years ago . . .

Grady Cothen, 63, retired as president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board on Feb. 1, 1984, a position he had held since 1975. He called successor Lloyd Elder “the Lord’s leader for the next era...”

—*SBC Today*, February 1984

editorial

How would Jesus think?

By John Pierce

“Are you a Christian?” the student asked the professor unabashedly on the first day of an Introduction to Philosophy class.

“Well, that depends on what you mean,” he replied, signaling that concise, direct, simple responses were not going to bode well in class discussions during this term.

“Yes, I’m a Christian in that I believe that the teachings of Jesus provide the best philosophy for living,” he explained. “But, no, not in the sense of some kind of personal relationship with God.”

Our young, well-protected ears burned. Many of us were aisle-walking, soul-saved believers who petitioned God daily and routinely detected divine tugs at our hearts.

This strange idea of an intellectually constructed Christian philosophy mystified us and had no appeal. It was cold sounding — and we were into vibrant faith.

As that classroom experience returned to mind some three decades later now, my conclusion is somewhat different. Both the young, energetic Christian students and the logic-

minded professor were hitting on some levels of truth.

Christianity is relational. It is about God reaching into humanity to offer grace, purpose and meaning. It is more than a calculated, transactional act of salvation — it is about the personal, individual transformation of lives.

But dismissing the need for a rationally constructed Christian philosophy for life — and following it — can get us off course. It can cause us to see the relational aspect of faith in terms that are too self-serving.

Why is it that those of us who emphasize a close, life-changing, personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ will so often live in ways that ignore or even contradict the basic teachings and example of the one we call Lord and Savior?

The philosophy of Jesus is clear and consistent with his earthly relationships — but not so easy to emulate. And those concepts



and his examples are not hidden from us in the Gospels.

They include such important ideas as:

- Love God as completely as possible as well as loving others indiscriminately.
- Forgive as freely as we are forgiven.
- Invest most heavily in lasting rather than temporal matters.
- Care for others — especially those who suffer in great need.
- Let love be so obvious that others define us by that act and attitude.
- Rather than pursue worldly defined success, find meaningful living in repentance, faith, discipline and service.

It dawned on me a few years ago that all of Scripture really addresses only two subjects: how we relate to God and how we relate to one another. But that makes the Christian way of living no easier.

Even a lifetime of effort cannot take us to the goal. That’s where the relationship comes in. The Christian life is a journey, not simply a destination.

We need to constantly reread the Gospels and revisit our understanding of a Christian philosophy for living. Otherwise, we start making the teachings of Jesus look more like our values than his.

That’s why the so-called “biblical worldview” of most American evangelicals is not helpful to us today. In fact, it is a detriment to faithful Christian thinking and living.

It has been politicized, nationalized and reduced to a couple of pet issues at the expense of many more central teachings of Jesus.

Without serious re-examination of a basic Christian philosophy, our cozy spiritual relationships can get too focused on what we expect from God rather than God’s expectations of us.

Prayer — the communication key of relationship — gets boiled down to seeking open doors for the goods and services we desire. The desires of God and the needs of others tend to get pushed aside.

It doesn’t hurt to keep asking: “Did I get this part right?” **BT**

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'STREET QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISTS'

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

'How could Martin Luther King Jr., Jimmy Carter, Jesse Helms and Jerry Falwell all be Baptists?'

In the midst of the Great Depression in 1934, the 5-year-old son of a preacher walked the aisle of an urban Baptist church in Georgia, confessed his faith, and was baptized. Martin Luther King Jr., would later become a preacher and spearhead the Civil Rights movement, in his untimely death becoming both a martyr and one of the greatest figures in all of Baptist history.

One year after King was baptized, an 11-year-old boy, having faithfully attended church through his childhood, walked the aisle of the rural Baptist church of his Georgia hometown, confessed faith in Christ, and was baptized. Later an advocate of racial reconciliation, a Sunday school teacher and the governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter became president of the United States in 1976, introducing the concept of "born again" faith to the American public.

In his post-presidential years Carter has become a spokesperson for moderate Baptists and a precursor of a new evangelicalism that emphasizes social justice and progressive theology.

While the young King and teenage Carter grew in their faith during the 1930s, a third young boy faithfully attended a small Baptist church in rural North Carolina. Future U.S. Senator Jesse Helms built his political career in opposition to King's legacy, an unrepentant representative of southern

white conservatism.

On a cold January night in 1952 in small-town Virginia, the 18-year-old son of a bootlegger walked the aisle of a simple concrete-structure church and accepted Christ as his savior. In the ensuing years, Jerry Falwell questioned the sincerity of King and emerged as the leader of a Religious Right that condemned the faith and politics of Jimmy Carter, embraced the social conservatism of Jesse Helms, and led many white Christians into political activism with a theocratic tinge.

United in baptismal waters, the lives of Jimmy Carter, Jerry Falwell, Martin Luther King Jr., and Jesse Helms nonetheless represent divergent, and at times opposing, trajectories. Yet their baptismal experiences and diverse ideologies are both central to understanding why these four men, rarely mentioned in the same sentence, have a common faith heritage in the Baptist family.

To begin with, being Baptist is about choice, both individually and congregationally. Rejecting hierarchical religion, the Baptist faith is predicated upon an individual's voluntary decision to place one's faith in Christ.



Bruce Gourley recently received a Ph.D. in American History from Auburn University. He lives in Manhattan, Mont., where he juggles a variety of jobs including online editor for *Baptists Today* and interim director of Mercer University's Center for Baptist Studies.

Authentic faith resides in personal experience, rather than creedalism and dogma. Congregationally, each local Baptist church is autonomous. Baptism lies at the intersection of voluntary faith and local church autonomy.

Individuals choose to participate in the sacrament of believer's baptism, an outward expression of personal faith and the entryway into participation in a local Baptist community. Carter, Falwell, King and Helms, united in the act of baptism in their early years, all made a choice to be persons of faith and participate in a local Baptist community.

Second, being Baptist is about being true to one's convictions in the context of one's personal relationship with Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit, while allowing others the same freedom. Freedom of conscience is at the root of Baptist identity, the principle that Roger Williams appealed to as he established the first Baptist church in the American colonies.

Otherwise known as soul freedom or soul competency, freedom of conscience welcomes diversity in Baptist life.

Early Baptists, for example, were unable to agree among themselves about the overarching theological paradigms of their era: Calvinism and Arminianism. Later Baptists embodied diversity in such primary internal issues as communion, denominational history, mission work and music.

Diversity also characterized Baptist interaction with cultural and social issues. Abolition, women's issues, temperance and modern science were controversies of the 19th century upon which the wide range of Baptist diversity reflected the opinions of Americans at large.

Carter, Falwell, King and Helms in the 20th century were spiritual descendants of a free people who prized individual conscience above religious creedalism, and free expression above conformity.

Within this context, Jimmy Carter gradually left his Southern Baptist roots to fully embrace the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Conversely, independent, fundamentalist Baptist Jerry Falwell in the 1990s became a Southern Baptist, following the Southern Baptist Convention's takeover by fundamentalists.

Martin Luther King Jr. remained within African-American Baptist life and helped reshape the community at large during the 1950s and 1960s. And Jesse Helms, a theological and political conservative embraced by Southern Baptists, found a spiritual home in a moderate CBF-related congregation.

The freedom of the individual Baptist, while transcending religious institutions, is expressed primarily within the context of a local community. While freedom of conscience ensures a diversity of opinions in Baptist life, it is within the local church that individual Baptists come together as people of God.

Being Baptist is thus both personal and communal. Each local church has membership requirements and expectations, democratically determined and administered. The spectrum of Baptist churches ranges across many axes, including liberal to fundamentalist, Calvinistic to Free Will, social justice-oriented to Romans Road evangelistic-centered, culturally and/or politically engaged to separationist, traditional to contemporary worship, and many others.

Within these wide-ranging matrixes, no two congregations are exactly alike, and many embrace Baptists adhering to multiple perspectives. For example, Jimmy Carter's current church membership rests in a congregation, Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., that affirms women in ministry and rejects fundamentalism, two issues important to his personal faith.

Jerry Falwell's life as a Baptist pastor was centered in his Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va., a congregation that affirmed fundamentalism, actively engaged the culture wars by supporting the Republican Party, and sought special societal privileges for conservative Christians, stances mirrored in

Falwell's Moral Majority political organization.

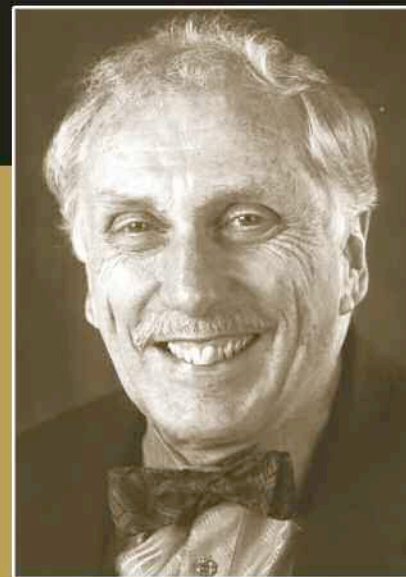
Martin Luther King's local congregation, Ebenezer Baptist in Atlanta, fostered his interest in social issues and political activism, but from the perspective of affirming equal rights for all, rather than seeking privileged status for a certain group. Jesse Helms' congregation, Hayes Barton Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., a moderate Baptist congregation, welcomed the conservative senator to the point of electing him as a deacon.

In short, former president and moderate Baptist Jimmy Carter, religious fundamentalist and socially conservative political activist Jerry Falwell, Civil Rights leader and progressive political activist Martin Luther King Jr., and hard-right U.S. Senator Jesse Helms all represent modern strands of Baptist thought.

In the big picture, there is room in the Baptist family for all who have voluntarily placed their faith in Christ and are members of one of the many diverse Baptist congregations throughout the world. The historical and contemporary diversity of Baptists allows for individual freedom of conscience, while the centrality of freedom of conscience ensures that Baptists will always be diverse. **BT**

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Preacher, civil-rights leader Otis Moss retires

By Bob Allen

CLEVELAND (ABP) —A hero of the Civil Rights Movement regarded as one of America's best African-American preachers has stepped down after 54 years as a pastor.

Otis Moss Jr., 73, preached his farewell sermon Dec. 29 to about 3,000 worshippers at Olivet Institutional Baptist Church in Cleveland. He led the congregation — one of the city's largest and noted for its commitment to social justice and civil rights — for 33 years.

A theologian, civic leader and sought-after public speaker, Moss served several churches in Georgia, including a stint as co-pastor with Martin Luther King Sr. at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, before moving to the Cleveland congregation in 1975.

As a young preacher in his native Georgia, Moss helped lead sit-ins at segregated lunch counters and fought for voting rights for blacks. He went to jail several times

for participating in sit-ins and marches. He marched with Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma, Ala., and Washington.

Orphaned at 16, Moss attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, where he became a respected student activist in the struggle for civil rights.

Moss was a special guest of President Clinton to witness the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan. He saw Pope John Paul II in a 1979 visit on the White House lawn.

He finished a doctorate from United Theological Seminary in 1990 and was twice named by *Ebony* magazine as one of America's top 15 black preachers.

Luminaries including Oprah Winfrey

were among 1,200 people at a December gala celebrating Moss' ministry. Then President-elect Obama sent a congratulatory letter telling Moss "you've left an indelible mark on all that you've touched," and "the Lord has used you mightily."

In 1997, Moss partnered with University Hospitals to open a medical center across the street from Olivet, calling it one of his proudest accomplishments.

In his farewell sermon, according to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Moss looked to the future and read from 1 Corinthians 2:9: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

Moss' son, Otis Moss III, replaced Jeremiah Wright as pastor of Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ after a controversy over remarks by Wright prompted then-candidate Obama to resign his membership in the congregation. **BT**



Otis Moss

Ella Mitchell broke ground for African-American women preachers

American Baptist News Service

ATLANTA — Ella Pearson Mitchell, who died Nov. 19 at age 91, was a distinguished religious educator, renowned preacher and celebrated author.

One half of an acclaimed ministry duo with her husband of 64 years, Henry H. Mitchell, she was a pioneer in African-American preaching and religious education.

Her reputation as a promoter and encourager of women in ministry, especially in the area of homiletics, earned her the title, "dean of African-American women preachers." Outspoken on the subject, she once declared, "I am convinced that women were ordained to be in ministry from the very beginning of time."

Dr. Mitchell compiled and edited six books, most notably her five-volume series, "Those Preaching Women," begun in 1985. In 2008, Judson Press published *Those Preaching Women: A Multicultural Collection*, co-edited by Mitchell and Valerie Bridgeman Davis.

Ella and Henry Mitchell, known for their dialogues in the pulpit, published their sermons in *Fire in the Well*. They also wrote *Together for Good: Lessons from Fifty-Five Years of Marriage* (Judson Press).

She served as president of the Board of Educational Ministries for the American Baptist Churches USA from 1959 to 1973.

"Dr. Ella Mitchell is a true Christian 'shero' of our time," said Aidsand F. Wright-Riggins III, executive director of ABC National Ministries. "She and Henry modeled black church ministerial leadership for a generation of African-American preachers. She ... also represented hope that women, and African-American women in particular, could respond affirmatively to the call of God on their lives. Their overwhelming response is her legacy."

She was the first female dean of Sisters Chapel at Spelman College in

Atlanta and the first woman to preach at Hampton Ministerial Conference in Virginia. She earned a doctor of ministry degree from Claremont School of Theology in California.

She was the second African-American woman to graduate from New York's Union Theological Seminary, which honored the Mitchells last year with their 2008 Trailblazer award, given to distinguished black graduates.

As an educator, she taught at Berkeley Baptist Divinity School (now American Baptist Seminary of the West) in California and at Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond. She also taught homiletics as a visiting professor at Atlanta's Interdenominational Theological Center from 1988-2001.

A memorial service was held Dec. 2 at the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta where she was a member. She is survived by her husband, three children and six grandchildren, and is predeceased by Henry IV, who died of leukemia at age 26. **BT**



Ella Mitchell



Above: Outgoing general secretary Alan Stanford speaks to NABF participants after dinner in the York Reading Room, formerly York Chapel, at Duke University. The hall became part of the university library after Duke Divinity School built a new chapel. Inset: Alan Stanford is presented a clock in recognition of his eight years of service to the North American Baptist Fellowship. Photos by Yutaka Takarada.

Duke hosts **BWA regional group**

North American Baptist Fellowship reflects, looks ahead

DURHAM, N.C. — Leaders of the North American Baptist Fellowship learned Jan. 5-6 that the organization is growing, even as they took steps to choose a new general secretary. Alan Stanford, who has led the organization for the past eight years, announced that he was stepping down, believing the time had come for new leadership.

For most of his tenure as general secretary, Stanford was also development director for the Baptist World Alliance, where his NABF duties were considered part of his job. Stanford left the BWA position last year to devote more time to his work as pastor of The Church at Clarendon, a growing congregation in Arlington, Va.

The NABF, a diverse fellowship of Baptist bodies and affiliated entities in North America, is one of six regional groups associated with the Baptist World Alliance, a global body of 214 different Baptist organizations.

Participants reflected on the large-scale, diverse New Baptist Covenant meeting held in Atlanta in early 2008, for which it was the

official sponsor.

NABF President David Goatley reported on a follow-up meeting held in March 2008, and said organizers concluded, "It was a good thing to happen, and a blessing to many."

