

BAPTISTS Today

A photograph of Barbara Brown Taylor, a woman with short, wavy, light-colored hair and glasses, wearing a black jacket and a red patterned scarf. She is speaking into a microphone at a podium. In the background, a man in a tuxedo and another person are visible but out of focus.

Sharing the Sidewalk

**Barbara Brown Taylor
takes a look at the
changing South**

page 4

A small portrait of James Dunn, an older man with white hair, wearing a blue checkered shirt and a red bow tie, smiling.

James Dunn and soul freedom *page 12*



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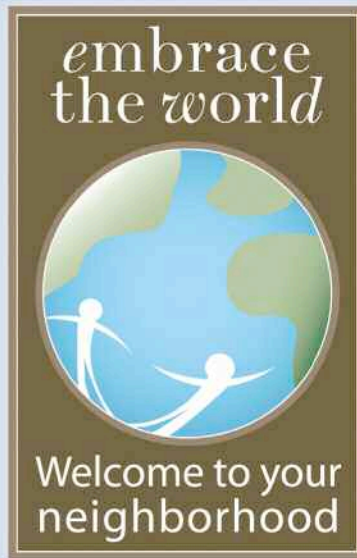
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July 2-3 | Houston, Texas

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Monday, June 29 - Wednesday, July 1

Arrive early and participate in local missions projects

Beginning Tuesday, June 30

The Houston Sessions, a collegiate missional experience, meets through Sunday, July 5.

Wednesday, July 1

Noon-5:00 p.m.	Registration Opens
1:00-5:00 p.m.	Leadership Institute, George R. Brown Convention Center
7:30 p.m.	Global Missions Field Personnel Commissioning Service & Reception, South Main Baptist Church

Thursday, July 2

7:30 a.m.	Auxiliary Events
8:00 a.m.	Registration Opens
8:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m.	Resource Fair Open
10:00 a.m.	General Session
11:00 a.m.	Business Breakouts
11:30 a.m.	Lunch and Auxiliary Meetings
1:30 - 2:40 p.m.	Workshop Session I
3:00 - 4:10 p.m.	Workshop Session II
4:30 p.m.	State/Regional Meetings
5:30 - 7:15 p.m.	Dinner and Auxiliary Events
7:30 p.m.	Worship
9:00 - 10:00 p.m.	Fellowship in the Resource Fair

Friday, July 3

7:30 a.m.	Auxiliary Events
8:00 a.m.	Registration Opens
8:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m.	Resource Fair
10:00 a.m.	General Session
11:30 a.m.	Lunch and Auxiliary Meetings
1:30 - 2:40 p.m.	Workshop Session III
3:00 - 4:10 p.m.	Workshop Session IV
5:00 - 7:00 p.m.	Dinner and Auxiliary Events
7:30 p.m.	Worship
9:00 - 10:00 p.m.	Reception in the Resource Fair

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship 

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Photo courtesy Greater Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau

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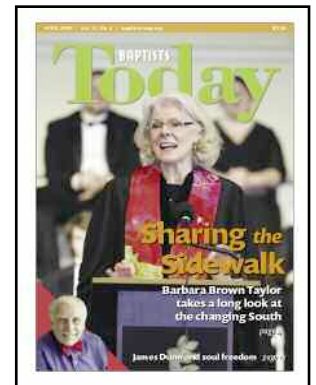
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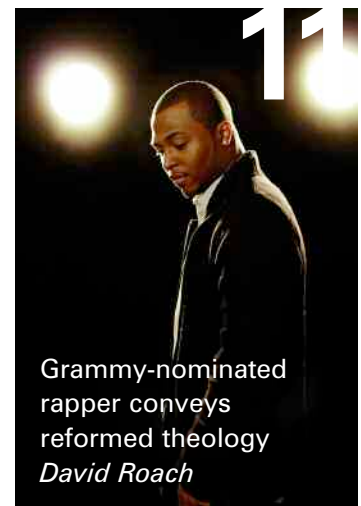
Street Questions

"Why so many Baptists in U.S., Texas?"

By Michael E. Williams



Cover photo by David Price of Piedmont College. 'Neighbor-love' is at heart of Christian tradition says Barbara Brown Taylor. **Page 4**



Grammy-nominated rapper conveys reformed theology
David Roach

Sharing the sidewalk

Barbara Brown Taylor explores the changing South

ATHENS, Ga. — “Ignorant people are more likely to be fearful people, and fearful people are more likely to hurt those they are afraid of,” said Barbara Brown Taylor in the opening session of a conference sponsored by Piedmont College, where the renown preacher and author has taught full time since 1997.

Therefore, Taylor, an Episcopalian who served as a parish minister for 15 years before joining the faculty of the small Congregational school in North Georgia, drags her students to meet all kinds of religious people in rural communities and throughout metro Atlanta. Studying world religions is now a hands-on experience.

Finding a wide variety of religious expressions in what was once the domain of Protestantism is getting easier. Hence, Taylor and the college sponsored this February conference to help others recognize and respond to the changing religious landscape of the South.

The fieldtrip education she offers to students is designed to counter ignorance of other faith traditions and to lessen fear of those who look and think differently. At the least, she wants her students to be curious about faith traditions other than their own.

“I’ll take curiosity over fear any day,” she said of her students’ inquiring minds when they visit a mosque, temple or other unfamiliar religious setting.

Taylor said she teaches world religions “because it is my best shot at creating world peace” and “... my Christian duty.”

Building relationships across religious lines is essential in communities that are now experiencing unparalleled diversity, she said. “As Christians go, I’m a hopeless idealist ...” she said. “I don’t want anyone dead because of their religion.”

For many Protestant Christians accustomed to majority status especially in Southern towns, however, the growing religious diversity can be threatening. Why?

“Because we are threatened by what we don’t know about,” Taylor told *Baptists Today* at the conclusion of the two-day conference. “Because we’ve never been in a position of having anyone else to talk to us about their ‘truth,’ their ‘gospel,’ their ‘good news.’ We’ve always been the giver of the good news.”

Moving from her parish ministry to the college classroom, Taylor learned that the plural pronoun she had used previously no longer meant the same thing. In her church setting, “we” applied to the congregation, Episcopalians or — or in the broadest sense — Christians.

She was surprised by the varied religious backgrounds and experiences of her students — especially those from metro Atlanta — including “more kinds of Baptists than I ever knew existed.”

Taylor tries to teach her students that learning about and respecting another person’s religious beliefs and practices do not compromise one’s own faith commitments. For Christians, she said, truth has much to do with “right relationships.”

For those unaware of the tremendous and growing religious diversity across the U.S., Taylor pointed to the Pluralism Project at Harvard University. Its web site (www.pluralism.org) tracks the shifts and growth, and provides multiple resources including a map that allows users to learn about the varied religious groups in a particular state.

Taylor said she was most surprised by “the almost meteoric growth” of the diverse Asian community. The Immigration Act of



Barbara Brown Taylor leads an exploration of “Who Is My Neighbor? A Changing Religious South” during a February conference sponsored by Piedmont College.



These Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders — among others — discuss the changing religious landscape of the South and how persons of varied faith traditions can better relate to one another. Photos by David Price/Piedmont College.

1965, she noted, opened gates that had been closed for 40 years.

“As someone who has known Atlanta for 30 years, that’s been a surprise — at how many different Hindu temples there are — Jain temples, Sikh study centers,” she said. “Buddhist temples of every kind — including the North American seat of the Dali Lama’s monastery in India is in Atlanta, Ga.”

Awareness of such religious diversity, Taylor hopes, will encourage action.

“‘Neighbor-love,’ I find, is at the heart of my (Christian) tradition,” she said.

Edward Bolen, pastor of Milledge Avenue Baptist Church in Athens, Ga., took such action a few days following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. He walked the three or four blocks from his church to the Al-Huda Islamic Center and knocked on the door.

Bolen confessed to not being a very good neighbor — having never welcomed the congregation to the community. It was the beginning of a relationship that soon included the local synagogue, Congregation Children of Israel, and evolved into the Abraham Alliance.

In a breakout session, Bolen and Rabbi Ron Gerson told of how the three congregations have partnered in recent years to build Habitat for Humanity houses together and to simply get to know one another.

The starting point was a spaghetti dinner hosted by the Baptists — where, as the rabbi said, “We just enjoyed the fellowship.”

“I’ve really not found much (anti-Semitism), but misunderstanding (between Christians and Jews),” said Rabbi Gerson of the university town. So he was eager for

interfaith relationships to grow within the community.

Bolen said that his interest in building interfaith relationships came from two sources. “First, because I am a Baptist.”

He explained how Baptists and Jews, alike, sought refuge and freedom in Rhode Island founded by early American Baptist and religious liberty advocate Roger Williams.

Second, Bolen said his experience of being a Southern Baptist seminary student in the San Francisco area broadened his perspective.

“It gave me an experience I did not enjoy growing up as Baptist in the South,” said the Valdosta, Ga., native.

The leaders of the Jewish, Muslim and Christian congregations have made no attempts to worship together out of respect for their individual approaches to worship. Instead they focus on building relationships, learning about each other’s traditions and working together in common community concerns.

“In interfaith (efforts), it’s important not to paper over differences,” said Rabbi Gerson. He noted that he attends many conferences where potential interfaith activities are discussed, but “we already have a model ... though it’s not perfect.”

One creative effort to foster better understanding among the three congregations was titled “Three faiths and a wedding.” The pastor, rabbi and imam recruited youth from their congregations to participate in mock weddings so that members of the other faith communities could witness the varied approaches.

Imam Hisham Achmed recently left Athens after completing graduate work at the

University of Georgia. The mosque has included participation in the Abraham Alliance as part of the job description for the new imam scheduled to arrive this spring.

Such interfaith efforts are crucial as the religious landscape continues to change — even in rural communities — said Taylor who lives in Habersham County, Ga., where the main campus of Piedmont College is located in the tiny town of Demorest.

The county “that looked like Mayberry when I immigrated there in 1992” now has three Thai restaurants, she noted.

Then how should the changing religious landscape in even rural communities impact Christian preaching?

“I can only say how it has impacted my Christian preaching,” Taylor responded to *Baptists Today*. “I’m always mindful of where I’m preaching. If I’m in the heart of a Christian community, I just let fly with all my Christian language and theology. If I know there may be people coming in from all over, I try to preach something that will sound like good news to everybody sitting there.”

Sharing one’s faith can be done faithfully, yet in the spirit of love, she said.

“If there’s hospitality and a willingness to listen both ways, I’m all for it,” said Taylor. “It’s just so often done with an unkind heart.”

The new religious landscape is a reality. The only choices involve how persons respond to such changes.

“It is one of our unique blessings as well as one of our unique challenges,” said Taylor, “to share the same sidewalk.” **BT**

Quotation

“ r e m a r k s ”

“This world has HEARD much from the church about who we are and what we believe. Too often they don’t SEE the church as being a different entity than others in their communities.”

—Southern Baptist Convention President Johnny Hunt of Woodstock, Ga., on selecting “LoveLoud — Actions Speak Louder Than Words” as the theme for the annual SBC meeting in Louisville in June (Baptist Press)

“Nothing this side of Galileo has inflamed so many Christians as Darwin’s evolutionary tome, *On the Origin of Species*. Still, I must confess: I just don’t ‘get’ the fight between religion and science or faith and reason.”

—Marv Knox, editor of the Texas Baptist Standard (ABP)

“[Mark Driscoll] has resurrected a particular strand of fire and brimstorm, one that most Americans assumed died out with the Puritans: Calvinism, a theology that makes Pat Robertson seem warm and fuzzy.”

—New York Times writer Molly Worthen, on the controversial Seattle pastor, in an article titled “Who would Jesus smack down?”

“One of the pastors helpfully reminded me that I was no longer in Virginia but back in Texas, and our Baptist churches don’t celebrate Lent ... So, I began to say, let’s celebrate 40 days of prayer between the first day of deer season and Super Bowl Sunday.”

—Randel Everett, new executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, on receiving a mild rebuke when he suggested a season of prayer, fasting and repentance for Texas Baptists during Lent (Baptist Standard)

“I don’t care what people’s motives are for signing up for the car, just that they hear the truth. People came to Jesus in the Bible for the wrong reasons, such as to be healed, for free food, or to be entertained.”

—Evangelist Ronnie Hill, who gave away a new Chrysler 300 LX in a website contest open to anyone willing to watch a three-minute gospel presentation (The Christian Index)

“One of the common errors of founder-presidents is to hold to the reins of leadership too long, thereby preventing the next generation from being prepared for executive authority.”

—James Dobson, who resigned as chairman of Focus on the Family but will continue his radio show and newsletter (RNS)

“We believe that we are in friendly cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention. Our purpose here today was to express that and also to share who Broadway is and what we are about.”

—Lyn Robbins of Fort Worth’s Broadway Baptist Church after the SBC Executive Committee postponed action on whether the congregation’s tolerance of gay members disqualifies it from SBC membership (ABP)

“We won’t start something that already exists. The church has one thing that every agency in your community needs — people. They need volunteers ... Partner where you can partner.”

—Rick Rusaw of LifeBridge Christian Church in Longmont, Colo., telling a Baylor University conference that his congregation intentionally avoids starting new ministries (ABP)

“You can’t run it like a church. You can’t judge anybody. You have people come in with all types of problems and needs and situations.”

—Church of God chaplain Rick Mann of Oaklawn Park horse track in Hot Springs, Ark. (RNS)

“The art of managing nowadays seems to focus on getting someone else to pay the price. Enjoy rewards on the way up, but dodge consequences on the way down.”

—Religion News Service columnist Tom Ehrlich

“The No. 1 byproduct of an age of greed is hungry souls. ... Our current economic crisis is providing an opportunity to rethink what matters and to turn away from the materialism that holds us in its grip.”

—Author Dick Staub in an RNS column titled “Greed, it turns out, isn’t so good after all”

In the news, 25 years ago . . .

“Even a casual reading of the New Testament should convince us that too sharp a distinction has been made between the ‘ordained clergy’ and the laity. We may also be convinced there is little if any scriptural basis for the rather elaborate type of ordination service frequently followed in our churches.”

—T.B. Maston of Fort Worth, Texas, in SBC Today, March/April 1984

editorial

A time for not talking about race

By John Pierce

Southern Baptist editor Kelly Boggs' recent column in Baptist Press reveals why white conservative Christians are not taken seriously very often in needed discussions about race.

The editor of the Louisiana Baptist Convention newspaper, *Baptist Message*, addressed the controversy over a political cartoon in the *New York Post* that many considered offensive — believing it to portray President Obama as a chimp. These racial sensitivities are understandable since for generations such racist portrayals have been common.

But white-guy Boggs is quick to give his white-guy perspective with comments like: "I saw nothing racial in the *Post* cartoon." "So long as some in our country see racism behind every wrong, every comment and in every cartoon, we will never make progress on the issue of race or be able to put the real racists in their place." "I do not believe that the *Post* cartoon contained any racial message."

Then Boggs quotes and agrees with the equally white, religious right figure Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council — who said that the solution to racial reconciliation is found "in a more aggressive church where we unite around ideals rooted not in skin color but in Jesus Christ."

While such lofty affirmations sound so spiritual, they ignore the reality that white evangelical churches have been a major part of the problem, not the solution to racism. An "aggressive church" is where racial discrimination was theologically justified and its related prejudices were reinforced within the faithful for decades.

Evangelical Christianity was a major obstacle to America's quest for civil rights — in which the "ideals rooted ... in Jesus Christ" concerning human equality were ignored or misconstrued by bad biblical interpretations.

Therefore, the words of white (especially Southern) evangelical Christians ring hollow. And Boggs is in no position to tell African Americans what they should or should not find offensive.

On this subject in particular, white evangelical Christians need to shut up about how to "fix" the race problem and spend more time seriously contemplating why our own history of race relations is so deeply marred.

Southern evangelicals have no more moral authority to speak on issues of race than the Roman Catholic Church does on sexual ethics.



Such authority is granted — not grabbed.