While the meeting "didn't do everything it probably could have, it accomplished more than many had hoped," said Goatley, executive secretary-treasurer of the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention. "That it didn't derail was a sure sign of grace."

A series of regional meetings are set for 2009, and another national gathering is tentatively planned for sometime in 2011. It was reported that several new Baptist groups have joined the NABF since the January 2008 meeting.

Participants approved budgets of \$40,000 for both 2009 and 2010, and agreed to expand the number of at-large members from four to 12. The NABF executive committee is comprised mainly of the executive directors of the member bodies, most of whom are male. By expanding the number of at-large slots, the group hopes to include

more women and younger adults.

In other matters, the group learned of a successful visit BWA and NABF leaders made to Vietnam, which helped open the doors for the official recognition of Baptists in that country. Participants also joined in a conference call with Italian Baptist leaders and discussed the possibility of theological exchanges and possible partnership opportunities.

Also, Roy Medley, general secretary of American Baptist Churches, USA, reported on ongoing efforts at dialogue between Baptists and Muslims. (See related story on page 13.)

In 2009, NABF leaders hope to coordinate service opportunities along the Gulf Coast, the U.S./Mexico border, and in Toronto, Canada. Participants were encouraged to report activities they have planned in those areas.

The meeting was hosted by the staff of Duke Divinity School, a part of Duke University in Durham, N.C., and a new leadership initiative it has begun called "Leadership Education at Duke Divinity." **BT**

BWA responds to Muslim letter

By Bob Allen

FALLS CHURCH, Va. (ABP) — The Baptist World Alliance has issued its formal response to a 2007 letter, written to Christians by 138 Muslim leaders, describing love for God and love for neighbor as common ground between the two faiths.

BWA leaders agreed that the double love for God and neighbor “lies at the heart of the message of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels” but clarified that Baptists do not understand those commands as “the sum total of our two faiths.”

The letter cited one example, the Trinity, as “troubling” for Muslims but “absolutely essential for us in confessing the oneness of God.”

“We are well aware that Muslims believe the Christian idea of the Trinity contradicts the affirmation that God has no other being in association with him,” the Baptist leaders said, but Christians do not understand “the distinct reality” of God in three persons to mean that any other being is beside God.

“Rather, the church is attempting to express the truth that there are mysterious, unknowable depths to the personal nature of God,” the letter said. “It is also aiming to be faithful to the truth of God which has been disclosed in the event of Jesus Christ in history.”

The Baptist leaders said the letter is not the place for “a fuller exposition of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity” or an attempt to try to convince Muslims of its truth.

“We write in order to make clear that we ourselves cannot think of God as love except in terms of an eternal communion or fellowship whose unity is dynamic and relational,” the letter said. “While we rejoice to confess with you that there is one God, it is not possible for us to speak of the one God without also speaking of Trinity.”

In November 2007 a number of Christian leaders published a statement in the *New York Times* responding to “A Common Word Between Us and You” by Muslim scholars and clerics.

Signed by evangelicals including Leith Anderson and Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals, Timothy George of Samford University’s Beeson Divinity

“While we rejoice to confess with you that there is one God, it is not possible for us to speak of the one God without also speaking of Trinity.”

School, David Gushee of Mercer University, Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church, Richard Mouw of Fuller Theological Seminary and Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, the “Loving God and Neighbor Together” response expressed strong agreement with the Muslim letter.

After conservative evangelicals including John Piper, Al Mohler and Focus on the Family’s *CitizenLink* newsletter criticized the Christian letter for not explicitly affirming the deity of Christ, some of the original signers had their names removed.

During a discussion of a Baptist response to the Islamic letter last summer, according to a report on the website *EthicsDaily.com*, some Baptists expressed concern about theological language in the original letter from Islamic leaders. Meanwhile, some Baptists from areas of the world where Christians and Muslims clash questioned the need for dialogue.

After that meeting, BWA leaders drafted a formal response signed by BWA president David Coffey, General Secretary Neville Callam, Paul Fiddes of the Commission on Doctrine and Inter-Church Cooperation, and Regina Claas of the Commission on Freedom and Justice.

The BWA letter thanked the Muslim leaders for their “generous initiative” and “irenic and constructive spirit” in the 2007 letter. The leaders proposed that future discussions take place not in a central commission of the BWA but rather in regional unions and conventions engaged in joint conversations and projects for aid and development.

They also called for education of both religious teachers and members of local congregations and mosques to “change attitudes and prejudices” that undermine values of respect and honor of others despite differing religious beliefs.

“Just one way this may happen is for religious teachers in both faiths to be careful about the rhetoric they use, which may have unintended effects on followers who are less aware of theological nuances, and which may even lead to violence,” the leaders said. “To be concrete, we have one suggestion for Baptist Christians, that they avoid words to describe evangelism (or telling the gospel story) which appear threatening to others, such as ‘evangelistic crusades.’ Nor is it necessary to be critical of another faith in order to commend what we believe to be true in ours; the story of Jesus has power to persuade in its own right.”

“It is easy to slip into a violent rhetoric which arouses unpleasant memories of conflicts in the past,” the letter said. “We do not venture to suggest examples of unhelpful rhetoric to you, our Muslim friends, but hope that you might be able to identify some for yourselves. Let our rhetoric be that of love...” **BT**

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within the restrictions of the Southern Baptist Convention.

When I was at West Virginia University (this fall) somebody asked me about Catholic women. I think Catholic women have to work this out — but Catholic women have stood in opposition to the church in lots of ways.

But for Baptist women — it's right there in Baptist theology. They can ground it — and these women [interviewed for the book] certainly did to a greater extent than people would expect.

BT: So if they hear their pastor saying on an ongoing basis that female submission is God's design and that this is what the Bible teaches, then it would be very difficult for a conservative, Bible-believing Baptist woman to say, "No, you're wrong." So they embrace it on one hand, then say, "But..."

SMS: "... but I'm going to find a way to do what I need to do."

One of the most interesting things they told me — and it made sense once they described it — was when some women [including those in Mother's longtime Bible Study group nicknamed "the Clique"] were talking about why they thought only men should be deacons. It was nothing theological.

What they said was: "If we don't let men be in leadership positions — just men — then they won't do it. They kind of have to have this to themselves."

They said: "We already do everything else; they've got to do something."

That's pretty clever. They actually said it in terms that men's egos are such that they need to be the leaders of the church — so we are just going to let them do that or they won't do anything.

I laughed when they told me that. But it makes so much sense in this context.

People who are actively involved on the fundamentalist side [of the SBC] adhere to that theology much more strictly. Yet I keep finding these ways to negotiate agency.

I even think about Dorothy Patterson's description of submission. She and Paige talk about everything when they disagree. Then when it finally comes down to it if they can't come to an agreement, she says, "OK, you've got to make the decision."

So what she is describing, to me, is a qualified sort of submission. They work at it

as a partnership until they can't come to a common agreement.

BT: In 2000, James Merritt was elected as president of the Southern Baptist Convention at the same time the revised *Baptist Faith & Message* was adopted calling for wifely submission. In a press conference, a reporter asked how Merritt and his wife make decisions.

He said that he made the major decisions and his wife made the minor ones. Then he joked that throughout their marriage they had never faced a "major" decision.

In other words, he didn't answer the question about how submission works in his own marriage. It makes you want to be a fly on the wall in the homes of those who promote this theological position to see how decision-making really takes place.

SMS: That's what is so interesting. I asked [interviewees] very specifically, "How do you make decisions in your family?"

They all described partnerships. No one said to me, "My husband makes all the decisions."

Paula Sheridan talked about some of those skills Baptist women have for getting what they want. She called them "tools born of oppression."

When you are in a situation in which you are restricted by gender, there are other ways to negotiate agency. I see that so clearly.

I didn't put this in the book, but at times it almost seemed as if they had to say [that they are submissive to men] because that is what they have been told the Bible says. We better say it because we are conservative biblically — yet behavior patterns are very much part of the contemporary culture with give-and-take, partnerships and joint decisions.

BT: So could there be less difference in the ways Baptist couples — whether moderate or fundamentalist — actually do decision-making than some might assume?

SMS: I think they have a very different language they use to talk about it. Moderates use the language of egalitarian relationships.

But on a day-to-day basis, I think it is very similar. They talk it over.

I talked with some young women at a church just outside of Nashville. They were very conservative, fundamentalist.

But in the home, it was a matter of who was better at [each task] — what was more

practical for their family. They told me stories about a time when a husband wasn't working and the wife went to work. One joked about how he packed a better diaper bag. And she might keep the checkbook because she is better at that.

I think these families are very pragmatic. They have this theological notion that they believe they need to give some sort of credence to — but the reality is very practical.

BT: However, there does seem to be a growing number of young Southern Baptist seminarians and recent graduates who have embraced a fundamentalist model of family that calls for having a large number of children to be home-schooled by a wife who does not work outside of the home.

SMS: I'm a little distressed that I had not heard of "full-quiver theology" [using Psalm 127:3-5 as a call for couples to have as many children as possible] until recently. I was shocked. That was something so new for Baptists.

I really do think that is again about the control of women. If women are constantly pregnant — and at home raising all these children and home-schooling them — then they are emotionally and economically dependent. They are not going to be able to exercise a whole of autonomy.

But, again, I believe you see some differences in the people who are out there leading and making pronouncements and those in the churches who are much more practical.

There was no one in the 159 people I interviewed talking about [full-quiver theology].

BT: Recently a chapel speaker at Southwestern Seminary even stirred up a debate over the appropriateness of birth control.

SMS: Yes. Anytime Southern Baptists do something all my colleagues think they need to send it to me.

All of that may be surprising, but I think it ends up being a backlash to the advances women are making. So the more women make advances in society, I think, the more there is a need to control that.

Karen McCarthy Brown talks about the need for fundamentalism — among whatever religious groups — to control women. Women represent the "other" among fundamentalists and so there is a great need to control them.

So they begin to say: “You don’t have access to contraception. You’ve got to have as many children as God gives you. You need to home-school them.”

Then it really becomes about keeping women isolated in the domestic sphere where they don’t have access to the resources that might allow them to challenge that.

BT: If you are a climber in your profession, isn’t it convenient to have a theology that eliminates half of the competition?

SMS: I think that’s really true. There is some research about “male space” — that came out of women who do geography, interestingly enough.

One of the characteristics of “male space” is the need to restrict access in order to minimize competition. As long as women can’t get in, it eliminates half of the competition.

I think in some ways the seminaries and the pulpits become those “male spaces” where they need to minimize competition.

The women I went to seminary with were really good — they were really good preachers and really good pastors. But they were in competition; we saw that routinely.

BT: That seems consistent with the Georgia Baptist Convention leadership’s need to take formal action this fall against a female pastor. Disagreeing with the church’s decision is not enough. They are angry and want to be punitive. It is threatening to them in some way — more than just a theological disagreement.

SMS: Yeah. It was so interesting that they did that.

I have known Julie [Pennington-Russell] for maybe 20 years now. She was at Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church in San Francisco when I was teaching at Cal Baptist at Riverside. Then when I did the interview [for the book] she was in Waco.

Julie is an amazing preacher and pastor. The people at her church in Waco just adored her. Those young women at [Baylor’s] Truett [Seminary] looked up to her; she was a role model.

So I could see where Julie — in theory — is a threat. But, if you meet her, she is one of the most gentle, kind people.

For [Georgia Baptists] to go after [Decatur First Baptist] like that is interesting. It reminded me of what the Floyd County Baptist Association did when North Broad Baptist Church [in Rome, Ga.] called Katrina

Brooks as co-pastor a few years ago.

It is interesting to me that so many years after the fundamentalists took over [the SBC] there are still these places where there is a need to purge — particularly around women.

BT: What in all of this research for the book was your biggest surprise?

SMS: (Laugh) Nobody is going to believe it. It was how much I enjoyed talking to Dorothy Patterson.

Dorothy is a force of nature. She has pizzazz. When she comes into a room she is a presence.

She is gracious. I interviewed her in her home and had lunch with her and Paige.

I do write about this in the book — this sort of sadness that came when she pulled out that picture of her as “Queen Regent in Service” [the highest level in the denomination’s Girls’ Auxiliary program].

A part of me thought: “You know, we’re all the same. Why couldn’t we find a way to work around our differences? Why is it so much easier for those people to work with Nazarenes and other groups than it is to work with other Baptists who happen to be different from them?”

I was a little surprised at how sad that made me. I thought, “Wow, we couldn’t find a way.”

BT: While Southern Baptists have codified their position on women in the 2000 *Baptist Faith & Message*, they have been extremely inconsistent in its application.

They say the Bible is clear on this subject. Yet some Southern Baptist leaders apply the restrictions to “senior pastors” only while others limit women in other roles such as any ministry position, deacons, chaplains, missionary supervisors and even as a Hebrew professor [Sheri Klouda at Southwestern Seminary where Paige Patterson is president].

If the Bible is clear on the subject, why do Southern Baptist fundamentalists have trouble with its application?

SMS: I never thought this was only about biblical interpretation. I always thought this was about the progress of women.

Look at the timing. In 1979, when the controversy bubbles over and the first fundamentalist SBC president is elected. What had just happened?

We had just spent over a decade in the

women’s movement. Women were making incredible progress.

Suddenly in the ’70s there is an influx of women in the seminaries claiming equality — saying, “We also have been called and should therefore be ordained, be pastors. We are as gifted as our male colleagues.”

I think sometimes the histories gloss over what is to me a glaring corollary. I think they see what happened to women as maybe tangential to the controversy over the Bible, where I think it is as central.

The progress of women was seen as primary evidence of theological liberalism.

BT: You wrote that the central theme of your book is soul competency. How so?

SMS: It’s the thing that sort of explains the contradiction.

I asked my respondents, “What does it mean to you to be Baptist?”

[Soul competency] is what they described over and over again. Some called it that, and others called it the priesthood of the believer.

Others just described it: “I don’t need a mediator between God and me. I can go directly to God. I can read the Bible for myself.”

Not surprising, I heard that over and over no matter where I was or whether they were out of fundamentalist, conservative, moderate or liberal churches. That’s what people described to me.

BT: I guess that’s why fundamentalist leaders tend to downplay or discount this Baptist doctrine. It gives these women a license to think and act for themselves.

SMS: It does. Over and over I asked Baptist women if it’s OK for them to disagree with their pastors. They said: “Yes.”

When I asked why, they said: “Because God speaks to me.”

They would say of their pastor, “I have great respect for *him* (always), but I can still read the Bible for myself.”

Nobody said: “Well, he is the pastor so I have to believe what he said.”

BT: Girls are taught in Sunday school and other church programs — as are boys — that God loves them and calls them and has great things in store for their lives if they

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respond faithfully. Then, in early adulthood, roadblocks appear that limit their responses to God's calling. Have Southern Baptists sent a mixed message to women?

SMS: Oh, yes. I think about what one of my respondents said: "They told us we could be anything God calls us to be. They taught us to memorize Scripture, to speak in front of the church and to be leaders. What did they think we were going to do with that?"

It was absolutely mixed. "Be open to the will of God. Do whatever God calls you to do. And God speaks directly to you. Only you can interpret the Bible for yourself."

My mother — even though she says she wouldn't want a woman as her pastor — says: "If they are preaching the Gospel, why would we tell them not to?"

I think that is pretty good for someone with a high school education but reads the Bible for herself and believes she is competent to do that. And that's a question I haven't yet heard any of the fundamentalists answer.

If they're preaching the Gospel, why wouldn't you want that? Isn't that what we are supposed to do?

BT: Paige and Dorothy Patterson are so closely associated with the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC and the doctrinal position that men are to lead the church and home. Can you share a little more about your visit with them?

SMS: Not that he would remember it, but I met Paige (while I was in high school) because, when Jerry Vines left as pastor the first time, West Rome Baptist Church tried to call him. But I think he had just taken his position at Criswell College.

I didn't know how they would respond to me. But I went in and didn't make any pretension to be anything other than what I am: I am a feminist; I teach at a state university; I'm doing this book; I went to Southern Seminary and here are the professors that I had and I loved.

They were incredibly kind. We talked about people we knew in common. We laughed a lot; shared stories.

Dorothy said something that did stick with me. It was real important when I did the book. She talked about how sometimes —

when she did these interviews — feminists wouldn't always be accurate in reporting what she said. So I wanted to be real sure of that.

I did something I don't usually do. I sent to her the passages where I quoted her before I published the book. I really did try to be true to what she said.

I didn't realize that Paige was going to join us for lunch. But I really did enjoy that.

It was so interesting. Dorothy's assistant, who is a Ph.D. student in theology, joined us for lunch too. I remember being sort of surprised, thinking: "So a woman can't teach theology but can still study it." I wasn't sure to what end.

[Hebrew professor] Sheri Klouda [later dismissed by Paige Patterson because of her gender] was still [at Southwestern Seminary] at the time. But she had a feeling it was coming.

In so many ways we would have disagreed, but here was some space where I think she could at least find support in my standing there and going: "Wow, I can't believe this either. That's shocking to me."

She had left by the time I finished the book, so I went back and added some things.

BT: On page 199 you wrote: "The idealized version of family and gender touted by conservative Southern Baptists assumes good, faithful men behaving righteously in relation to women in their lives." Of course, that is not the case. Does this theological position increase the potential for abuse?

SMS: I don't think the statistics support that. I talked to Nancy Mason Clark, who is a big researcher in that field of domestic violence and sexual abuse in religious families.

Interestingly, the statistics hold up whether you are talking about secular families, religious families, fundamentalist families. I think probably the effect it does have is that those people are less likely to leave [an abusive] relationship, less likely to seek out help and less likely to find supportive, helpful pastors.

Women in fundamentalist families get told what Bill Gothard always said: "Go back home; be submissive; you pray and God will change his heart."

In more moderate churches you are more likely to hear: "Get out of there. Call the cops. Call a lawyer. Let's get you in a shelter."

I think it is access to resources rather than the actual abuse itself.

BT: How much did you hear the argument that those who affirm women in ministry and other leadership roles are bringing secular feminism into the church at the expense of biblical authority?

SMS: The only person who said that was a woman who was teaching at Southern Seminary at the time [of the interview]. Other people didn't suggest that.

Even those who didn't want to identify as feminists themselves, usually older ones, begrudgingly admitted that feminism brought about some needed changes.

"We need equal pay for equal work and equal employment opportunities," they said. "And we needed support against domestic violence."

They weren't against feminist ideals. But they had bought into some of the stereotypical notions of feminist extremes — which there are feminist extremes. To a great extent, I don't think they understand the range of feminism.

Most of them would say, ontologically, they believe in full equality between men and women. That's what Dorothy Patterson affirms: There are difference roles, but we are ontologically equal.

But, for me, those "different roles" always end up with men in power.

BT: Older Baptist women have really witnessed a lot of sociological change in their lifetimes, haven't they?

SMS: Some older women would say: "The women's movement didn't do much for me because I was raising my family. But it did a lot for my daughter. I didn't want her to get paid less, and I wanted her to go to school and have every opportunity."

I see that in my own mother. She never limited what my sister and I could or couldn't do. They always said: "You can do anything; get out there and do it."

Had they thought that somebody or something was limiting us by gender, they would have been appalled by it.

Middle-aged women were much more likely to say: "Oh, yes, I'm a feminist."

Young women kind of went one of two ways. They were either decidedly feminist or they were more conservative than their grandmothers basically. **BT**

Editor's note: God Speaks to Us, Too was published by The University Press of Kentucky (859-257-8400).

'True Woman Manifesto' sponsors seek counter-revolution to feminism

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — A group of conservative Christian women is seeking 100,000 signatures on a "True Woman Manifesto" aimed at sparking a counter-revolution to the feminist movement of the 1960s.

Introduced at a gathering of more than 6,000 women in early October, the document calls not for equal rights, but instead proclaims that men and women are created to reflect God's image in "complementary and distinct ways."

That includes the idea that women are called "to honor and support God-ordained male leadership in the home and in the church."

"That is very explosive stuff," organizer Mary Kassian described the campaign Nov. 25 on a radio program hosted by Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. "It is countercultural, because the world would be screaming at us, women would be screaming at us: 'What are you doing? All those rights that we fought so hard for, how can you [tell us to] just give that up and say that men are to be the heads of the homes?'"

"The basis on which we do that is because we believe that is taught in Scripture," Kassian explained. "And we believe that is a blessing for women and not a curse against women, and that actually when we live according to God's design, we find blessing and peace and wholeness in our lives."

The idea for the True Woman '08 Conference held Oct. 9-11 and webcast from Schaumburg, Ill., came as Kassian — an author, speaker and distinguished professor at the Louisville, Ky.-based seminary — and Christian radio broadcaster Nancy Leigh DeMoss discussed how feminism revolutionized women's lives.

Recognizing that revolution began with a meeting of only a few women, they asked why there couldn't be a similar movement sparked by a meeting of women driven not by feminist ideals, but by teachings of the Bible.

"We are believing God for a movement of reformation and revival in the hearts and



homes of Christian women all around this world," DeMoss said in the conference's closing address. "I just believe there is a massive women's movement of true women in those millions of women who are able to capture all kinds of battlefronts for Christ."

DeMoss said there are "a lot of truly desperate housewives" in homes and churches, who are not finding fulfillment in what God intended for them to be.

Kassian told the gathering that women have come a long way in the last 50 years, but not always in the right direction. While they may not have been able to identify the source of their values, she said, the idea of complementary roles for men and women was part of the social landscape until after the 1950s.

In the 1950s, for example, the Cleaver family in the TV sitcom "Leave it to Beaver" exemplified the ideal suburban family. In contrast, she said, during the last decade media images overwhelmingly portrayed women as being in charge, while men were "marginalized and de-masculinized" into characters that are whiny, needy, not-too-bright and totally unreliable.

Kassian said even Christian women have been influenced by feminism more than they realize, including the idea that patriarchy — the idea of submitting to male authority — is the source of all their heartache and problems.

Kassian told radio host Al Mohler the solution is not going back to the 19th century but to Scripture. Instead of "wimpy women," she said the movement is out to recruit women who are "doctrinally strong and theologically strong" and who will "study and search Scripture and come to scriptural conclusions."

"I believe part of the reason the feminist movement was so successful throughout the '60s was that you had a whole culture that was just living by [a] Judeo-Christian framework in the '50s, without really thinking about [it]. And then when feminism came in with these new ideas, a lot of Christian women even began to embrace them," she said.

"We are interested in a countercultural movement," Kassian said, that looks nothing like "Leave it to Beaver" or the 1950s.

"True Woman is taking the Bible and God's plan for womanhood and applying it to my life today in this millennium, in this year, and for what that looks like for single women, for married women, for women at all stages of life," Kassian said.

Mohler, along with Kassian, a member of the Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, termed the manifesto "a very important document."

"These are shots that ought to be heard around the world," Mohler said. **BT**

2009

The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Charles Qualls



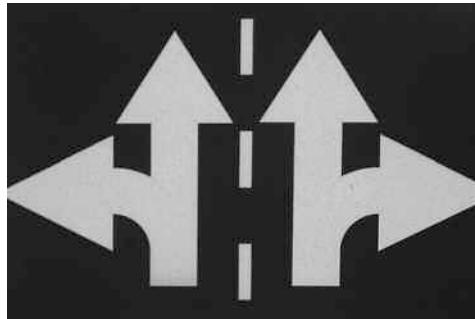
Embracing the excluded: Divorce recovery ministries

Cheryl is a 40-year-old sales person in the divorce recovery group. Her 20-year marriage has just entered into separation, and the battle with her husband is on. Successful in her own career, she'll be okay financially. It's her heart and her confidence that are a little dinged up.

Darcy is a 48-year-old graduate student. Her marriage of 18 years ended recently when her husband announced reconciliation with his first wife. In divorce recovery, she realized they had never connected emotionally to begin with.

Churches have a unique opportunity to counter the prevailing cultural assumptions when it comes to life realities such as divorce. Because the rate of first marriages ending in divorce continues to hover just below 50 percent, communities across America provide the need for divorce support. The church has a public relations problem, though. Divorcees assume the church will sit in judgment rather than respond in grace. By working to offer quality divorce recovery programs, congregations can reach out with love, safety and support in tough times.

Most participants bring some degree of exclusion from relationships as they enter divorce recovery. Many have noticed a change in the way even close friends and family members act toward them because of their divorce. Others feel isolated or focused upon even by strangers, as though "everyone" knows they have experienced a broken marriage. They say things similar to: "My friends and family all want me to be 'fixed' — in other words they want me back to normal since I'm driving



them all crazy right now." Some indicate, "There's a distance, although it's hard to describe." Plainly, some express a version of "I feel like everyone is staring at me."

So what can churches offer through divorce recovery ministries that might help? Here are some ingredients in good divorce support work:

- Skilled leadership that connects with divorcing participants (ex: divorcees, ministers, counselors, empathetic church members)
- A willingness to not attach bottom-line type growth or financial numbers to justify the program
- Support resources such as counselors for referral as needed or a skilled life-transition coach.
- Investment in costs for training, print/electronic resources, promotion/advertising costs (with participants possibly providing some funding)
- The discipline to resist trying to "fix" participants and their marriages, and focusing on grace rather than guilt
- Evaluating participants who may become future leaders of the program

At Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, we offer a two-level program consisting of eight-week small groups. The first level focuses on the grief and emotion of the experience, while

the second level works at reconnecting with relational health and hope. Each group uses a book for the study, and the entry-level group spends a few moments watching a video based on that week's chapter before easing into discussion for the balance of the time. These entry-level groups are offered twice annually, with an advanced-level group offered once a year to all who have completed the entry level.

What happens when a church reaches out to its community by offering a support experience such as divorce recovery? First, life needs are being met if the group is structured well and offered with a degree of competence. Weak, manipulative or guilt-producing divorce work is not supportive.

Next, churches provide a trustworthy place for their members and friends to receive help when divorce or separation arises. While groups may come and go with only community members in them, there will be occasions when church or family members need a place to turn to.

An additional outcome is that the church's reputation is strengthened. A banner in the front yard advertising such a program speaks well. It entices passersby to consider what kind of congregation might offer such support, even in the eyes of those who have no need for the group.

Divorce recovery groups, and others like them, are not always easy. They cause ministers and leaders alike to walk into murky water with persons in pain. Participants are not always easy to be around. Sometimes the leaders will have to remember that they can't save everyone from self-destructive patterns. Many participants will use the church's program, only to disappear back into the city again upon completion. Still, Christ's call to support and to uphold is upon believers who have the resources to be of help. **BT**

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 Charles Qualls, associate pastor for pastoral care at Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta. Resource Page Archives are available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.

2009 Formations Commentary

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

**LESSONS FOR:
Sunday, March
1-29, 2009**

**“WHAT WOULD
JESUS SAY (WWJS)?”**

Written by Mack
Dennis, pastor of First Baptist Church
of Mount Gilead, N.C.



Mar. 1, 2009

WWJS about the Bible?

Matthew 4:1-11

In today's text, Jesus battles the tempter using verses from Deuteronomy 6 and 8. Reread these chapters to see the larger context of his counterattack. Notice, he is not quoting scripture in a desperate attempt to avoid sinning. Though he is tempted, he is in control. His responses to the tempter are calculated. The devil is outmatched, not because Jesus has quoted scripture (even the devil can do that — see v. 6), but because Jesus is embodying the scripture. He responds to the tempter as the one who fulfills the Bible with his life.

The devil is crafty, but here his ignorance is exposed. He cannot manipulate Jesus by quoting a psalm because Jesus is a living psalm. He is the living prayer the psalms seek to shape. Stanley Hauerwas says, “In truth only one life, the life of Jesus, has been the perfect prayer the Psalms are meant to form” (*Cross-Shattered Christ*, 61).

For example, imagine getting in an argument with William Shakespeare and quoting *Hamlet* in a vain attempt to outwit him. As the author of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare would have a more effective retort. The devil tries to outwit Jesus in a similar way. He foolishly uses holy words to outwit the one who is the Word.

The tempter has it easier with sinners like us. Sometimes the best we can do when tempted is lob a Hail Mary verse of scripture at the devil. Martin Luther would sometimes even yell aloud, “I'm baptized! I'm baptized!” to avoid capitulating to temptation. While this

combative tactic can be helpful against the devil, it is not Jesus' strategy here.

If we would outmaneuver the tempter as Jesus' disciples, we must saturate ourselves with the same scriptures that shape and reveal Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 and 6:13, as well as 8:3. All three verses come from chapters where Moses intricately links the commandments with abundant life. “Observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply...” (6:3). Then, “This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, so that you may live...” (8:1).

Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy as he resists temptation. But more importantly, he quotes them because the scriptures are inseparable from his life as the Son of God. Jesus embodies the truth Deuteronomy communicates to us.

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness isn't a random episode early in his ministry. Rather, Matthew 4:1-11 flows naturally from Jesus' baptism in 3:13-17, after which a voice from heaven says, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” The reason the Father is well pleased with the Son is because of the Son's obedience to the Father. By his baptism, and during temptation, Jesus reveals the kind of obedience Moses commends to the people of God in Deuteronomy. His is a diligent obedience marked by the continual reading of the scriptures.

It is no coincidence that Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6. This is the same chapter where Moses says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (v. 5). Immediately following this verse is the decree to keep these commandments in our hearts; to recite them to our children and talk about them when we're at home and away, when we lie down and when we rise; to bind them as signs on our hands and fix them as emblems on our foreheads; and to write them on the doorposts of our homes and on our gates.

This is the kind of diligent scripture read-

ing required if we would master temptation in the footsteps of Jesus. Only by literally saturating our hearts and minds with the God of the Bible will we ever find the strength to battle temptation.

Read Matthew 12:43-45. See how the unclean spirit returns to the heart of a person after wandering “through waterless regions looking for a resting place.” Since it cannot find a new home, it returns to the person it first left, finds him to be cleaned up and “put in order,” and so returns with seven other spirits “more evil than itself.” The person who has warded off a demon ends up in a situation seven times worse than before. Why? Because when the unclean spirit leaves the person, that person finds no good replacement. The person's heart, though freed from the unclean spirit, remains empty.

The heart and mind of a Christian must be so filled with the knowledge and wisdom of the Bible that temptation is continually greeted with a “No Vacancy” sign. Matthew 4:11 tells us, “Then the devil left him.” The devil leaves Jesus because Jesus has kept “these words that I am commanding you today in [his] heart” (Deut. 6:6).

So then, what would Jesus say about the Bible? He would say not to quote it superficially. Instead, through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus shows us we must live the scriptures. He shows us that merely quoting scripture in the face of temptation may even make matters worse. Through Jesus, we learn that the verses of scripture we speak against the devil should well up from lives lived so faithfully that only the God of the Bible could have shaped them.