Long reflection, ongoing confession and honest repentance must precede any meaningful proclamation. Maybe years after humbly confessing our sins — and acknowledging our capacity for hate and our inability to read Scripture correctly when it goes against the grain of our culture and economic benefit — then we can offer a fresh word.

But now is the time to reflect quietly on troubling questions such as ...

- How could we have missed such a basic biblical truth as the equality of all persons?
- How could we treat fellow Americans — even sisters and brothers in Christ — as of less than equal value?
- Why has racism been fostered by the very persons who claim Jesus as Lord?
- How could so-called Christian churches not even open their doors to people of all races?

Then, more importantly . . .

- Where are our blind spots today?
- To whom will we need to apologize in the days and years ahead for our current sins of oppression and exclusion?

President Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder — the first African Americans to hold their respective positions — have rightly called for more open, honest dialogue about race. But the best contribution from many of us would be to simply listen for a while.

White evangelical Christians are not going to bridge the racial divide with proclamations that attempt to define what is and is not racism or try to quick-fix the centuries-old problem with spiritually-wrapped statements of simplicity.

Sure, it is more satisfying to tell other people the answers to all of their questions than to wrestle with our own. And Baptists too often aren't very good at the hard work of reflection, repentance and relationship building.

We like to talk — and act as if our latest opinion is the right one for everyone else to embrace. But our past actions do not afford us such a position on the subject of race. It is a time to reflect deeply and listen to others. **BT**

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'STREET QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISTS'

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

'Why are there **so many Baptists** in America, especially in Texas?'

This question takes us to the very origins and core beliefs of Baptists — who, in their earliest days, were a despised sect within Christianity.

In English life, Anglicans and even Puritans generally lumped Baptists together with groups like Quakers and sometimes Presbyterians in a category known as Dissenters. The first Baptists in England, led by Thomas Helwys and John Murton, experienced heavy persecution at the hands of the established Church of England.

The Puritans of New England and the Anglican Church in the South transferred this persecution to the first Baptists appearing in the North American colonies. By 1730 only about 50 Baptist churches with fewer than 2,500 members existed in the original colonies.

With the Great Awakening, however, Baptists benefited more than perhaps any other group from the revivals that spread throughout the colonies — although, ironically, many existing Baptist churches did not fully embrace the Awakening.

The growth for Baptists came from many Congregationalists in New England (called "New Light" congregations) who became convinced that Baptists were correct about the importance of believers' baptism. So many revival converts adopted Baptist beliefs that it caused famous evangelist and Anglican George Whitefield to say, upon returning to the colonies, that all his young chicks had become ducks — alluding to their baptismal choices.

These new Baptists formed New Light Baptist churches rather than joining the old "Regular" Baptist churches. Three remarkable leaders — Shubal Stearns, Martha Stearns Marshall and Daniel Marshall — emerged. Their efforts resulted in an explosion of New Light Baptist congregations called "Separatist" Baptists throughout North Carolina and Virginia.

Enthusiastic evangelism along with informal worship and polity typified the first of these churches, Sandy Creek Baptist Church. These Separate Baptists became one of the key traditions that influenced the growth of Southern Baptists.

These characteristics also appealed to the largely uneducated and fiercely independent settlers, many of Scots-Irish descent who fled to the frontier in search of cheap or free land and little government interference, and no political or religious authoritarianism.

Due in large part to the influence of the Great Awakening and the aggressive church planting and evangelism of the Separate Baptists, by 1790, Baptists may have numbered over 67,000 members, and Baptist historian Robert Gardner's meticulous research identifies nearly 1,000 Baptist churches in the newly formed republic.

The new nation's separation of church and state and religious freedom aided this growth. About the same time, older Regular Baptists and new Separate Baptists recognized they had far more in common than characteristics that separated them and began to draw closer together.

When a series of revivals eventually known as the Second Great Awakening

occurred in the early part of the 19th century, Baptists were uniquely positioned to benefit again. The Baptist emphasis on the priesthood of believers and soul competency meant that every frontier farmer or storekeeper was a potential preacher. Likewise, due to local church autonomy, any group of Baptists could start a church — without awaiting the approval of a regional bishop or synod or some far-off mission board — and call one of their own to serve as pastor.

While a lack of emphasis on educated clergy sometimes harmed the work of Baptists and led to conflict and schism, these poorly educated or uneducated leaders spread the work of Baptists across the frontier both North and South.

Baptists thrived in new states such as Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas and the northern parts of Louisiana. As Baptists spread westward, they took their beliefs with them.

About the same time, Baptists like Luther Rice and John Mason Peck led churches in both the North and the South to organize and unite around missions, though not without some fierce opposition from "anti-missions" Baptists.

Women discovered a venue for leadership in the support and promotion of missions. Spectacular growth for Baptists continued throughout the antebellum period.

In the South, however, a continued emphasis on personal evangelism and individualism led to the neglect of social issues including a nearly unanimous cultural compromise with slavery, unlike in the North, where frequently Baptists could be counted among the abolitionists.

This failure to confront the slavery issue



Michael E. Williams
dean of the College of
Humanities and Social
Services and professor of
history at Dallas Baptist
University

unfortunately also enhanced the numerical growth of Baptists in the South, who split from Northern Baptists in 1845.

When the first Anglos began to migrate into Texas in the 1820s, Mexican authorities forbade the organization of churches that were not Roman Catholic. As Leon McBeth writes, “Only God knows for sure when Baptists first set foot in Texas; the lesser authorities disagree among themselves.”

Some claim that Baptists could be found in Texas as early as 1812, but the first recorded Baptist preacher was Joseph Bays in East Texas in 1820. Ironically, in defiance of Mexican law, the first Baptist church located in Texas was an “anti-missions” congregation. By 1840, only about six Baptist churches existed in the republic.

Following natural migration patterns, Anglos flooded the area in the next decade after the U.S. annexed Texas. Immigrants — including Baptists — were drawn by land where profitable cotton could be grown as it had in the southeastern part of the U.S. J.M. Carroll recorded that Baptists formed more than 500 new churches between 1846 and 1860.

The Civil War and Reconstruction era

disrupted Baptist growth in both the Deep South and in Texas. However, the emancipation of slaves — many having attended Baptist churches — led to the formation of new churches. The same characteristics — local church autonomy, the priesthood of believers and soul competency — that had appealed to fiercely independent whites appealed to these newly freed people.

Likewise, the opportunity to find leadership roles in their churches appealed to African Americans in the same way that leadership in missions appealed to white women in the South.

Thus after the Civil War, Baptists became the most numerous denomination among African Americans in the United States and in Texas.

Yet, another reason why there are so many Baptists in the U.S. and Texas is that in the late 19th century and throughout the mid- and late-20th century, Baptists continued to focus aggressively upon missions. While both Northern Baptists and African-American Baptists actively engaged in this enterprise, Southern Baptists led the missions charge as a way of preserving and extending their southern “Zion.”

Utilizing a cooperative, convention-style approach to missions support and eventually toward all their endeavors such as higher education, the Southern Baptist concentration on cooperative missions and evangelism distracted them from the theological controversy that deterred and ultimately divided so many of America’s mainline denominations in the 20th century.

The same zealous evangelism and cooperative support of missions that typified Southern Baptists seemed especially suited to Texas Baptists. Gifted leaders such as George W. Truett, L.R. Scarborough and E.Y. Mullins enhanced numerical and institutional growth until Baptists became the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, led by the Southern Baptist Convention and, most recently, churches formerly associated with the SBC.

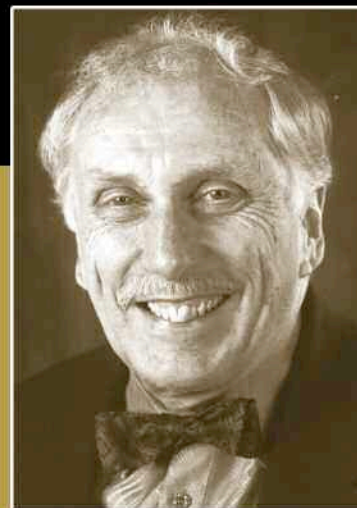
Texas Baptists make up a good percentage of the larger number of Baptists in the United States. Given that Texas is the second largest state in both land size and in population — and given that Baptists have long emphasized local church autonomy and independent thinking — it is not surprising that Baptists have flourished in Texas. **BT**

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Grammy-nominated rapper conveys Reformed theology

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — What do English Puritan John Owen, pastor John Piper and theologian Wayne Grudem have in common with rap music?

This trio of theological heavyweights inspired Marcus Williams Gray to write and record a Grammy-nominated album of hip-hop tunes that communicate Gospel truths.

Gray, also known as Christian rapper “FLAME,” is a student at Boyce College, the undergraduate school of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

On the surface, the two seem a discordant mix — the violence and sex-saturated ethos of hip-hop music and the otherworldly ethos of biblical Christianity — but FLAME has wed the two in a way that is proclaiming the Gospel on a bold new frontier.

“A lot of people say, ‘That music is of the devil,’” Gray said of rap. “Well, I agree. The message can definitely be demonic or anti-Christ. But the power in rap music in and of itself is massive. So when you take the Gospel message and you marry it to rap music, it’s a dynamic that can’t be duplicated.”

Gray’s latest album, *Our World Redeemed*, translates the Reformed theology of Owen, Piper and Grudem into a musical study of redemption. The album was nominated for a Grammy in the Best Rock or Rap Gospel Album category and has many people listening to the Gospel who wouldn’t otherwise be interested.

“When people, especially those who love rap music, when they hear Christian rap, it’s just an automatic respect if the quality is good,” Gray, a biblical counseling major, said. “... People stop in their tracks, and they lend you an ear. It’s almost like Mars Hill, the Areopagus. It’s just this marketplace where people want to hear your ideas.”

Though he is careful not to equate rap with preaching, Gray said the Holy Spirit has used rap to convert sinners to faith in Christ.

“When they hear relevant metaphors and similes that are from the culture but are affiliated with God’s Word and the Bible, it’s just a wonderful tool in the hands of God,” he said. “And I’ve seen so many people, I’ve just seen



their jaws drop and I’ve seen the Holy Spirit dig inside of their heart and start to remove that stony heart. And they hear the Gospel through rap music.”

Gray believes rap music may be a more effective tool for communicating the Gospel than pop music. A rap song has three verses of 16 bars each, he said; thus, the tempo and non-repetitive nature of a rap song allows those verses to be packed with biblical content.

“You can’t do that normally in just a regular pop song or singing-style song,” he said. “But in this form and in this medium, you can pack so much information in one song. And people just become liberated because they heard God’s heart and His Word articulated in such a way where it makes sense and it’s relevant.”

Growing up in the inner city of St. Louis, Gray was influenced by hip-hop culture from a young age. He started rapping in fifth grade, addressing positive and benign topics. But as he aged, Gray turned darker both in his music and his lifestyle. Gangs, drugs and a party atmosphere — the more standard elements commonly associated with the hip-hop lifestyle — became fixtures of his life.

At age 16, God got his attention: A car accident involving an 18-wheeler nearly took Gray’s life. When he asked his grandmother why God let the incident happen, she told him God was trying to catch his attention. A week and a half later his grandmother died, and Gray felt broken.

When a friend invited him to church, the Gospel captivated him.

“When I heard the Gospel, I just wept because [I realized] the purpose for which God

created me, to worship Him. Hearing the Gospel and His love for sinners and the call to repent — all of that just kind of gripped my heart,” he said.

“It was through that experience I remember just shedding tears, man, and asking the Lord to forgive me for all the things I had done in my past and at that point in my present. And He saved me.”

Immediately God began removing vices from Gray’s life. He recognized that “the Lord was changing me and cleaning me up.”

As part of his devotional life, Gray wrote raps to God and sang to Him during quiet times. Though he had no plans to become a recording artist, Gray began to listen to other Christian rappers and realized the potential power of the medium for ministry. So through a series of providential encounters, he began producing albums.

Among the topics his music has addressed are the Trinity, hermeneutics, the fall of man and the false teaching of the prosperity gospel.

Though he gained the name FLAME before becoming a Christian, Gray says it now describes the “fire in his bones” to spread God’s Word.

“People can get a full and a broad perspective of the whole counsel of God in one album,” he said. “You take 74 minutes, and you can flesh out the whole counsel of God and people can get a short synopsis of the entire Bible in 74 minutes. So it’s a powerful platform.” **BT**

—David Roach is a writer for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

James Dunn

and soul freedom

STORY BY AARON DOUGLAS WEAVER
PHOTOS BY KEN BENNETT/WFU

“Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.” This famous phrase characterizes the ministry of Baptists such as Thomas Helwys, Roger Williams and John Leland. In the last half of the 20th century, James Dunn has been the loudest and most aggressive Baptist proponent for religious liberty in America.

Dunn is best known for his leadership as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (now the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty), an organization comprised of multiple Baptist bodies that deals solely with religious liberty issues on Capitol Hill.

During his career, Dunn embodied and articulated a paradigm for Baptist political engagement in the public arena that was based upon the concept of soul freedom: voluntary, uncoerced faith and an unfettered individual conscience before God.

With uncompromising intensity, Dunn defended soul freedom as the historic basis of religious liberty. He attempted to so identify with the radical component of the Baptist

witness to religious liberty that Baptist historian Walter Shurden has called him a modern-day “John Leland,” the 18th century’s strongest proponent of separation of church and state.

To be authentically Baptist, Dunn believes, a person must defend soul freedom.

APPLIED CHRISTIANITY

A self-described “Texas-bred, Spirit-led, Bible-teaching, revival-preaching, recovering Southern Baptist,” James Milton Dunn accepted a “call” to vocational ministry as a 19-year-old junior at Texas Wesleyan University. Subsequently, Dunn graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (B. Div., 1957; D. Th., 1966).

Under the tutelage of T.B. Maston, the influential Southern Baptist ethicist, Dunn was drawn more intensely toward the social concerns of “applied Christianity.” While a graduate student, Dunn worked in Baptist Student Union (BSU) ministries and served as a pastor.

Dunn joined the Texas Christian Life Commission (TCLC) in 1966 and entered into the vocational arena of social Christianity. As associate director (1966-1968) and director (1968-1980) of the TCLC, Dunn attempted to “stir the consciences” of Texas Baptists regarding “applied Christianity.”

He helped develop Baptist viewpoints on issues such as gambling, race relations, Christian citizenship, hunger and religious liberty. Between the years 1966 to 1980, Dunn had transformed from a mild-mannered former BSU minister low on confidence to a nationally known Baptist leader with a reputation for his aggressive but effective style in the public square.

THE BJC AND THE SBC

Dunn’s defense of religious liberty and the separation of church and state became one of the pivotal issues in the Southern Baptist Convention controversy during the 1980s.

He was a primary target of the so-called “Conservative Resurgence” that ultimately gained control of the SBC. In 1981, soon after the initiation of the fundamentalist plan to win the SBC, Dunn left the Texas CLC to head the Baptist Joint Committee in Washington, D.C.

He immediately addressed the threat of the Religious Right and warned that there was a particular danger whenever powerful religious forces developed a close relationship to partisan politics. It was civil religion at its worst with God functioning as a “national mascot,” he warned.

Fundamentalist dissatisfaction with Dunn

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erupted when Dunn attacked President Reagan's proposal to amend the U.S. Constitution with a Prayer Amendment (1982). With blunt flair, Dunn exclaimed, "It is despicable demagoguery for the President to play petty politics with prayer. He knows that the Supreme Court never banned prayer in schools. It can't. Real prayer is always free."

Ironically, Southern Baptist fundamentalists agreed with the position of Dunn and the BJC on many religious liberty questions including support for the Equal Access Act and opposition to diplomatic relations with the Vatican. However, with his opposition to Reagan's "prayer amendment," fundamentalists realized that Dunn was not going to always represent their interests on Capitol Hill.

To a group known for its demands of conformity, this was not acceptable.

A "final straw" for Dunn's critics was his involvement on the board of "People for the American Way (PFAW)." While some Baptists viewed PFAW as a broad-based coalition for First Amendment rights, Dunn's critics were convinced it was anti-Christian.