Mar. 8, 2009

WWJS about poverty?

Luke 16:19-31

During a recent Group of Eight (G8) summit in Hokkaido, Japan, the leaders of the world's most powerful countries enjoyed an eight-course, 18-dish meal just before discussing



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hunger and the world food crisis. This is a perfect modern version of Luke 16:19-31. The rich feast sumptuously, while the poor lie hungry and miserable outside the gate.

Take note of the “chasm” (v. 26). The Greek word for the size of this chasm is *mega*. This is no ordinary divide, but a *mega chasm*, an impassable, eternal space separating the rich man [“Dives”] from Lazarus. After their deaths, the mega chasm becomes “fixed,” making post-mortem reconciliation impossible.

We see this chasm stretching wider throughout the text. In the first verse, the separation between the two men is palpable, but not yet permanent. The rich man dresses, eats and lives in luxury, but shares nothing with Lazarus. The rich man’s head is above the table, while Lazarus must bear the humiliation of eating the crumbs beneath the table. Since the dogs are licking Lazarus’s sores, we can assume the rich man even has a nicer complexion.

Yet, the chasm between Dives and Lazarus, though great, is not yet fixed. There is still time for the rich man to share his wealth and thus bridge the divide. But by verse 22, Lazarus dies and is “carried away by the angels to be with Abraham.” Dives dies and is only “buried.” Even their death experiences are separate.

Only now, the last has become first, carried to glory by angels. The first has become last, tossed in a pine box, his smooth skin reduced to a scrumptious feast for worms. Lazarus is in the comfort of Abraham’s bosom, while the rich man is tormented. The rich man pleads with Abraham and asks him to send Lazarus to alleviate his agony. Abraham denies his request. Those wanting to pass over the chasm from either direction can no longer do so (v. 26).

In his last Sunday sermon (March 1968), preaching at the National Cathedral just days before his assassination, Martin Luther King delivered a powerful interpretation of this parable. According to King, “Dives didn’t go to hell because he was rich; Dives didn’t realize that his wealth was his opportunity. It was his opportunity to bridge the gulf that separated him from his brother Lazarus. Dives went to hell because he was passed by Lazarus every day and he never really saw him. He went to hell because he allowed his brother to become invisible.”

Notice how Dives refers to Lazarus in the third person: “Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue” (v. 24). Even in death, the rich man wants the

poor man to do the manual labor, and he doesn’t even have the tact to ask Lazarus directly. After death, Dives can’t speak directly to Lazarus — he never cultivated a relationship with the beggar when he had the chance. Lazarus, his closest neighbor, lay at the gate. Lazarus stood at the door waiting to come in, not just to eat with Dives, but to be with another human. Both men were impoverished and lonely. The rich man was so because he withheld not only his material goods from Lazarus, but also himself, eliminating the possibility of friendship.

Jesus says in John 12:8, “You always have the poor with you...” This doesn’t just mean the poor will always be “around” or that there will always be political systems that perpetuate economic injustice. Jesus is saying we will always have the poor with us. He couldn’t imagine his church not being with the poor. Jesus assumes there will be no chasms of any width or depth between his disciples and the poor. In fact, when he says, “Blessed are you who are in poverty” (Luke 6:20), he is speaking directly to his disciples.

Poverty is part of following Jesus. Disciples will always be with the poor because they will be poor themselves, or because they will be devoted to true friendship with people in poverty.

Shane Claiborne, founder of The Simple Way community in Philadelphia, often tells the story of his involvement with homeless people living in an abandoned sanctuary in the city. The local diocese tried to evict them (mostly women and children) from the old church. Others heard of this and came to help, providing many basic necessities. But one very wealthy local congregation had a package sent to the front steps of the church. Inside were boxes of microwave popcorn. A note read, “For the Homeless.”

It’s good to send money for missions. It’s good to build clothes closets, work in food pantries and go on mission trips. These are essential acts of faith. But what Jesus says about poverty calls us to go even further, so that we become friends with the poor. We must learn their names, their stories, their struggles. And they must learn ours. As the preacher, James Forbes, has often said, “Nobody gets to heaven without a reference letter from the poor.”

Jesus gives the poor a typewriter and says, “I need names and addresses of the people you know and love.” The question is, will the blessed poor know our names by heart, or will they need a church pictorial directory for help?

Mar. 15, 2009

WWJS about discipleship?

Mark 8:34-9:1

In today’s lesson, Jesus calls his disciples into life-threatening discipleship: If any would follow him, “let them deny themselves and take up their cross” (v. 34). We are tempted to remove this difficult proclamation from its context. Then we can make the cross — Rome’s brutal method of capital punishment — about us. We had much rather define the cross in terms of our personal suffering. Though we may faithfully endure personal suffering, the suffering of Jesus’ cross is taken up, rather than randomly or passively received.

The text is set in the villages surrounding Caesarea Philippi (v. 27), which sat on the Mediterranean coast and served as the capital of Herod’s son Philip’s tetrarchy (a district under Roman rule). As a pagan city, Caesarea was home to “a magnificent temple in honor of the [Roman] emperor” (Douglas A. Hare, *Mark*, 98).

Caesarea was also home to those with authority to issue the death penalty. This setting directs our interpretation. Jesus’ call to follow him occurs within earshot of those who use violence to exert their power.

Secular power is forceful and often merciless. It assumes suffering is a sign of weakness. Though he confesses Jesus as the Messiah (8:29), Peter still believes in secular power. He cannot imagine why the Son of Man must suffer. In close proximity to the worldly powers in Caesarea, the tension builds for Peter because Peter believes Jesus will defeat Rome militarily. But a different tension is building for Jesus. By suffering on the cross, he will expose the weakness of worldly power. Jesus is purposeful in teaching his disciples this disturbing lesson near Caesarea. Power like that issued forth from Caesarea will be overthrown on Christ’s cross.

When Christians today hear the call to take up our cross, we hear the word “cross” as though we know how the story ends. Christ’s resurrection blocks our view of the cross. The horror of the cross becomes distant to us, often relegated to symbolic placement in sanctuaries or pieces of jewelry.

But the crowd in Mark 8 would have trembled to hear Jesus’ command. They would have heard the word “cross” in terms of capital punishment. Jesus’ message to his disciples and the surrounding crowd is stunning:



Faithfully following Jesus could get you killed.

Iraqi Christians will hear Jesus' call to discipleship differently than American Christians. War and terrorism have decimated their churches. The churches that remain have endured constant threats, torture and murder. Iraqi Christians don't have to imagine what Jesus means in Mark 8. For them, simply going to worship is a literal fulfillment of 8:34. We have much to learn from their faithfulness. The blood of their martyrs is seed for the church.

Christians in the United States enjoy freedom from violent religious persecution. How are we to hear Jesus' call to life-threatening discipleship? Should we be seeking death purposefully, acting out our faith in ways that will surely get us killed? To do so would be to seek our own glory. This is not what it means to take up our cross. Rather, our churches should be shaping us into disciples who seek not their own cross, but the cross of Jesus. It is his particular cross we take up. Only by bearing the cross of Christ can we be so faithful that if unbelievers in America were allowed to kill us they would.

The cross of Christ is costly. It demands everything from those who lift it up. Disciples of Jesus — by definition — don't accept philosophical ideals or assent to religious principles. The way of life we take up in Christ cannot be reduced to a salvation plan. It wells up only from the new life inside us. "It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

A disciple of Jesus is one in whom Jesus fully dwells. At baptism, our old selves die and make way for Christ's spirit to fill us from within. But Christ's spirit calls us into a life of constant dying. Like St. Paul, we "die every day" (1 Cor. 15:31).

American Christians living in the luxury of religious freedom can't understand this until we understand that the cross isn't a reflection of our personal struggles, whatever they may be. To be sure, in Mark 8, the call to take up the Christ is personalized. But it isn't privatized. That is, each disciple must take up his or her cross, but there is only one kind of cross — the cross of Christ.

Our private burdens don't invite the wrath of the powers that be. But the cross of Christ is a direct result of Jesus' threatening way of life. One of the reasons the authorities killed Jesus is because he exposed the weakness of their power. Those of us who follow in his footsteps will incite the world's violence. But we are not fearful, for to us, "living is Christ and dying is

gain" (Phil. 1:21). Thus, Jesus can say, "There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power" (Mark 9:1).

Though cross-bearing may get us hurt or even killed, disciples carrying their cross won't taste death. Why? Because, for Christ's sake, they have already lost their lives (v. 35).

Mar. 22, 2009

WWJS about evangelism?

John 4:31-38

Non-fundamentalist Baptists have a hard time with what often occurs in the name of evangelism. We don't want to manipulate or coerce people with vague threats of eternal punishment. To most of us, the motive behind the question, "Where would you go if you died tonight?" is low-brow and philistine. It abets cheap grace, salvation without discernment, capitulation instead of inspiration, and discipline apart from love.

We believe we know how not to evangelize. But an increasingly pagan culture presents complex challenges to sharing the Gospel with integrity. How can we as individuals and churches do evangelism with deep care and passion? Are there ways to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ besides merely asking friends to come with us to church?

The linchpin of today's text is verse 35. In Greek, the verse reads, "Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look in wonder at the fields, because they are already white to harvest." The literal Greek is more helpful than the NIV's version, "open your eyes and look," and the NRSV's version, "look around you, and see."

First, there's a major difference between "lift up your eyes" and the latter two translations. Why? Because the call to lift up our eyes implies not that our eyes have been closed, but that our eyes are pointed in the wrong direction — down. We're not aware of the ripe fields because we're too busy staring at our feet. Nor is Jesus telling us the first step to faithful evangelism is to "look around." Rather, he calls us to lift our attention up and away from selfish concern and redirect it to our neighbor.

Jesus' command in verse 35 echoes Psalm 121:1, "I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

God and the communion of saints who have gone before us have already sown the seed. They have already given us the help we need to evangelize. The harvest is ripe because of God's work in the world through the church. Let no one say there will be no harvest to see upon looking up. The question is not whether there is anything to reap. There is only the commissioning to reap what others have sown (John 4:38).

Isaiah tells those who stand among the ruins of Jerusalem, "Lift up your eyes all around and see; they all gather, they come to you" (49:18). Isaiah comforts those who couldn't imagine a brighter future for God's people. Isaiah would say to our churches, "Don't hang your heads over declining membership roles and sparse gatherings. Remember, they all gather; they come to you. Look up, and you'll see them coming!"

Jesus' call to look up is incomplete apart from its corresponding invitation. We cannot simply acknowledge that the fields are white to harvest. We must also "look in wonder" at them. The verb translated "see" in verse 35 is more accurately translated as "look in wonder," "contemplate" or "behold." We must lift up our eyes with a "careful and deliberate vision which interprets ... its object" (G. Abbott Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 203).

We cannot separate today's text from the story that precedes it — of Jesus evangelizing the woman of Samaria. That Jesus would lift up his eyes to a Samaritan woman is scandalous in three ways.

First, it wasn't proper for men to speak to women in public (4:27). Second, this woman was a Samaritan. Third, Jesus was sharing water with her, and "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans" (4:9).

Nevertheless, Jesus and the Samaritan woman carry on a personal, theological conversation. Jesus hasn't simply lifted his eyes to see that this woman needs to hear the good news. The personal content of their conversation is due to Jesus' having "looked in wonder" at who she really is. The woman is inspired to tell others in her village about Jesus, not only because he has acknowledged her existence, but also because he cares about her life story (4:18), helps her understand what God is doing in a way that neither condemns nor excludes her (4:21-24), and fully reveals his own identity to her (4:26).

Jesus' evangelism is contagious. The woman immediately returns to her city and says to the people, "Come and see a man who



told me everything I have ever done!” Once she has piqued their interest, they all leave the city to look for Jesus (4:30).

Too many Christians have neglected this kind of evangelism. Too many churches would rather relocate than lift up their eyes and engage their closest neighbors with intentional acts of care and hospitality. We must remember, Jesus said “the fields are white to harvest,” not “go find the whitest fields.”

Such evangelism isn’t easy. It might not yield higher numbers. But the pangs of hungering for fulfillment in our churches will subside through the strengthening of relationships, in traditional and scandalous ways.

Does your church hunger for growth in Jesus Christ? Do you have neighbors who might be hungry for God? Then lift up your eyes to them. Look upon their lives with wonder and care. It is no small matter that, just after his encounter with a most unlikely convert, Jesus tells his disciples, “I have food to eat that you don’t know about.”

Mar. 29, 2009

WWJS about himself?

John 8:39-59

What Jesus said about himself was so blasphemous to his hearers, they tried to stone him inside the Temple. What did he say that so enraged them? Simply that, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (8:58).

Jesus’ statement is a claim to divinity, of oneness with the God who said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exod. 3:14). The Jewish authorities interpreted Jesus’ claim to divinity as blatant blasphemy. Their response was in keeping with what the Hebrew scriptures commanded. Leviticus 24:16 says, “One who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer.”

It has been argued that Jesus’ claim to bear the divine name is merely John’s view. But the whole New Testament bears witness to the truth that the Word of God became flesh and lived among us.

There are I AM sayings in each of the other Gospels (see Mark. 6:50, 13:6, and 14:62; Luke 21:8 and 22:70; and Matt. 14:27). Note that some translations render the Greek *ego eimi*, or I AM, as “It is I.” Raymond Brown argues compellingly that the I AM sayings in John grew from the traditions of the other three Gospels (*The Gospel According to John*, 538).

That Jesus is God, and that the early church understood him to be God, is evidenced beyond the scope of the Gospels. Paul says of Jesus, “He is the image of the invisible God ... In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col. 1:15, 19). Paul also cites what might be the earliest Christian source in the Bible in Philippians 2, the hymn that begins, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (2:5-7). Hebrews calls God’s Son the one through whom the worlds were created, and says, “He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Heb. 1:2-3). And in Revelation, one cannot even glimpse the power of God in the Risen Jesus without passing out (see Rev. 1:17).

We may think we don’t need the latter review. We think we have little in common with the Jews who reject Jesus in John 8:39-59. We Christians need not be reminded that Jesus is very man and very God. Or do we?

There are disturbing similarities between these Jews and us. We can’t reduce this text to a quibble between Jesus and his ignorant, pious opponents. The text is much deeper, because to truly understand this text will leave the reader deeply saddened.

The Jews who argue with, reject and try to stone Jesus make us sad because they remind us of our own failure to recognize who God is and what God does. Those who reject Jesus’ claim to divinity are to be pitied because they are ignorant of God’s love. Though they strictly abide by the Law, though they may “believe in God,” they still don’t know what the Gospel according to John knows. They can’t imagine a God who loves them so much that he would give “his only Son, that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Their failure is not a refusal to believe in God, but to believe God could come so close to them.

Jesus’ response that “Before Abraham was, I AM” is scandalous to anyone who believes God’s love is limited. But that is part of the scandal of the Christian faith. God loves us so much that, in order to be with us, he became one of us.

The Jews in the temple with Jesus should already know the God who comes close to us. God was intimately involved with us at creation, coming close to breathe the breath of life into our nostrils. God wrestles with Jacob

hand to hand, comes close to Moses in the burning bush, separates the waters to deliver his people, swoops down to take Elijah with a flaming chariot, and speaks through the prophets to all of Israel. If “long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,” then why is it beyond possibility that “in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb. 1:1-2)?