Southern Baptist leader Paige Patterson said having someone identified both with PFAW and the SBC was "like putting Sodom together with Jerusalem." Dunn resigned from the PFAW board in an attempt to calm the criticism, but attacks continued.

After several attempts to de-fund the BJC in the 1980s, the SBC finally severed ties with the agency in 1991.

Throughout the SBC conflict, Dunn refused to remain silent or capitulate when convinced that conscience was at stake. In the face of accusations that his involvement with PFAW meant he was sympathetic to "pornographic smut peddlers," "baby-killing abortionists," and "enemies of America," Dunn continued to appeal to soul freedom as the essence of Baptist identity.

In his last address to the SBC, he defiantly declared: "Baptists will not remain silent facing the destruction of the wall of separation between church and state."

UNFETTERED CONSCIENCE

Ideas such as soul liberty and soul competency that had been trumpeted frequently in Baptist history found a home in the thought and rhetoric of Dunn. He became the heir of E.Y. Mullins and those before him who insisted that freedom of the individual conscience and the emphasis upon direct personal experience of God without reliance upon ecclesiastical leaders were at the heart of the best of the Baptist tradition.

In fact, Dunn's work for an unfettered conscience, religious liberty for all, and the separation of church and state was especially rooted in his understanding of soul freedom. Dunn has often described soul freedom as "the fire that burns in the innards of every true Baptist."

According to Dunn, since Baptist pioneer Thomas Helwys' bold proclamation that "the king is not Lord of the conscience," the hallmark of the people called Baptist is that "dogged determination to be free — free and faithful."

Dunn's advocacy for an uncoerced faith and truly voluntaristic religion led him to oppose creedalism because of its threat to soul freedom and religious liberty. He decried creeds as "the necessary requirement to squeeze in and squeak by some theological gate."

He said: "If we have anything remotely resembling a creed, it is the Baptist oral tradition that insists, 'Ain't nobody but Jesus gonna tell me what to believe.'"

Not surprisingly, Dunn's understanding of soul freedom has not been spared from criticism. Like E.Y. Mullins, Dunn too has been criticized of promoting a radical form of unbounded individualism, a faith without authority.

Nearly 50 years ago, American Baptist historian Winthrop Hudson stated that "the practical effect of the stress upon 'soul competency' as the cardinal doctrine of Baptists was to make everyone's hat their own church."

Some contemporary Baptists — usually associated with the "Baptist Manifesto" that advocates a communal reading rather than individual reading of Scripture — have seconded Hudson, claiming that Dunn turned "soul competency" into "sole competency." In other words, Dunn made an individual the exclusive arbiter of what Jesus is saying.

To say soul competency was sole competency was a distortion, Dunn argued. Baptist historic commitments to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and to the Bible as the authoritative standard for religious faith and practice were

the only boundaries needed to keep individualism from going awry.

As Dunn said: "Real Baptists still test Scripture by Jesus Christ."

Moreover, the theme of freedom and responsibility was consistently echoed in Dunn's writings. He also revealed his belief that genuine voluntary individual faith led a believer into the life of the church.

Dunn believes that the separation of church and state is the logical, theological and political consequence of a genuine uncoerced faith that springs from soul freedom and extends religious liberty to all. Consequently, he is against anything that smacks of an established religion or coercive mandated faith.

Dunn has advocated that strict neutrality, not benignity, is the proper role for government in regard to religion. According to Dunn, "Churches appeal for state assistance without counting the cost. When government meddles in religion, it always has the touch of mud."

Dunn does not equate "the separation of church and state" with the separation of religion from politics, however. In a pluralistic democracy, he fully understands that religion and politics will mix, must mix and should mix. He often declared that "mixing politics and religion is inevitable but merging church and state is inexcusable."

In his nearly 50-year-long ministerial career as an ethicist and distinguished activist for religious liberty, Dunn has offered a paradigm for Baptist political engagement in the public arena grounded in a commitment to soul freedom and the sacred regard for the unfettered conscience.

While knowing that his view of freedom is controversial, Dunn believes it to be rooted in the nature of God, found in the Bible, and literally covering the historic Baptist landscape.

Dunn has been a tireless, aggressive fighter for soul freedom. Even critics could identify with the Texas oil executive who once declared: "I'd rather have been Jacob wrestling with the angel than to see James Dunn walk in the door of my office." **BT**

—Aaron Douglas Weaver is a doctoral student in religion, politics and society in the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University and blogs at www.thebigdaddyweave.com. This article is adapted from his 2008 masters thesis at Baylor titled "James M. Dunn and Soul Freedom: A Paradigm for Baptist Political Engagement in the Political Arena."

Duke Divinity addresses challenges in establishing effective church leadership

By Tony W. Cartledge
Contributing Editor

DURHAM, N.C. — Churches and religious organizations function best when they have effective leaders, but such leaders are often in short supply. Even those who have been successful in the past may find themselves in need of retooling to meet the demands of the present and the challenges of the future.

At Duke University, a fledgling but well-funded program is working to make effective leadership education available to leaders ranging from high school youth to organizational CEOs. Fortified by a \$14 million grant from the Lilly Endowment and additional funds from the Duke Endowment and other sources, Leadership Education at Duke Divinity hopes to do for religious leaders what Coach Mike Krzyzewski has done for Duke basketball.

David Odom, former director of the Center for Congregational Health at North Carolina Baptist Hospital, was tapped to help shape the program, which was founded in January 2008 and is now hitting its full stride. The Lilly Endowment “felt like denominations and others needed help in developing leadership, but would not get around to investing in it,” Odom told participants at a January executive retreat for leaders in the North American Baptist Fellowship.

Speaking to the same group, Duke Divinity School dean Greg Jones said the program seeks to develop leaders who can promote three essential elements that faith communities need to survive: “traditioned innovation, transformative leadership and vibrant institutions.”

Citing Jaroslav Pelikan, Jones said: “Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”

Effective leadership cannot rely fully on either one, Jones suggested. Rather, through “traditioned innovation” the church can recapture its spiritual imagination by developing “a way of honoring the past and engaging the present in a way that points to the future.”

Such innovation requires “transformative leadership” on every level, he said, leaders who are able to hold divergent ideas in tension while seeking a way forward. Such leaders tend



Far left, Duke Divinity School dean Greg Jones. Left, David Odom, director of Leadership Education at Duke Divinity School. Photos by Yutaka Takarada.

to be extraordinary storytellers, able to “draw people together into a new trajectory through storytelling in a compelling way.”

One of the deepest leadership challenges, especially for Protestants, has to do with institutions, Jones said. Many contemporary leaders struggle with whether institutions are part of the gospel, and fail to appreciate the value of vibrant institutions, he said. Yet, institutions are “crucial for carrying on a way of life” and can’t be ignored.

Vibrant institutions in the Christian economy include colleges, seminaries and denominational organizations “that are carriers and incubators of leadership,” Jones said.

Although Leadership Education is new, it encompasses and builds upon a number of established programs already under the Divinity School’s aegis. It also develops customized programs for targeted leadership groups both within single denominations and in cross-denominational groups. Topics focus on pressing issues such as clergy health and well-being, pastor assessment and debt management.

To extend its reach beyond the limited number of people who can participate in seminars or special groups, Leadership Education has developed a Web site (www.faithandleadership.com) that Odom hopes will become a standard resource for pastors and institutional leaders.

The interactive site debuted in February, and is designed to be a one-stop shop for leadership resources. Supported by a staff of five, it features a lead story related to leadership that changes weekly. The story, in turn, invites readers to give feedback and engage in dialogue through an associated blog called

“Call & Response.”

Within the blog, a journalist regularly reviews news sources and posts links to five stories that the staff believes religious leaders should be aware of. Every week the site also features one bit of data from a survey related to American religious life, along with an interpretive explanation regarding its significance.

Leadership Education’s own research has shown that pastors and other leaders want information about managing their staffs, growing as leaders, and taking better care of themselves and their congregations. The Web site seeks to make that kind of information readily available.

“All this is free,” Odom said. “You can cannibalize it if you want — it doesn’t matter to us — we want it to spark conversation.”

In developing the program, the Divinity School is seeking to learn from and partner with other entities such as Duke’s Fuqua School of Business and Duke Corporate Education. In early February, the Faith and Leadership website even featured a column on leadership from Duke’s Coach K, who frequently collaborates with the Fuqua School of Business.

The goal, ultimately, is to help churches and religious institutions to thrive, rather than just struggling to survive. In doing so, Jones said, the program will “develop educational offerings that cultivate thriving communities that are signs, foretastes and instruments to the reign of God ... cultivating congregations and communities that thrive in ways that allow Christian discipleship to flourish.”

“We forget that our first calling is to be disciples,” Jones said. “If we keep our focus on that, it will be significant.” **BT**

Russian Baptists denounce bogus newspaper

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

MOSCOW — Russian Baptists denounced the injection of religion into politics after a bogus newspaper circulated in a mayoral race falsely identified a candidate as a Baptist in an effort to besmirch his character.

According to Internet reports, a counterfeit newspaper stuffed into mailboxes in the western Russian city of Smolensk claimed Baptists were supporting a mayoral candidate in hopes that his election would cause Baptists to rival the Russian Orthodox Church for influence.

“Russian Baptists are for Maslakov!” appeared as a banner headline in the supposed special edition of *The Protestant*, presumably forged as a political dirty trick.

The article claimed that Baptists all over Russia and from around the world were hoping candidate Sergy Maslakov “would become the first Baptist mayor in Russia.” But Baptist leaders said Maslakov, one of 10 candidates, has no known ties to Baptists.

The article alluded to rumors of rampant sexual immorality and pedophilia among Baptists, and implied Russian Baptist churches are funded largely by Western sources, including the government of the United States.

“Political con-artists are trying to turn the respected, 140-year history of Baptists in Russia into a horror story in hopes of helping

and hurting certain political parties,” said Vitaly Vlasenko, the Russian Baptist union’s director of external church affairs.

Vlasenko accused campaign workers of “sowing hatred between the [denominational] confessions,” an act he termed “ugly and totally unacceptable.”

The article reportedly included comments falsely attributed to the head of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists from an interview that did not take place. The paper carried photos of Baptist leaders with mismatched captions that identified them with incorrect names.

Viktor Ignatenkov, pastor of First Baptist Church of Smolensk, told the Slavic Legal Center the candidate has no relationship to Baptists and has never been a member of a Baptist church. He said the anonymous authors apparently intended to inflame religious strife with statements about Baptists that are patently false.

Anatoly Pchelintsev, a university professor and chief editor of the *Religion and Law* journal, told Slavic Legal Center that Baptists have never conducted themselves in ways described in the newspaper or interfered in political activity. He joined Russian Baptists in saying law enforcement should investigate who was behind the publication.

Smolensk, with more than 300,000 citizens, is one of Russia’s oldest cities and scene of some of the heaviest fighting during

World War II. Located on the Dnieper River, it is a port city and important rail junction for distribution of agricultural products and other goods.

It is also hometown of the new Russian Patriarch, Metropolitan Kirill, who supports better relations between the Orthodox Church and other faith groups.

Tensions between Orthodox leaders and minority faiths are not uncommon in the former Soviet Union. Last year a court in Smolensk dissolved a Methodist church for having a Sunday school attended by four children, but Russia’s Supreme Court later reversed the decision.

The First Baptist Church of Smolensk, on the other hand, was recognized by the government of Vladimir Putin for its social ministries.

The International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic, recently sponsored a groundbreaking conference aimed at improving Baptist-Orthodox relations in European contexts with an Orthodox religious majority. The aim of the colloquium, attended by more than 30 representatives from Orthodox, Baptist, Free Evangelical and Pentecostal traditions, was to discuss points of tension and opportunities for enriching a shared Christian witness. **BT**

Editor’s note: Neither Maslakov nor the candidate whose campaign was associated with the political stunt prevailed in the March 1 election.

Ministers often need help caring for their own mental health

(ABP) — Congregations often view their pastors as strong, stable shepherds, but many ministers experience a disconnect between the image they project and the mental and emotional battles to which they are subject.

“I have never met a clergy person, either in therapy or out, who did not suffer some type of wound to [himself/herself],” said clinical psychologist Robert Randall, who spent 37 years as minister of counseling at St. Peter’s United Church of Christ in Elmhurst, Ill.

Clergy are not very good at taking care of their health, he said. “The common excuse is ‘not enough time,’ but the underlying problem has more to do with narcissistic issues.”

Clergy want to be seen as unshakeable and don’t allow anyone to see what they are going through. Instead, they keep “working and working” to be seen as productive and indispensable, Randall said.

“For some clergy, there is a long history of struggles to maintain firm self-cohesion and self-esteem,” he said. “But even pastors with a firm sense of self are always vulnerable to having their self shaken.”

Randall recommends four steps for pastors facing depression:

1. “Admit you are depressed and need help.
2. “Get into psychotherapy with a good therapist, one who not only understands depression but also understands the life of ministry.

3. “Consult your M.D. or a psychiatrist to discuss the possible need for anti-depressants.

4. “Keep putting one foot in front of the other, even if you don’t feel like it. Maintain your routine.”

Randall cautions against sharing while in the midst of the struggles. “If a depressed pastor is still functioning fairly well, then the pastor should treat his/her depression as his/her own personal issue, shared with family and select friends, but not made a congregational issue.”

If the pastor’s work is impaired, he or she needs to inform the elected leaders to discuss the best way to inform the congregation and the path that needs to be taken, Randall said. **BT**

Facing a new Baptist century

By Larry Hovis

What will be required of Baptists in order to be faithful to the mission of God in the next Baptist century? Allow me to suggest three critical factors.

1. The New Baptist Century will be built on the firm foundation of Baptist principles. In the first Baptist century in Europe and in the second Baptist century in America, Baptists did not suffer persecution for nominating committee reports or giving plans. They fought, suffered and sometimes died for bedrock principles:

The Lordship of Jesus Christ — Before anything else, we are persons made in the image of God and sinners saved by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, seeking to live in the way of Jesus.

The Scriptures as our final authority for faith and practice — The Bible is authoritative for individuals and congregations and in shared ministry. Any human words about the Scriptures are always subordinate to the Scriptures, and therefore must never be used in a coercive manner.

The priesthood of every believer — Believer-priests have both the privilege of relating directly to God through Jesus Christ and the responsibility of ministering on behalf of God in the world. The symbol for our priesthood is baptism, upon profession of faith.

Self-governing congregations — No outside entity may have authority over the local church. Congregations shape their own governance, develop membership requirements, call leadership, order worship, and pursue their unique mission in concert with partners of their own choosing.

Religious liberty for all people — Baptists believe the best way to cultivate religious liberty is through the separation of the institutions of government and the institutions of religion. Yet we believe also that our voices — as well as the voices of people of all faiths and no faith — should be proclaimed freely in the public square.

Cooperating with others in God's mission — No individual Baptist or congregation can accomplish God's mission alone. We partner with other Christians and churches to establish and support ministries to fulfill both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

2. We will develop a renewed focus on the mission of God. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we will share our resources and creativity to strengthen churches, the front lines of ministry.

Through partnerships we will assist one another to form faith in persons of all ages, especially children, youth, college students and young adults. We will work together to call out the called in order to discover, nurture, and sustain current and future church leaders.

We will motivate and equip individuals and churches to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ by providing resources and opportunities to be on mission locally and globally. And we will provide the kind of Christian fellowship that celebrates our oneness in Christ, respects our differences and energizes one another for participation in the mission of God.

3. We will transition from mere cooperation to missional collaboration. "Missional" means that everything must be evaluated in light of the mission to bring about God's kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven." Missional collaboration means that congregations and ministry partners work together to pursue this mission.

Often, in the last Baptist century, cooperation was reduced to funding and governance. Churches gave money to the denomination that then determined budgets and elected boards to govern agencies and institutions. Actual ministries were often subordinate to the focus on funding and governance, leaving congregations at arm's length from the ministries they funded.

A needed change to that system will require finding the most effective ways to relate to and become engaged with ministry partners, to strengthen congregations and to discover appropriate ways for congregations to affirm their partnerships publicly.