We are children of the devil only when we, like Jesus’ opponents in John, refuse to believe God would stop at nothing to save us. We are children of the devil when we reject the possibility that God could become flesh to reconcile us to himself (see Eph. 2:11-22). We are born of the devil when we suspect anything might be impossible for God. The devil’s children are those who refuse to welcome the God who “made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus’ claim to divinity is proof of God’s perfect love for us. But accepting what Jesus says about himself frightens us. In order to love perfectly as God loves, we must come as close to one another as God has come to us in Jesus. This is terrifying. We might try to stone those who try to love us with this kind of love ... unless we remember, “there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love” (1 John 4:18). **BT**



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Yates Baptist Church is seeking a **minister of students and recreation** to lead the development and implementation of ministry programs for students in grade 6-college and a church-wide program of recreation. Two years of experience working in youth ministry, preferably as a member of a church staff, are preferred. Send résumé to: Yates Baptist Church, 2819 Chapel Hill Rd., Durham, NC 27707 or info@yateschurch.org.

Faith Baptist Church in Georgetown, Ky., affiliated with the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, is seeking a **minister of children and education**. This person will be responsible for programs for 60 children from birth through 6th grade, and will provide direction for the church's educational programs including Sunday school for more than 200 people. Interested candidates should submit a résumé to: Minister of Children and Education Search Committee, 116 Pocahontas Trail, Georgetown KY 40324.

CBF of Louisiana (www.cbfla.org) is seeking a full-time **state missionary** for the Together for Hope Rural Poverty Initiative based in East Carroll Parish. This person should have an expressed sense of calling to rural poverty ministry and community development and a personal spiritual commitment and willingness to be involved in local churches. He or she would need to be a self-starter with strong people skills and experience relating to community members. Entrepreneurial/financial experience, a rural or small town background and interest/understanding of agriculture are preferred. Understanding and commitment to community transformational principles are required. Send résumés with references to: cbflouisiana@gmail.com. Application deadline is Feb. 15.

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Correction: A.D. King (wearing a hat and bowtie) was misidentified in this photo on page 4 in the January issue. He and his brother Martin Luther King Jr. (second from left) and young Albert Brinson (center) encounter the law in this 1960 photo from an Atlanta protest against A&P stores for racial discrimination. We regret the error.

back-row birdie

Two halves of the same whole

By Keith D. Herron

When young lovers stand before God and family and friends to say their vows of commitment to one another, it's not uncommon that someone reads from Paul's love chapter: *If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal ...*

Those are great words! So inspiring, so romantic, and yet often so untrue. Most of the couples look more like the little boy wearing his father's shoes and the young girl playing with her mother's makeup. They are "projects of love" we might say. The foundation for a marriage has been laid, but the verdict of their vows is not yet certain.

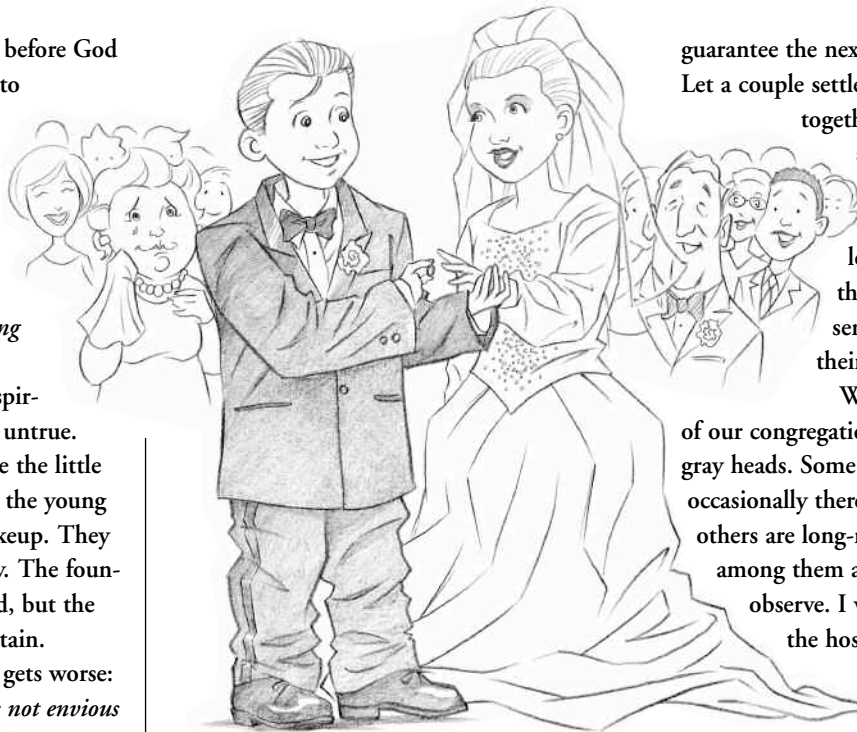
But Paul's letter on love only gets worse: *Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.*

See what I mean? The first handful of years after the wedding are often like a dark comedy where the persons wed try vainly not only to figure out who this person is they've married, but also who they are as individuals.

Like most ministers, I give the couples who come to me to marry them several premarital counseling sessions. We plan the wedding, but we also talk about some important concerns designed to keep the couple together long enough to survive the early years.

I also give them a warranty for their wedding that's only as good as their willingness to avail themselves of it. In issuing them a warranty, I make them a deal: "Call me before you call a lawyer." I figure once a lawyer has been hired, it's usually too late to save the marriage.

Last week Birdie told me about her long marriage to Earl. "Reverend, when Earl and I got married we were two fools in love without much else going for us. We went through



some bumpy years before we finally learned to quit fighting and to love one another."

I actually love the time I spend in premarital work with a couple. It may be my best work as a pastor, but it's only a hopeful wish of helping them succeed in building a marriage. I believe in the hopefulness of what Paul wrote to help believers strive to keep the commandment to love one another. But in reality, it only describes the love they *hope* to grow into.

There's no way they can know all they will know while their love shines so brightly. There's no way they can become what they are only beginning to discover about themselves and each other. What they learn after the wedding is, there's a life ahead of them that will seek to crush the selfishness out of them and will help them learn who they are and what limits they have but haven't yet discovered.

Instead, I've come to think about the love chapter's claims after a couple has proven they're up to it. Give them a few decades together until their kids are pushed out of the nest and grandchildren are on the scene to

guarantee the next generation is established. Let a couple settle into those last stages of life together to see what love is really about like the two tottering adults who lean on one another to get by. They've learned to love to the point that they finish each other's sentences as if they share even their thoughts with one another.

When I look over the heads of our congregation, I see a good number of gray heads. Some of them are widows or occasionally there will be a widower, but others are long-married couples. The oldest among them are a fragile blessing to observe. I visit them when they go to the hospital. I watch them stand vigil for one another praying that the day of separation by death won't be today. They help each other get along in life when the other cannot go without the other's support. Sometimes they are half of what they were, but together they form two halves of the same whole.

And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. Maybe that's the kind of love Paul was describing.

Birdie knows all about this as she and Earl had a 43-year marriage until Earl died a few years back. They had their share of speed bumps, but they found a way to hang together through the rough spots.

I'm performing the marriage for Birdie and Earl's grandson soon, so she stopped by to encourage me. "Brother Pastor, when you meet with my grandson and his fiancé next week, would you help them get it right? You know how much they love one another ... give them your best!"

"Birdie, you know better than most how mysterious the whole endeavor of marriage is. I will do my best, but the mystery's in their hands." **BT**

—Keith D. Herron is pastor of Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo.

in the know

Keeping up with people, places, and events

PEOPLE

Griffin Bell died Jan. 5 at age 90. A former U.S. Attorney General during the Carter Administration, Judge Bell was a member of Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta. He was deeply committed to his alma mater, Mercer University, where he was named a Life Trustee in 2007.

Mike Clements is associate pastor of Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church in Sanford, N.C., coming from the pastorate of Moncure (N.C.) Baptist Church.

Todd Deaton is the new editor of the Kentucky Baptist state newspaper, the

Western Recorder. Deaton has been managing editor of the (S.C.) *Baptist Courier* since 1996.

Leonard Ezell is pastor of Northwest Baptist Church in Ardmore, Okla., coming from First Baptist Church of Union Point, Ga.

Robert T. Handy, church history professor emeritus at Union Theological Seminary, died Jan. 8 at age 90. He served Union for 36 years.

Brenda Lee is the first full-time director of chaplaincy services at Williamsburg Landing, a retirement community in Williamsburg, Va.

G. Avery Lee died Dec. 23 at age 92. His pastoral ministry included First Baptist Church of Ruston, La. (1948-1961), St. Charles Ave. Baptist Church in New Orleans (1961-1979) and University Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, Miss. (1980-1985). A former campus minister, he was also an author and civil rights activist.

Jeff Prince is minister of youth and family life at the First Baptist Church of Morganton, N.C.

Lisa Williams is associate pastor for faith development at the First Baptist Church of Marion, N.C.

Creating a firm foundation of support

Ann Beane appreciates quality writing. It is one of the reasons why she became a loyal reader and a continuing supporter of *Baptists Today*.

“Quality writing is a calling of sorts,” the grandmother of seven explained. “When God gives you the gift of writing, it is a calling to do your best in the printed word. I think the folks at *Baptists Today* have quality of work down quite well. I hear it over and over about the quality of the material in *Baptists Today*. People say that they just can’t wait to get their hands on it.”



Ann Beane

The Richmond, Va., resident and *Baptists Today* director highly values the unbiased coverage that the news journal provides. “I have always liked the phrase inside the front cover: ‘autonomous news journal.’ The word autonomous means a lot to Baptists. The information is not just about the CBFers and the SBCers ... it is across the board. It covers world issues as well as local news about

Baptists, and it is from people you can trust.”

Having served on the boards of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond and *Baptists Today*, Mrs. Beane says she has learned the importance of long-term financial support.

“Those things that we give credence to and think are important in our lives need to be endowed so they can continue,” she said. “I see the financial support of *Baptists Today* as a way for people to know of all the work that is being done to promote God’s Kingdom. Whether it is an online journal or the printed word, I think it is important to see that this quality newsjournal is preserved for future generations. We need to endow *Baptists Today*.”

Through her attorney, Mrs. Beane has arranged for a foundation to be established in her and her late husband’s name at the time of her death. “I want to be able to continue my support of *Baptists Today* and, through the foundation, this will become a reality. It gives me great joy to know that the work of *Baptists Today* will continue and that I have done something to help make that happen,” she said. “Perhaps learning of my plans to support the publication will encourage others to do the same.”

If you would like to explore making a gift to *Baptists Today* through your estate, contact Keithen M. Tucker, Development and Marketing Director, at 1-877-752-5658, or ktucker@baptiststoday.org. **BT**

Baptist News, Baptist Views

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Wide variety of Baptists, other faiths found at opening of 111th Congress

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) — Baptists, they say, multiply by dividing. And the various Baptist churches and denominational groups represented in the 111th Congress are emblematic of America's broad array of Baptists — and of religious life in general.

While precise figures and specific answers on some lawmakers' church membership are hard to come by, there are 66 self-identified Baptists in the new Congress, according to a study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

Baptists make up a slightly smaller percentage of the new Congress (12.4 percent) than they do of the United States' adult population at large (17.2 percent), according to the Pew study. It was based on biographical data that Congress members' offices provided to *Congressional Quarterly*. The nation-at-large statistics come from the results of a massive survey Pew released last year.

An analysis of the new Baptist Congress members by Baptist blogger Aaron Weaver reveals that congressional Baptists are a broadly diverse lot in terms of denomination, race and political party.

For instance, congressional Baptists belong to churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, the three major African-American Baptist denominational groups, the American Baptist Churches USA and the Baptist General Conference.

There are also several members of Congress whose churches' primary affiliation is with para-denominational groups that resulted from the division between moderates, progressives and fundamentalists in the Southern Baptist Convention during the 1980s — the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Alliance of Baptists.

At least one member of Congress — North Carolina Rep. David Price (D) — belongs to a church affiliated with the gay-friendly Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists.

In the House, self-identified Baptists are evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans, with each party claiming 29 Baptist representatives. African-Americans make up 33 percent of House Baptists.

Several of the most prominent members of Congress on both sides of the aisle identify as Baptists. Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), the Senate's president pro tempore and the lone white Baptist Democrat in that chamber, is a member of Crab Orchard Missionary Baptist Church (ABC/USA) in Crab Orchard, W.Va.

Arizona Sen. John McCain, the failed GOP nominee for president in 2008, identifies North Phoenix Baptist Church as his home congregation. Although McCain — who was baptized into the Episcopal Church as an infant and has not undergone believer's baptism as an adult — is not technically a member of North Phoenix Baptist, his wife and their children are.

North Phoenix Baptist has the distinction of being the church home to two members of Congress — McCain and Arizona Rep. Trent Franks (R).

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) still lists his denominational affiliation as Baptist, although he reportedly now attends Southeast Christian Church in Louisville. He was a longtime member of Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, but church officials said Jan. 5 he is no longer on their membership roll.

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), is a member of Broadview Baptist Church in Temple Hills, Md.

Baptists are the second-largest religious group in Congress after Catholics, who make up 30 percent of lawmakers. The next four largest groups — Methodists, Jews, Presbyterians and Episcopalians — are represented in Congress in greater percentages than they are in the population at large.

The "religious group" most under-represented relative to its share of the overall population is the religiously unaffiliated. Only five members of the 111th Congress failed to list any religious affiliation, according to *Congressional Quarterly*. But the Pew survey found that the religiously unaffiliated make up just over 16 percent of the U.S. adult population.

The 111th Congress is also home to Lutherans, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Pentecostals, Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists, Muslims, Buddhists, Unitarians, Christian Scientists and a Quaker. **BT**

Poll finds no evidence that recession pulls people into pews

WASHINGTON (RNS) — The economic recession has not led to an increase in attendance at U.S. houses of worship, according to Gallup pollsters.

Despite anecdotal evidence cited in high-profile media outlets, Americans' worship patterns have held steady in 2008, the Gallup Poll reports. Since mid-February, Gallup said, it has asked 1,000 adults a day how often they attend church, synagogue or mosque.

About 42 percent have said they go weekly or almost weekly, with no increase in September through December, when the recession tightened its hold on the U.S. economy.

Gallup also said there has been no significant change in the percentage of Americans who say they attend church about once a month, seldom, or never.

"The available data on self-reported church attendance among American adults

do not appear — as of mid-December — to support the hypothesis that on a society-wide basis, the current bad economic times have resulted in an increase in Americans' churchgoing behavior," Gallup's Dec. 17 report said.

The pollsters said they conduct about 30,000 interviews per month on church attendance, which results in a margin of error of plus or minus 1 percentage point for the surveys. **BT**

Black churches struggle to blend youth, tradition

By David Briggs
Religion News Service

CLEVELAND — In the front of the Emmanuel Baptist Church sanctuary, teenage dancers act out a story of young people overcoming the temptations of the streets. One by one, they resist drugs, sexual advances and violence.

It is the first night of a weekend Youth Explosion, and a band blasts contemporary gospel music in the church on Cleveland's East Side.

David Cobb Jr. knows that many older members consider this type of topic and style of worship too worldly for church. But he also knows that young people want a better balance in church life, from sermons that pay attention to the problems of youth to opportunities for dance, drama and contemporary worship.

Therein lies the challenge for many black churches, where aging congregations confront a generation whose music, technology and dress clash with century-old traditions.