Shortly after I came to work for CBFNC, I visited a pastor friend to invite him and his church to become more involved in our

Fellowship.

He wished me well, but explained that he and his church really didn't need us. He was confident of making it to retirement without getting bogged down in any more Baptist organizations.

This is how the Lord led me to respond: "You're right. You and your church can probably make it OK until you retire without the help of any Baptist organization. But you didn't get where you are by yourself.

"You're a good preacher and a good leader, but you're not so talented to have made it this far alone. As a teenager, your youth group attended a denominationally-sponsored camp where you learned that God had a larger purpose for your life. In college, you participated in Baptist Student Union where you honed your leadership skills and received a call to ministry.

"You attended a denominational seminary with good professors, which was so inexpensive you could graduate with no debt. You then had a network of ministers, professors and denominational leaders who helped you receive a call to that first little rural congregation that taught you how to be a pastor.

"That same network then helped you move to a county seat First Baptist Church and then to your current church. There was an entire system that nurtured, supported and enabled you to progress to where you are today.

"What kind of system will exist to help the next generation of Baptists take the same journey you and I have taken? Who will help your son and my daughter follow God's call in their lives? If not you and me — whom?"

In order to be faithful to God's mission, we really do need each other. As we step into a new Baptist century, we must have strong, healthy Baptist organizations that are ready, willing and able to serve as a robust catalyst for mutual ministry and missional collaboration. **BT**

—Larry Hovis is executive coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina. This commentary is adapted from his Feb. 9 address to the "New Baptist Century Convocation" in Greensboro, N.C.



From complacency to common cause

By Scott L. Stearman

On Feb. 7, 2008, a man walked into Kirkwood City Hall and killed six people. It made national news.

But for me, the important story is seen in the beauty of what has happened since — or, in a sense, before.

In August 2007 my wife Cecelia began a Community Gospel Choir as a way to bring blacks and whites “together in song.” Since moving here in 2003 we have been disappointed in the segregated nature of St. Louis, and both felt a call to do our small part to help.

In January 2008 we went with staff and members from Kirkwood Baptist Church to the New Baptist Covenant Celebration. It was a beautiful experience, and we sensed a continued call to work on the racial divide.

A few days after getting home from Atlanta, I attended a neighborhood meeting in our African-American section of town. The mayor, whom I knew fairly well, and one of the local council members were both present.

A couple of weeks later, the mayor would be in the hospital from a gunshot wound to the head and the council member would be dead. The mayor would live a few months. Five victims (including two policemen) would die that night.

The shooter, known quite well by several church members, was a black man. All of the victims were white.

But it was not just the villain/victim skin color that made the massacre a racially charged event. Charles Thornton came from a section of Kirkwood that was historically African American. In 1990 it was annexed by the city. In the process of annexation, promises were made or implied. Some of those were not kept.

In the already segregated reality of St. Louis, tensions were heightened. Like many such stories, it's complicated.

Suffice it to say that Thornton's act cannot be divorced from or explained by the history of race relations in St. Louis. This kind of act has no rational explanation, but on the other hand, to remove it from our

I must admit that for me as pastor, the most powerful moments of this last year came when two congregations came together — one very white, one quite black.

historical context makes no sense.

About two weeks after the shooting, Kirkwood Baptist Church hosted a city dialogue, inviting African Americans to talk with their neighbors. Out of that meeting we created an organization called “The Community for Understanding and Healing,” which has subsequently enlisted hundreds in multi-racial dialogue.

We've taken a serious look at issues such as white privilege and the white/black achievement gap. It has been a rich, sometimes fraught, but beautiful journey.

The new mayor, elected not long after the shooting, and all city council members have been at the majority of the meetings.

Recently the organization sponsored an essay contest for local children. There were well over 300 entries.

Nine winners were chosen, and the top three (one each from grade school, middle school and high school) read their essays in front of a diverse crowd of 200, including the mayor and a majority of the city council members. Again, Kirkwood Baptist Church was honored to serve as host.

Out of this effort, many relationships were formed. I now have a friendship with Pastor Jeffery Croft of the Harrison Avenue Missionary Baptist Church. In October we joined together to conduct a one-day missional effort called “Hands On Kirkwood.”

In January we met on four successive Wednesday nights to watch and discuss the video “Beneath the Skin: Baptists and

Racism,” produced by the Baptist Center for Ethics. This was an exceptionally moving time.

The community-wide dialogues were instructive and helpful. Many good relationships were formed. I believe the organization we began will continue its good work in the community.

But I must admit that for me as a pastor, the most powerful moments of this last year came when two congregations met together — one very white, one quite black. We tried to grapple with the ideals of the gospel we preach and the reality of the past we've experienced. Having the commonality of a vibrant Baptist faith led us to a level of discussion that was very rich. There was an honesty and openness I'd never seen in a setting like this.

After watching the section of the video where issues of institutional racism were explored, some of the older black participants talked about our local “Spencer's Grill” where not so long ago they could not go inside. Skin color determined that they had to stand at the back door.

An older white member told about growing up in a “sundown town” where only whites were allowed after the sun set. On these evenings we all felt as if we were eating at the same table, knowing that the sun was setting on our divided journey.

The date Feb. 7, 2008 will be forever etched on my brain. Every time I hear a helicopter, my mind goes to that night of circling helicopters and a futile rushed trip to the hospital. We will not soon forget, and we mourn those who were lost.

But we also celebrate that out of this tragedy our complacency has been shaken and our sense of common cause has found new life. **BT**

—Scott L. Stearman is pastor of Kirkwood Baptist Church in St. Louis, Mo. For information on community efforts there, visit www.cfuh.org. For information on “Beneath the Skin: Baptists and Racism,” visit www.ethicsdaily.com.



back-row birdie

Easter in us, O Lord

By Keith D. Herron

“**M**ommy, why did the Easter Bunny kill the baby Jesus?” Pastors get all the tough questions. Some members haven’t yet discovered the glories of the Internet, so they ask about the Bible, faith, death, fatal diseases and ... their children’s thorny questions. Still, I was stunned to get this question from the mom of a preschooler.

Can you really blame the little child who took the story given to him by the church and cooked it in his own fractured thinking? The kid was only working with the hand dealt to him because most churches throw every cultural image at children from Santa Claus to the Easter Bunny to the goblins at Halloween. Children are not like adults. They don’t have the filters to separate fantasy from fact. Yet, we adults act like they can. And it takes a child a while to figure out when we’re telling the truth and when we’re not. Maybe Easter’s naturally tough for a kid to figure out.

But why is Easter such a tough story for us adults to wrap our minds around? “The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it,” we say piously. But does that answer really hold? Karl Barth once remarked that people come to church for only one reason — to ask, “Is it really true?”

So we gather up the washed and the unwashed on Easter morning to see if we’re still up to the question. Even the New Testament challenges us mightily, “If our hope in Christ were limited to this life, only we should of all mankind be the most to be pitied!”

The child who asked that question so many years ago likely has children of his own by now. And maybe the question lingers in his memory because perhaps he never heard an answer that makes sense to him. But Easter deserves more than that, don’t you think?

My friend Birdie is a part

of the terminal Sunday school class of ladies who’ve no more classes to promote to. They are at the end of the line; the next stop is the fruit salad and baked ham and green bean casserole served at the lunch prepared for their families when they die. Birdie knows the score, and so do the other ladies.

What I like about them is they’ve been to the circus, they’ve been around the block a time or two, and there’s not much they haven’t seen. Most often they have a wise word to offer the rest of us who have the time to listen. These are the ladies who’ve buried their husbands and because of the gender difference of mortality, they’ve formed an unspoken bond with one another. Those still with husbands know the score: They will likely give up their spouses before their own time comes around. And when that happens, as it likely will, they will pass their initiation into the sorority of widowhood.

Birdie helps me understand them. She knows their language and helps me know what the conversation is all about. She knows their language because she too is a full-fledged member as her husband Earl died two years before I arrived as her pastor. I step into the class gingerly to say hello, and they

immediately stop their quiet conversations with one another to smile sweetly and discern why I’ve come or to see if I have a good word to share with them. I suppose they know who holds the important cards in this meeting. My hand is mostly empty, and they play coy with me. In truth, there’s not much I can deliver for them other than the promise to be there for them in their moment of need with the hope I’ll have something good to say when their day arrives.