Nowhere is the struggle more striking than in inner-city congregations. These churches have stayed in the neighborhoods where youth face poverty, violence, drugs and unemployment.

But many of these churches find that a majority of their members live in the suburbs. The number of people with decades of ties to city churches and traditions is dwindling.

In a generation with fewer attachments to church than any in modern history, relaxed dress codes, expanded musical styles, increased participation in services by young people and the use of video screens and Web sites are no longer merely an option, many black church leaders say.

"If you don't change, you're going to be obsolete," says Larry Macon of Mt. Zion Church of Oakwood Village, about 20 miles southeast of Cleveland.

Cobb said he is challenging "sacred cows" in music and dress as fast as he can. He uses rap singers, praise dance teams and the Youth Explosion to reach young people in the neighborhood around his church.

The pastor hears the murmurs from older members who object to jeans and sweat shirts or dancing in the church. But he is committed to building a "blended" congregation of young and old.

"I would define myself as a true blended pastor," Cobb says. "Most pastors are only blended in their minds. When it comes time to



Members of Distinguished Gentlemen of the Spoken Word perform during the Youth Explosion event at Emmanuel Baptist Church. Religion News Service photo by Tracy Boulian/*The Plain Dealer*.

put up or shut up, they shut up."

There is a lot of David Cobb Jr. in 15-year-old Brandon Baldwin.

Cobb, whose parents divorced when he was 8, found a spiritual and personal refuge in Little Zion Baptist Church in Atlanta, where members rallied around him and his family. When three of the older deacons died, and with them the objections to drums in Sunday services, he became the drummer at Little Zion.

Brandon, whose mother died three years ago after a heart attack, finds love and support at Emmanuel Baptist. Under Cobb, he became the church's drummer.

"I love this church," Brandon says. "Despite everything I've been through in the past, this church is the first thing on my mind." Cobb, 35, and Brandon, who lives a few blocks from Emmanuel, both want to bring in more young people so they can find the same joy in church.

The church recently hired a music minister for youth, and Cobb is thinking about adding more contemporary music on Sundays.

Among other plans are creating junior deacons and junior trustees so young people can have a say in the spiritual and administrative life of the church.

The changes cannot come too soon for Emmanuel's youth.

Jazmine Blue, 16, a member of the praise dance team, says when she tries to encourage her peers to come to church, they say, "No man, church is boring."

"I don't want to listen to a lot of older people with their old boring songs" all the time, she says.

But to older church members, hip-hop and

rap — Christian or not — represent violence and drugs.

The tension is not new. Gospel great Thomas Dorsey, who used the popular music styles of the 1930s to write such church standards as "Take My Hand, Precious Lord," once was labeled "too bluesy" for the church.

What gives the issue of music a special urgency, church observers say, is that one can no longer count on succeeding generations to come through church doors.

Pew Research Center surveys found only 14 percent of respondents ages 18 to 29 attended church more than once a week, half the percentage of those 50 and older.

In his grandparents' day, Cobb says, "Everybody went to church. Church was mandatory until you die." In his mother's day, that changed to "you had to go to church until you were 18, then it was strongly recommended."

"Today, it's basically you can go if you want to," Cobb says.

When they do go, they increasingly "church shop" rather than automatically attend where their parents and grandparents went.

For those churches that stay in the city, some in sanctuaries that date back 60 or 70 years, it is critical not to let traditions such as suits and ties for men and dresses for women get in the way, many church leaders say.

"You don't have to just have one way to praise him," Cobb declares to his congregation at the fall youth day service. "We are just happy to see young people today, praise God." **BT**

—David Briggs writes for *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland

Churches, other Baptist groups support news journal

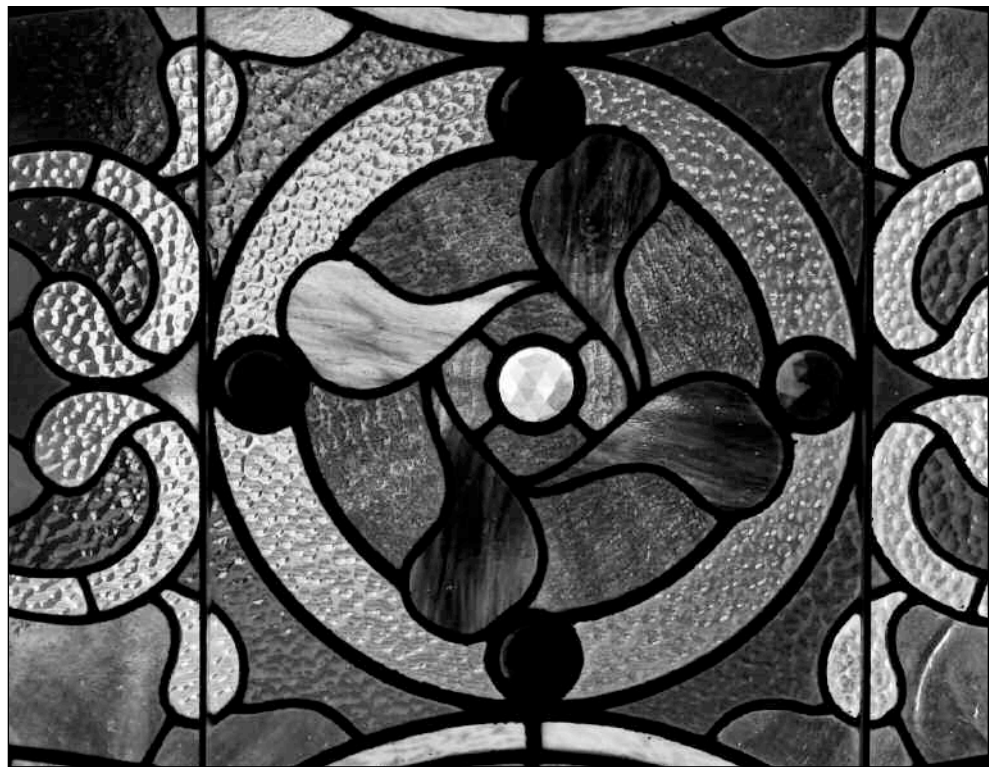
Baptists Today expresses deep appreciation to the churches and organizations that made gifts to this communication ministry in 2008 through direct or designated gifts, as First Freedom Project partners or through the Missions Resource Plan of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.

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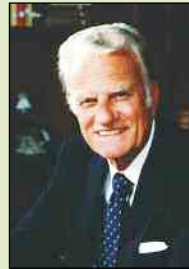


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Billy's one bad example

By Tony W. Cartledge,
 posted Nov. 11, 2008
www.tonycartledge.com



Billy Graham

It's hard not to admire Billy Graham. From the time I watched his televised crusades with my great-grandmother back in the early 1960s until now, I have appreciated his earnest faith and evangelistic zeal.

When I became old enough to be aware of such things, I applauded his fine example of financial integrity and accountability. I'm sure he's lived well enough in his mountain retreat all these years, but he never exploited his popularity for personal wealth.

I haven't appreciated all of Graham's actions: the way he insinuated himself into Southern Baptist Convention politics, for example, rarely attending but occasionally sending letters to endorse a fundamentalist candidate or affirm some convention action.

The major thing that bugged me about Graham, however, was that he lived in

Montreat, N.C., but maintained his church membership at First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. He first joined there in 1953, when firebrand Wally Criswell was still early in his pastorate and Graham was conducting a crusade in the city.

Just now, Graham finally decided to join a church closer to home — in Spartanburg, S.C., where his friend and associate Don Wilton is pastor.

But, Spartanburg is still 60 miles from Montreat, while the 90-year-old Graham is largely infirm and rarely leaves the house. He's close enough to watch services on TV and for the pastor to visit and minister to him occasionally, but in no position to help the church in any way but through his reputation and his tithe.

I was raised with the belief that faithful believers should be actively involved in a

local church. In my childhood church and the first one I served as pastor, we followed the traditional "Church Covenant" that used to be pasted in the *Baptist Hymnal*.

After affirming various aspects of holy living and mutual support, the covenant closed with "When we remove from this place, we engage as soon as possible to unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's word."

I grew up believing that was important, and when I became a pastor, I believed it even more. Christ followers serve Christ best when they are actively involved in a local community of faith where they can both contribute to and receive from the ministries of the church — and worship in an environment of accountability.

Long-distance church membership typically leads to inactive Christ fellowship.

Maybe Billy Graham could remain an active and devoted Christian while remaining aloof from the churches in his community, but in doing so, he has set a poor example for those who can't. **BT**

Parasites and politics

By John Pierce, posted Dec. 6, 2008
www.bteditor.blogspot.com

Politicians and parasites are sometimes mentioned in the same sentence — but usually not in a literal or positive sense.

However, an article in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* tells how amazingly close one politician's efforts have come to eliminating the dreadful parasite-borne Guinea worm disease.

According to the article, Baptist layman and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and others working with the Carter Center report that they have nearly

eradicated this disease that affected 3.5 million people just 22 years ago.

Grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and others are being used to wipe out the remaining impact — estimated at fewer than 5,000 cases of Guinea worm disease left in six African countries.


The news report stated that the eradication of Guinea worm would make it the second known disease to be eliminated from humans — with the other being smallpox. Filtering water is the means by which the disease is countered since the Guinea worm larvae enters the body through infected water sources.

President Carter praised the local villagers who have carried out this important

educational health program. However, the former president, his colleagues at the Carter Center, donors and worldwide partners also deserve our affirmation for this remarkable example of compassion and care.

The Carter Center is now giving attention to creating a new program in Ethiopia to fight another parasitic disease called lymphatic filariasis — that causes severe swelling and is better known as elephantiasis.

The Carter Center web site (www.cartercenter.org/health/guinea_worm/index.html) is counting down the remaining cases of Guinea worm disease — showing the latest report at 4,410. **BT**



Flight of the Dove Ascent of the Mountain

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia General Assembly • FBC Columbus, GA • March 13-14, 2009

<p>For more information contact the CBF/GA office 478-742-1191, ext. 21, or toll-free 877-336-6426.</p> <p>Register at www.cbfga.org.</p>	<p>Friday, March 13 ... Giving In to Being Loved</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td>10:00 a.m.</td><td>Coordinating Council Meeting</td><td>7:00 p.m.</td><td>Worship</td></tr> <tr><td>12:00 p.m.</td><td>Lunch</td><td>8:30 p.m.</td><td>Dessert Reception • Resource Fair</td></tr> <tr><td>12:30 p.m.</td><td>Registration</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>1:30 p.m.</td><td>MEL Talks (Missions • Education • Leadership)</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>2:30 p.m.</td><td>Resource Fair</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>3:30 p.m.</td><td>MEL Talks (Missions • Education • Leadership)</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>4:30 p.m.</td><td>Resource Fair</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>5:00 p.m.</td><td>Dinner</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>5:45 p.m.</td><td>Business Meeting</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>6:30 p.m.</td><td>Registration/Resource Fair</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>6:45 p.m.</td><td>Pre-Worship Music</td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>	10:00 a.m.	Coordinating Council Meeting	7:00 p.m.	Worship	12:00 p.m.	Lunch	8:30 p.m.	Dessert Reception • Resource Fair	12:30 p.m.	Registration			1:30 p.m.	MEL Talks (Missions • Education • Leadership)			2:30 p.m.	Resource Fair			3:30 p.m.	MEL Talks (Missions • Education • Leadership)			4:30 p.m.	Resource Fair			5:00 p.m.	Dinner			5:45 p.m.	Business Meeting			6:30 p.m.	Registration/Resource Fair			6:45 p.m.	Pre-Worship Music			<p>Saturday, March 14 ... Giving Up to the Demands of Love</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr><td>7:30 a.m.</td><td>Baptist Heritage Breakfast (For tickets, call 706-583-8618 or email baptistheritage@bellsouth.net)</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>9:00 a.m.</td><td>Network Gatherings: Liberia Missions Network • Chaplains Network • India Missions Network • Others...</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>10:00 a.m.</td><td>Resource Fair</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>10:30 p.m.</td><td>MEL Talks (Missions • Education • Leadership)</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>11:30 a.m.</td><td>Resource Fair</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>12:00 p.m.</td><td>Lunch</td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>	7:30 a.m.	Baptist Heritage Breakfast (For tickets, call 706-583-8618 or email baptistheritage@bellsouth.net)			9:00 a.m.	Network Gatherings: Liberia Missions Network • Chaplains Network • India Missions Network • Others...			10:00 a.m.	Resource Fair			10:30 p.m.	MEL Talks (Missions • Education • Leadership)			11:30 a.m.	Resource Fair			12:00 p.m.	Lunch		
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A new (old) way of thinking

Everybody eats. Have you ever wondered why? Why would God create the world so that human life requires eating, which in turn necessitates the death of other living things?

That's the sort of thing Norman Wirzba wonders about, the kind of question that is informed by a sensitive spirit, an agrarian outlook, and an inquisitive mind steeped in both philosophy and theology.

Wirzba is in his first year as Research Professor of Theology, Ecology, and Rural Life at Duke Divinity School, coming to Duke after 13 years in the philosophy department at Georgetown College, in Georgetown, Ky.

He knows it's not easy living an ecologically responsible life, but there are reasons for it that go beyond economics and environmental concerns: Wirzba believes that caring for God's gift of creation is a central aspect of what it means to follow Christ. Few Christians, however, especially in contemporary America, give much thought to how their lifestyle choices impact the earth.

That's why Wirzba is at Duke.

"My job is to teach courses that will help church leaders understand the connections between creation and church, rural churches and urban churches, and our vocation as creatures of God," he said.

The gift of creation

At his book-laden desk in a small office lit only by compact fluorescent bulbs, Wirzba speaks with quiet passion about the American church's failure to appreciate what it means to accept God's gift of creation.

In *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (2003), Wirzba points out that American Christians tend to think of creation mainly in terms of the beginning of the world, which leads to fights over evolution and misses the bigger intent of the biblical story.

"Scripture is less interested in the



Duke Divinity School professor Norman Wirzba feels right at home in the university's "Refectory," which features local and organically grown produce.

mechanics of how it all began, and more interested in how human beings are to live within God's creation," he says. Over and over, the Bible stresses appreciation of the earth and the sustenance it provides as God's gift. But the way many church people treat the world suggests that they don't really think of the earth as God's creation, he says.

"They think of it in terms of economy, scientific experiment or technological application. When humans become absorbed in this mechanistic, scientific way of looking at the world, they do great damage and don't realize they're violating something sacred."

Wirzba wants Christians to have a greater sense of God's creative, sustaining presence, wherever they live. As fewer people live close to the land, however, the connection is lost.

"If you're a farmer," Wirzba says, "you learn quickly that you don't control life, you don't make the seed grow: it always comes as a miracle, as a gift." But, "In our culture that disappears almost entirely because we don't garden — food is a commodity that we buy. You don't need God, just WalMart or Kroger. We don't understand food as a gift of God."

When everything is seen as a commodity, the sense of creation as a divine gift gets

lost, and that bothers Wirzba. "One thing I want to suggest is, to be a real creature is to learn to receive the world as God's gift, and that's something we're not doing well today."

Imagine receiving a nice gift from a loved one, but then destroying it in their presence, Wirzba suggests. People wouldn't do that. But with respect to the earth, "that's what we're doing daily," he says. "We're arrogant, destructive, blind to what we're doing to the world. We're belligerent in not recognizing that the world is a gift."

Those are strong words from a mild-mannered man, but Wirzba has strong convictions.

The wonder of food

Take food, for example, the subject of Wirzba's next book. The Bible says a lot about food that modern believers tend to overlook. The New Testament often mentions Jesus eating, but always in the context of community.

"Today we often eat on the lone or to our ill health," Wirzba notes: "Looking at how people eat gives us a great way to figure out what people value and think is important."

As an example, he points to "the

American obsession with cheap food,” which “results directly in farmers going out of business, land being degraded, water being polluted, and animals suffering.”

“Why should food be cheap,” Wirzba asks, “if it’s the basic sustenance of life?”

One summer, Wirzba recalled, he made salsa from tomatoes, peppers and onions he grew in his own garden. He then gave much of it to friends, who liked it so well that they asked if they could buy more. By the time he figured in canning expenses plus the labor to raise, harvest, cook and can the salsa, Wirzba said, he would have had to charge \$20 per jar — as compared to the three dollars we might pay at a grocery store.

Still, that three-dollar salsa comes at a cost: “Many laborers live in near slave conditions because we want to have cheap food,” he says, “but for most Christians it never enters their minds that the desire for cheap food contributes to the destruction of creation, the disintegration of rural communities, and injustice in our working communities.”

Beyond that, most food items travel an average of 1,300-1,500 miles before reaching the supermarket shelves, he notes, at a great cost to the environment. “If not for cheap fossil fuel, our whole food system would collapse.”

Starting a garden can help us re-orient the way we think about food, Wirzba suggests, as well as learn more about the source of our food. Buying direct from farmers, farmers’ markets, or grocery stores that feature local produce may cost more, but is kinder to the environment and more supportive of local economies.

“People who grow food should be celebrated,” he said.

Living close to the land comes naturally for Wirzba: he grew up in the farming community of Lethbridge, in the southern prairies of Alberta, Canada. His grandparents, like many others in the area, were German immigrants who came to the U.S. and Canada as refugees following World War II.

Many of the immigrants were Baptist, including Wirzba’s family, and the church served as the center of their community.

But many believers don’t have a background in a supportive church or a frugal farming community. They may have no personal experience or appreciation for the wonder of creation and the labor that goes into environmentally sustainable farming.

What might motivate them to forgo

cheap and easy food at the supermarket for more expensive, locally grown products?

The motivation of love

Wirzba finds the answer for that, and for other issues that plague humankind, in love.

In a philosophically-oriented book called *Transforming Philosophy and Religion: Love’s Wisdom* (2008), Wirzba and co-author Bruce Benson take a different approach to the concept of philosophy as the love of wisdom.

Scholars tend to focus on the wisdom part, he says, but would do well to reflect on the meaning of love.

“If we view the world only as an instrument to get what we want, we’re not showing love,” he says, “but instrumentality is the dominant form of rationality that we have in modern western society.”

On the other hand, “If you take love as the starting point, being available to others, you have to take a different approach to the world.” That will have technological implications, Wirzba says. “I’m looking for forms of philosophical reflection that are gentler and kinder to other people.”

Such thoughts are not the realm of academia alone, he says. While few people think of themselves as philosophers, “People are using such philosophy whether they’re aware of it or not. Everyone has a philosophical approach or world view ... the way you think determines the way you’re going to act.”

By failing to ask important questions, Wirzba contends, “the church has adopted the modern western secular view of how to relate to the world, and has not even thought about whether that is an appropriate one.”

Wirzba has been strongly influenced by the work of Christian agrarian Wendell Berry, who contends that today’s economy is the most destructive we’ve ever known, and that the church is not only complicit in it, but unconcerned.

“We need to see how we treat God’s gift of the world as just as important as other means of expressing faith,” Wirzba says. “Otherwise, we have a very abstract faith that doesn’t carry over from Sunday to the other six days of the week.”

Old Testament prophets often criticized Israel’s devotion to rituals while being devoid of personal commitment and a true appreciation of God’s gifts.

“So many churches are focused on ritual

that doesn’t affect how we relate to other people, Wirzba says. “If you abuse people or animals or the land, doesn’t that mean that you’ve misunderstood what it means to trust in God as the creator and the giver of every good and perfect gift?”

Thus, just thinking about food from a perspective of love — paying attention to whether it was harvested or processed in oppressive conditions, whether it was raised in a way that damages the land, or whether it treats animals cruelly — could lead to lifestyle changes that encourage more humane and sustainable practices.

The joy of the Sabbath

That is Wirzba’s hope. He speaks to some of the same issues from a different approach in another book, co-authored with Wendell Berry, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (2006).

Keeping Sabbath is much more than just vegging out on the couch and watching football on Sunday afternoons, he says. God’s

creation of the Sabbath in Genesis 2 expresses God’s joy and delight in the goodness of the earth and its inhabitants.

For humans, keeping Sabbath means learning to find that “the place where you are is so wonderful that you don’t want to be anywhere else.”

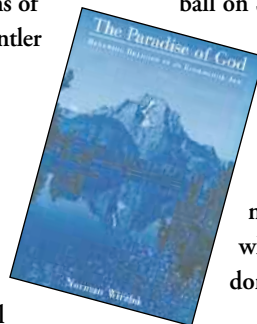
“When you think about rest that way,” he says, “you can understand so much of our restlessness today — restlessness that’s reflected in our desire to always want more, to do more, to no longer accept the people we are with. It’s a demonstration of our inability to receive the world as the gift of God that is beautiful and good and given for us to celebrate and enjoy.”

Wirzba acknowledges that finding such rest is not always easy, and that some places appear more wonderful than others. That’s why true Sabbath keeping, in his view, “is not an individual pursuit ... the church is called to work in the world so that all people can enjoy it as a place of delight.”

That effort inevitably leads to the church becoming active in issues of peace and justice.

“That’s what Christ typifies in his own ministry,” Wirzba believes, a ministry of “healing and reconciling the world so that we can be in right relationship with each other and learn to receive each other as the gifts of God.”

As gifts, indeed. **BT**





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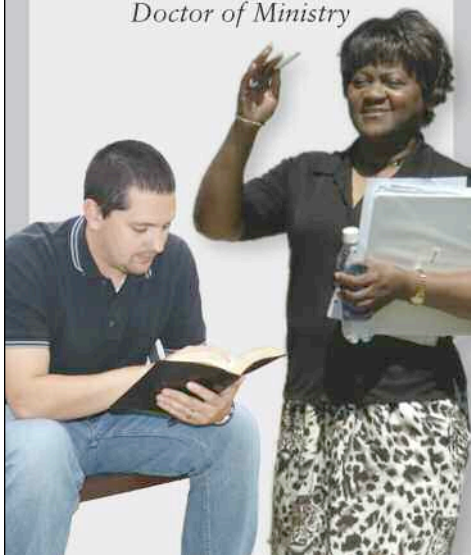
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Review by Darrell J. Pursiful

In Search of the New Testament Church

The Baptist Story

C. Douglas Weaver

Weaver's history of Baptists documents the 400-year-long passion to be faithful to — and duplicate — what they see as *the* New Testament pattern of church life. The conclusion, which should be obvious to anyone acquainted with the biblical evidence, is that this passion produced different results in different places, times and circumstances.

For example, some early Baptists appealed to the New Testament to justify women pastors and deacons; others did not. Some Baptists practiced foot-washing, the laying on of hands, and, with the rise of Pentecostalism in the 20th century, speaking in tongues and other controversial gifts of the Spirit. Some Baptists were staunchly Calvinistic, and others were unabashedly Arminian. There was even an early English Baptist practice of appointing itinerant “messengers” with quasi-episcopal responsibilities.

In a variety of ways, Baptists sought to be true to the vision of the church they found on the pages of their Bibles. Examining their history, one quickly realizes that “the New Testament church” is not so much the destination of the Baptist movement as its unfolding journey.

Weaver navigates the maze of Baptist belief and practice with warmth, even-handedness and a breadth one might not expect from a book of fewer than 300 pages. We are introduced in the first chapter to the General and Regular Baptists of 17th-century England, then led through the contextual factors giving rise to early Baptists in America: Regular Baptists, Separate Baptists, Primitive Baptists and the rest.

From the beginning the central issue for Baptists was freedom of the individual conscience, with the corollary repudiation of infant baptism as an affront to this freedom. By making soul freedom their line in the sand, Weaver contends, Baptists quickly had to make peace with the possibility of con-

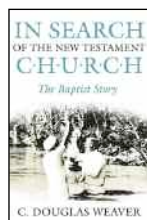
tentious disagreements within their ranks: “Diversity is simply what messy freedom allows” (253).

Weaver highlights times when the passion for New Testament purity took a back seat to other cultural or theological factors, such as white supremacy in the South or ecumenical zeal in the North. Nor is he neglectful of the experiences of African-American Baptists or of Baptists in Europe and around the world.

It is, however, somewhat disappointing that Weaver does not show us some of the actual exegetical reasoning that led to various Baptist thinkers coming to the conclusions they did. Apart from occasional references to particular biblical proof texts, there is surprisingly little New Testament in Weaver's search for “the New Testament church.”

It would have been enlightening to discover how John Leland came to champion religious liberty, for example, or have summarized Thomas Grantham's biblical defense of the office of “messenger” — and the objections of other Baptists that made such a defense necessary. There are also a few editorial glitches. The “JLJ” Church (named for its pastors, Jacob, Lathrop and Jessey) is more or less consistently described as the “JLC” Church with no explanation of where the “C” might have come from.

Despite these minor quibbles, *In Search of the New Testament Church* is a wonderful, informative read for any Baptist interested in his or her heritage. Weaver's book compares favorably with Leon McBeth's larger and more encyclopedic *The Baptist Heritage* (Broadman & Holman, 1987). At less than half the size, it is a far more accessible general survey of Baptist history. There is no more technical jargon than is necessary. The writing is concise and accessible, providing an excellent resource for church libraries, group studies and undergraduate Baptist history courses. **BT**



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Darrell J. Pursiful is editor of *Adult Formations* at Smyth & Helwys Publishing.

guest commentary

Break out the raincoats

The earth doesn't literally move when paradigms shift. In fact, it might be years before anyone truly notices. But shift they do, and there's no going back.

Consider my typical day in summer 1963: I called friends on a hard-wired family telephone and borrowed my mother's big Ford sedan to drive to the mall on "our" side of town. I browsed a local department store, prepared for a private college whose annual tuition equaled the price of a Chevrolet, and later spent a family hour watching network television.

If it was Sunday, of course, the mall was closed so we could attend our neighborhood churches.

Can you count the paradigm shifts?

Hard-wired telephones gave way to cell phones and Internet phones. Big American sedans are yielding to small Japanese hybrids. Shopping malls can't compete with stand-alone Wal-Marts or on-line retailers.

Racial profiles no longer dictate residential patterns. Local department stores were acquired, re-branded and sometimes closed. The cost of that private college now equals a Mercedes-Benz, moving it beyond the reach of middle-class families. Networks must share a shrinking television audience with cable and computer media.

Stores are open seven days a week. Once-thriving neighborhood churches either re-branded as "destination churches" with specialized offerings or shrank to enclaves serving the elderly.

I don't feel the least bit nostalgic about any of this. But I do notice how much futile energy institutions devote to fighting history.

In fact, people have just moved on, as they tend to do when free. People don't spend two hours on Saturday finding entertainment at a mall. Parents resist paying \$50,000 a year for college.

A consumer economy cannot afford to set aside a full day for religion. Faith-seekers don't worry about denomination, location or convenience. Driving has become an expensive hassle, and suburbs based on driving seem less inviting.

Paradigms don't stop shifting. Banking and finance, for example, are losing their luster as career choices. An economy based on manic

consumer spending-by-borrowing has collapsed. The job market doesn't swoon over elite academic credentials.

Religion has become a self-led personal quest, not an exercise in brand loyalty or indoctrination by experts. The over-involved parent is unmasked as self-serving and abusive. Any paradigm associated with suburbia is in flux.

Custodians of fading paradigms tend to fight back, often with moral imperatives, calls to patriotic duty, and pleas for government favors. The race, however, goes to those who adopt new technology, study the marketplace, accept volatility, and learn from misfortune and mismanagement.

In the end, you see, reality prevails, and settled patterns go the way of fedoras, Ma Bell and Bobby Vinton.



That's why Detroit either goes "green" or goes bust. Private colleges will either sell education at a price people can afford or become academics-optional playgrounds for the wealthy. Religion, too, must escape its own overhead.

Paradigm shifts aren't necessarily toward the better, more humane or more efficient. But neither can those who resist paradigm shifts claim the moral high ground. Self-described "defenders of tradition" are often just bullies or lazy.

Change is like the weather: it happens. A free people are like the clouds: they keep moving.

Rain dances are misguided. Raincoats are wise. **BT**

—Tom Ehrlich is a writer, church consultant and Episcopal priest based in New York. He is the author of Just Wondering, Jesus, and the founder of the Church Wellness Project.

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simple pleasures

Birthday parties significant for persons with HIV/AIDS

INDIANAPOLIS — The birthday celebrations that Karen Estle throws each month at an Indianapolis apartment building for people living with HIV/AIDS stick to the basics — a cake, sometimes pie, ice cream, soda and a card and gift bought from a local dollar store.

For many residents, the celebration is the only recognition of their birthday.

Some residents attend the birthday parties because they are regular members of the weekly HIV/AIDS support group that Estle leads. Others come to satisfy an empty stomach.

“I make it clear that everyone is welcome,” said Estle, a member of Speedway Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Ind. “When a resident objects that someone only comes for cake, I explain it is not up to me to judge.”

Estle, a certified pastoral counselor with an endorsement through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, is the spiritual advisor with the Palliative Care Team at Wishard Health Services in Indianapolis.

During the 13 years that Estle has led the support group, residents have shared how others have abandoned or rejected them because of their HIV status. But the residents’ expressions — hardened by years of anger and fear — begin to soften when Estle shares her own story of rejection.

Estle, who survived polio as a child, shares how some people were afraid to touch her when she had the dreaded disease of her day. Once she was in her front yard when a man arrived to deliver some important papers to her parents. Rather than delivering the papers to the door and risking contact with someone who had polio, he instead tossed the papers into the yard.

“It amazes me how this story still calms down an angry new resident today as they realize I understand,” Estle said. “I model Christ’s unconditional love by touching, listening or being present. It creates an atmosphere in which topics and questions can be raised, discussed and wondered about. Over time, trust develops



Shirley Heidenreich, right, and Joyce Finch, left, members of Speedway Baptist Church in Indianapolis, prepare for the weekly HIV/AIDS support group. Photo by Shawn Williams.

and healing comes.”

The support group gives participants emotional and spiritual support as well as practical help with daily living. Residents have learned how to use the bus, where to buy groceries, how to access social services and how to deal with the side effects of medications, she said.

Estle has seen members of the group transformed by Christ’s love. One man recently told Estle that he had let go of his anger and gave her a note asking her to keep spreading the “light.”

Other residents ask Estle to buy a gift for a hospital patient in place of a birthday gift for themselves.

Members of Estle’s church, Speedway Baptist Church, have joined Estle in her ministry at the apartment complex. The church, a CBF partner, covers the costs for monthly birthday celebrations.

One of the women’s Bible study classes at Speedway provides meals for the residents four to five times a year. The women, who range in age from 50 to 90, eat with the residents and often play board games.

“I believe each of the women has helped residents heal from broken family relationships,” Estle said.

“The new residents are always

surprised to find women who are like mothers and grandmas who are coming to feed and nurture them,” Estle said.

One of the women, Joyce Finch, lost her son to AIDS in 1992. She seldom mentioned his death and the disease that caused it at the time “because it was not a thing that was talked about,” she said.

Finch’s friendships with the residents have helped her heal from her son’s loss. Her first-hand experience with the challenges her son faced while living with HIV/AIDS now helps her relate to the residents, she said.

“It takes a really courageous person to live with the physical effects of the disease and the social stigma attached to it,” Finch said. “They need all of the encouragement and help they can receive because it isn’t an easy way to live. They need to be accepted as they are.”

Finch said she follows the example set by Jesus Christ.

“Jesus was inclusive,” she said. “He didn’t turn his back on anyone.” **BT**

To learn about partnership opportunities related to HIV/AIDS ministries, contact Chris Boltin at engage@thefellowship.info or 1-800-352-8741.

Improving an image

ORLANDO, Fla. (RNS) — Josh Spavin knows the stereotypes about evangelical Christians: judgmental, sanctimonious, narrow-minded. He may not buy into the image, but at the same time, he knows how real — and damaging — it can be.

So that's why Spavin, a recent graduate of the University of Central Florida and an intern with Campus Crusade for Christ International, wants to launch an HIV/AIDS outreach with a campus gay-lesbian group.

"Because of the way they perceive us," said Spavin, 25. "What we wanted to do is find common ground where we can serve alongside with them. ... We don't necessarily agree with their choices, because that's not part of our faith, but we still love them."

Campus Crusade — an organization that once denounced rock music only to later embrace it — is once again changing with the times, engaging potential new Christians through social issues that perhaps seemed taboo in the past. Unofficially nicknamed "Good News, Good Deeds," the initiative is a ground-up effort by one of the nation's largest evangelical groups.

It also provides a peek at what issues young evangelicals see as important, and how they are changing a faith they inherited from their parents, but sometimes chafe against.

"Young evangelicals in particular are very conscious about poverty and the environment, and they tend to be more tolerant on issues such as gay rights and homosexuality," said John Turner, assistant professor of history at the University of South Alabama and author of the new book, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America*.

"Evangelicals and evangelical organizations, they do have a big public relations problem of being known for intolerance or homophobia or not being concerned enough about social issues, and I think their desire is to correct that image," he said.

Campus Crusade was founded in 1951 by the late Bill Bright and his wife, Vonette. Today, the Orlando-based megaministry counts 55,000 student members at nearly 1,100 U.S. campuses, and is active in 191 countries.

Campus Crusade officials say they detect a new desire among young evangelicals to live out Christian concepts such as compassion and understanding. **BT**

Who is God?

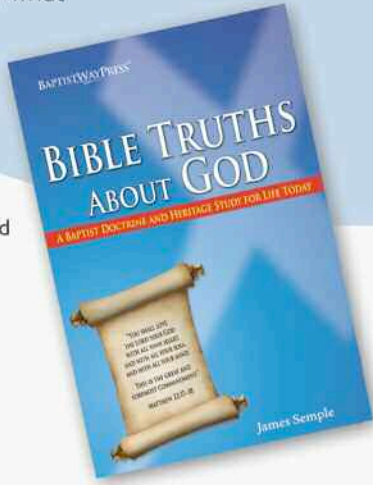
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It's 'just money'

Financial advisors advocate for socially responsible investing

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Susan Taylor holds a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Maryland. Yet she and husband Andy Loving named their financial advisory practice “Just Money.”

The image of a stream flowing through the company logo comes from the words of the prophet Amos (5:24): “Let justice flow down like waters.”

They describe their Louisville-based practice in terms of socially responsible investing. Making money while bringing about positive social change can go hand-in-hand, they affirm.

“For-profit and social change is one vision,” said Loving, a Certified Financial Planner and ordained Baptist minister.

The couple speaks of their mission in terms of helping individuals and organizations to use all of their financial resources in ways that align with personal — and often faith-based — values.

“We only work with people who care where their money is invested and how it is used,” said Taylor.

Their clients, they say, are concerned about making good financial investments but also about peace, poverty, the environment, people’s rights, fair trade and other social issues.

Churches often talk about the spiritual discipline of giving a tithe — 10 percent of one’s income — to the Lord’s work. But rarely is the stewardship of the remaining financial resources discussed, they said.

Loving said they raise the question: “How does the money I don’t give away contribute to the Kingdom [of God]?”

“There’s another 90 percent to consider,” said Taylor.

Screening investments is nothing new to



Financial advisors Susan Taylor and Andy Loving help clients fulfill their commitments to economic justice through socially responsible investment options.

Baptists, said Loving. For a long time many Baptist individuals and groups have sought to avoid putting their investments in corporations linked to certain ethical issues.

“We don’t invest in alcohol, tobacco or pornography either, but we’ve expanded it to include nuclear weapons, sweat-shop labor, polluters [and others],” he said. “All we’re

doing is calling on people to broaden their Christian ethic.”

But even the best effort at keeping investment funds on an ethical track is imperfect, he confessed. “If you’re looking for purity, this [business] ain’t it.”

However, they take their cause seriously — both in terms of their professional work

as socially responsible investors and in their personal lives as Christian stewards.

“I think the basic concept of stewardship — that ‘the earth is the Lord’s’ — is true,” said Loving. “We are stewards, not lords. I learned that in Training Union and all the Baptist churches.”

Susan and Andy embrace “Sabbath economics” — the belief that “there is enough for everyone if we share.”

“I learned that in Sunday school,” said Loving. “And they got it right.”

Their practice of stewardship and approach to financial investments are not anti-capitalism, they explained. But they do challenge an “uncritical embrace of modern multinational capitalism” that disregards the poor.

“I’m a capitalist,” said Loving, noting that he learned the value of combining profitability and economic justice when he and Gary Gunderson founded *SEEDS* magazine in 1979 at Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga. “Creating capital is necessary if we are to feed the world.”

Taylor said some people mistakenly believe that socially responsible investing

comes at too high of a price.

“The assumption is you have to take a lower rate,” she said. “It’s just not true anymore.”

Like all financial advisors, Taylor and Loving promote diversification. They help clients to use a variety of investment tools — including community investing with financial institutions that serve the poor by providing capital for economic development such as small businesses.

For example, Taylor and Loving — along with other members of the Jefferson Street Baptist Community in Louisville — put some church and individual funds into a Netherlands-based ecumenical bank that serves the poor.

The result was “helping 700 families a year without it costing us a dime,” said Taylor.

On a personal level, the couple — married for 21 years — remains committed to putting their own security in something more reliable than money.

“I hang laundry,” said Taylor. “And we shop at thrift stores.”

She said fellow church members get a

kick out of seeing how many of their children will wear the same shirt that gets passed along when outgrown.

This broader concept of stewardship is something they are passing along to their own children as well.

“Our kids learn from the way we live; by the way we spend money,” said Taylor.

Children pay attention, she said, to whether their parents share freely with others and on what kinds of things they spend their money. She also thinks it’s important for children to learn financial decision making early on.

“Put them in a position to make choices even if they have enough money,” Taylor advises. “It’s good for them to see we’re OK in the middle of making choices.”

And regardless of one’s age or financial circumstance, Taylor said one question should always be applied to expending or investing money: “Is this choice in line with our values?” **BT**

Editor’s note: Susan Taylor served as the first associate editor of Baptists Today when it was founded by editor Walker Knight in 1983 and called SBC Today.



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Darlene Eastridge, dean of the Carver School of Social Work at Campbellsville University in Kentucky, sees a bright future for training social-work professionals. The school began offering a Master of Social Work degree last year, in addition to the Bachelor degree program. Photo courtesy of Campbellsville University.

Carver School blossoms in new setting

CAMPBELLSVILLE, Ky. — In a small classroom building at the Baptist university here, students stood before their peers and outlined ways to make good on slogans covering the walls that urged them to fight poverty and “make a difference.”

They gave presentations on agencies they “created” to help young mothers, rescue abused children and mediate family disputes.

While the agencies were fictitious — part of a class assignment — the students were honing real-world skills they will need as graduates of the Carver School of Social Work at Campbellsville University.

“I have always had an interest in helping

people,” said student Angela Pace, whose work with orphans in Romania prompted her to seek a social-work degree. “I love the program here. I love that it’s faith-based.”

Pace and her classmates are part of a slow revival of a program that was shuttered in one Southern Baptist setting in Louisville before finding a home in another here about 80 miles away.

More than a decade ago, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary closed its Carver School of Church Social Work, which was the nation’s only seminary-based social-work program.

That decision, one of the signature episodes in the tumultuous rightward shift at the seminary in the 1990s, came after the seminary’s leaders concluded that contemporary social-work values were incompatible with its mission.

Campbellsville University came to the opposite conclusion.

It acquired the Carver name from the seminary in 1998 along with library materials, scholarship funds and a century-old heritage of blending religious values with human services.

In the past decade, the Carver School at Campbellsville has granted 136 bachelor’s degrees in social work. The seminary only offered master’s degrees in social work.

And it achieved a milestone last year when it began offering social-work courses at the master’s level, the first at the Carver School since 1997, when it granted its final 11 social-work degrees as part of the seminary.

Six students are in the first year of the master’s-level social-work classes. Carver School Dean Darlene Eastridge is optimistic it will grow.

“It’s a very exciting time for us,” she said.

“I can’t speak for what happened at the seminary,” she added. “All I can speak for is here. [Social service is] very much a part of ... who we are as a school.”

School faced challenges

The Carver School is no direct transplant, however, as it has had to recruit new faculty and seek accreditation on its own.

And while Campbellsville received some of the old Carver School’s funding, the Southern Baptists’ Woman’s Missionary Union — which handles the old Carver School’s endowment — has also used those funds for other Baptist university programs, such as a large social-work program at Baylor University in Texas and a women’s leadership program at Samford University in Alabama.

Those programs reflect the heritage of the Carver School, founded in 1907 to train Baptist women for missions and social services.

By the 1950s, the school had evolved into a co-ed social-work program, named for early supporter and seminary professor W.O. Carver.

The Carver School merged with the seminary in 1963. It became a battleground in the 1990s, when the seminary came under more conservative leadership.

Seminary President Albert Mohler fired Carver School Dean Diana Garland (now dean of Baylor University’s School of Social Work) when she sought to hire a professor who favored the ordination of women, which the seminary officially opposes.

Seminary trustees closed the school after concluding in a study that “considerable differences exist in the structures, processes and issues of social-work education and theological studies.”

The code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers prohibits, among other things, advancing one’s religious interests in professional settings and discriminating on the basis of such factors as sexual orientation.

The code posed challenges to the seminary’s central emphasis on evangelism and its opposition to homosexuality.

Mohler said in a recent interview that a social-work program would represent “for any Christian institution, a significant point of stress, given some of the values and practices adopted within the social-work profession.”

He said he’s not familiar with Campbellsville’s program, but hopes it can meet those challenges.

“It is good to see that the program is continuing under a different sponsorship, and I certainly wish them well.”

Faith does play a role

Campbellsville is affiliated with the Kentucky Baptist Convention, the Southern Baptists’ state affiliate.

The state convention confirms Campbellsville’s trustees and helps fund the college, which has grown from 1,615 to 2,601 students in the past decade, while adding several academic programs. Campbellsville has operated as a college since the 1950s, and gained university status in 1996.

Whereas the seminary trains professed Christians to be church leaders, the liberal-arts college provides a “faith-oriented environment” while admitting students “whether they have any faith perspective or not,” President Michael Carter said.

Social-work graduates learn that for many clients in crisis, “their faith plays an important role,” Carter said, “but there won’t be a proselytizing process.”

“The world is a diverse place, and we believe as Christians we’re called to live in a diverse world,” Carter said. “That doesn’t mean we have to adopt the values of the world but we need to live out an ethic of caring, compassion and concern.”

That suits Tony Rutherford, one of the first six students to enroll this year in the first master’s level class in social work.

“I think if we just respect the dignity of each individual, it pretty much takes care of the rest of it,” he said.

Erlene Grise-Owens, a former Carver School professor now at Spalding University, was glad to hear of the Campbellsville program’s growth, while also noting that master’s social-work programs at Spalding, Baylor and elsewhere were created in part to fill the void left by the Carver School.

“You can’t replicate” the original Carver program, she said. “It was what it was and it is no longer, but there are other entities that the Carver School was the seed for.” **BT**

Editor’s note: This article is reprinted with permission from The Courier-Journal in Louisville, Ky.

Carver School of Social Work

Location:

Campbellsville University, Taylor County

Degrees offered:

- Bachelor’s and master’s in social work
- Master’s in counseling

Students:

- 136 graduates from the bachelor’s program since its move to Campbellsville
- Six students in the new master’s in social work program

Accreditation:

- Bachelor’s program accredited in 2001 by the Council on Social Work
- Education master’s accreditation pending

History:

- Woman’s Missionary Union Training School founded in 1907 to prepare women for missions and social services
- Operated in Louisville on East Broadway in present-day Metro United Way building
- Relocated to Lexington Road in 1941
- Reorganized in the 1950s as the co-educational W.O. Carver School of Missions and Social Work, in honor of a professor and supporter
- Merged with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1963 and was later renamed the Carver School of Church Social Work
- Closed by the seminary in the 1990s on the grounds that “considerable differences exist in the structures, processes and issues of social work education and theological studies”
- Campbellsville University acquired the Carver name and some assets from the seminary in 1998

What do these churches have in common?

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Boulevard Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C.
Broadmoor Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La.
Broadway Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky.
Center Hill Baptist Church, Lexington, N.C.
Central Baptist Church, Daytona Beach, Fla.
Chadbourn Baptist Church, Chadbourn, N.C.
College Avenue Baptist Church, Lenoir, N.C.
College Park Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla.
Covenant Baptist Church, Gastonia, N.C.
Cullowhee Baptist Church, Cullowhee, N.C.
Druid Hills Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.
Dunwoody Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.
Edenton Baptist Church, Edenton, N.C.
Emerywood Baptist Church, High Point, N.C.
Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, Ky.
Fernwood Baptist Church, Spartanburg, S.C.
First Baptist Church, Ahsokie, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Aiken, S.C.
First Baptist Church, Anderson, S.C.
First Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Bladenboro, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Cape Girardeau, Mo.
First Baptist Church, Carolina Beach, N.C.
First Baptist Church, Carrollton, Ga.
First Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tenn.
First Baptist Church, Clemson, S.C.
First Baptist Church, Columbus, Ga.
First Baptist Church, Commerce, Ga.
First Baptist Church, Conway, S.C.
First Baptist Church, Dalton, Ga.
First Baptist Church, Decatur, Ga.
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First Baptist Church of Wheaton, Silver Spring, Md.
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Franklin Baptist Church, Franklin, Va.
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Holmeswood Baptist Church, Kansas City, Mo.
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Mount Zion Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.
Murfreesboro Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, N.C.
National Heights Baptist Church, Fayetteville, Ga.
New Heights Baptist Church, Macon, Ga.
Northminster Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss.
North Stuart Baptist Church, Stuart, Fla.
Northwest Baptist Church, Ardmore, Okla.
Peachtree Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.
Piney River Baptist Church, Lovesville, Va.
Pintlala Baptist Church, Hope Hull, Ala.
Providence Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C.
Providence Baptist Church, Cookeville, Tenn.
Providence Baptist Church, Hendersonville, N.C.
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