In that holy moment, I remembered British poet Gerard Manley Hopkins and how he wrote eloquently about the deaths of five Franciscan nuns who drowned at the mouth of the Thames River in the winter of 1876. It was an insurmountable tragedy that those lovely committed sisters died. Hopkins searched for just the right word to describe his heart’s plea when he took a noun and bent it into a verb: “Let Christ ‘easter’ in us,” he wrote.

As I stood there gawking, Birdie generously invited me into their class, pulled out a chair for me to sit in and poured me a cup of coffee as though I belonged there. “Preacher, give us a good word for this season when we look past our pain and sorrow to that better day.” What was so beautiful about her invitation was said through the sparkle in the eyes of the women who sat around the table. Each of them affirmed Birdie’s invitation by the light in their eyes and by the sweetness of their smiles. In light of their open-handed welcome, I had nothing to offer them other than to smile back broadly and to recognize that all of us were united in the eastering Christ who brought us together for just this moment.

Amen! Let it be so, O risen Christ! **BT**

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



2009 Formations Commentary

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

**LESSONS FOR:
Sunday, May 3-31,
2009**

Written by Steve McGlamery, a Ph.D. Student in sociology at Virginia Tech and a former associate pastor



May 3, 2009

The king chooses Esther

Esther 2:1-18

Interesting Tidbit: Esther is one of two books in our Bible named after a woman.

The book of Esther tells the dramatic story of a young Jewish woman whose life, through a series of “coincidences,” becomes pivotal in the future of the Hebrew people. In chapter 1, everything is over the top at the Persian palace. King Ahasuerus — believed to be the one known in most historical sources as Xerxes I, who ruled the Persian Empire from 486-466 BCE (see *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 4.) — is used to getting anything he wants, and in return he holds nothing back in displaying the opulence and wealth of his kingdom.

Then, Queen Vashti refuses his command to come show off her beauty to all the VIPs. From our 21st century vantage point, one might say, “You go, girl!” in solidarity with her fight for gender equality. But in that less enlightened day, it was “You go, girl, where your husband tells you to go, or you’re gone.” After male privilege has been restored, our story picks up in chapter 2 with a plan to replace the banished queen.

The search for the right girl to marry into royalty sounds like a Cinderella plotline. Verse 5 introduces “a Jew” named Mordecai. (The book of Esther and Zechariah 8:23 are perhaps the only uses of the term “Jew” in the Old Testament. This points to a late date for the writing of the book, since the term only came

into common use after the time of most of the Prophets.)

Mordecai’s grandfather had been carried into Babylonian captivity, placing the story in historical context. The Persians have since conquered the Babylonians, and make up the most powerful empire of their day. Mordecai’s kinswoman, Esther, is an orphan and his adopted daughter. Esther pleases first, not the king, but the king’s eunuch placed in charge of the candidates. She thereby gains advantages. Verse 10 introduces “the secret” central to the story: Mordecai thought it best that Esther hide her Jewish identity (It may be that the change from her given Hebrew name Hadassah to the Persian name Esther is for this purpose).

Why would this be the case? Probably the same reason some Jews have “passed” as gentiles in more modern times — to avoid persecution, to avoid calling attention to herself as a foreigner, to avoid becoming suspect as an outsider.

After going through a long-term “extreme makeover,” Esther’s turn with the king comes. The implication that the audition with the king included sex is strong. Yet the narrator expresses no opinion on the morals of this situation, but in silence implies that such is just the way it is with pagan kings — and maybe Jewish kings, too!

Verse 11 gives a lovely picture of a pacing, loving adopted father concerned for his adopted daughter’s well-being. The outcome, though, is that Esther wins the royal contest — out of the hundreds of beauty contestants. The writer would attribute the win to beauty (v. 7), resourcefulness (making the right friends, v. 9), familial love and solidarity (vv. 7, 11), trust and self-confidence (v. 15), and discretion in keeping her identity hidden (v. 10).

King Ahasuerus stages a grand celebration. (Imagine the 20th century royal wedding of Charles and Diana many times over!) The celebration is but the beginning of the story, however.

May 10, 2009

Mordecai angers Haman

Esther 3:1-15

Interesting Tidbit: Many scholars consider Esther one of the three books in our Bible that are self-contained short stories.

Mordecai apparently has an important role as guard or gatekeeper at the city gate, as his heroic deed at the end of chapter 2 reveals. But now another character is introduced, the new antagonist Haman. (The story has been without an antagonist since Queen Vashti was unceremoniously dumped.) We don’t know how Haman got in so good with the king, but the king has seen fit to make him second in command. And the king (at Haman’s request?) has decreed that all persons are to pay Prince Haman homage. Mordecai, however, refuses to bend his knee. We are not told why. Maybe it is similar to Daniel’s story, where allegiance to the one true God demands that one never appear to be subject to (certainly not be seen to be worshipping) anyone else.

Haman apparently doesn’t notice Mordecai’s disrespect. Mordecai’s co-workers notice, however, and are incredulous. They try to talk some sense into Mordecai, but when he refuses to relent, they decide to report him. Perhaps they don’t want to be seen as complicit in Mordecai’s actions. Shockingly, Mordecai has revealed to his co-workers that he is a Jew — despite insisting to Esther that she keep it secret.

Mordecai’s apparently careless indiscretion soon threatens the annihilation of his — and God’s — entire people. Haman is now revealed in all of his monstrous evil. He will not be satisfied simply to force Mordecai to bow down to him. He will not be satisfied that Mordecai be stripped of his royal position or that he be imprisoned or tortured or even killed.

No, Haman’s irrational, inhumane and angry reaction to this slight is to order the slaughter of this foreign race in their midst



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who, he insists, cannot be trusted to be loyal to the Persian authorities. The only saving grace for our heroes is that Haman, rather than implementing the dastardly, bloody plan immediately, decides that a lot (in Persian, a *pur*) is to be cast to determine the fateful day. Fortunately for our heroes, the lot gives them 11 months to intervene and prevent their own destruction.

Notice that Haman never mentions to the king the personal slight that is behind his desire to seek the destruction of the Jews. In fact, he never mentions who these people are. Instead, he slyly plays upon the king's fears of disloyalty among his subjects. Just as Vashti had to be punished to keep all the other wives in line in obeying their husbands, so now these people must be punished so that other non-Persian people in the empire won't insist on following their own laws. At least that is the implication of Haman's appeal to the king.

We don't know what is on the king's mind or where his priorities are. (The story might lead us to believe he is preoccupied with the next meal, the next drink, the next party.) But he does not ask any questions or seek more details on the matter. He trusts Haman too easily, and rather blithely dismisses the matter from his concern, handing authority to Haman to do as he pleases.

And so the die is cast. The word is spread abroad "to destroy, to slay, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day" (v. 13, RSV). One cannot help but think of the Nazi Holocaust. Sadly, other such genocides have been carried out throughout our era. From Stalin's and Mao's reigns of terror to the killing fields of Cambodia, from the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia to the slaughter in Rwanda, right up to our own day in Darfur, Sudan and many other not-so-publicized places: all are chilling reminders of the evil in humanity. How is it that we can so callously seek the destruction of entire peoples for being different from us, and that the world can stand on the sidelines and wring their hands? We cannot help but believe that God would have us do better than that.

May 17, 2009

Mordecai intercedes

Esther 4

Interesting Tidbit: Esther is the only book in our Bible that never mentions God by name, which likely hindered its inclusion in the Jewish canon and called into question its appropriateness as

Holy Scripture as late as the Protestant Reformation.

Mordecai and all the Jews are pictured in abject sorrow and penitence. A big burden is on Mordecai. He is the one who let it slip that he was Jewish. He is also the one who refused to do obeisance as commanded. Now the fate of his people is at stake. Yet he is helpless to do anything on his own. But luckily he has a friend in high places — his adopted daughter, the favorite wife of the king.

Unfortunately, Esther is so isolated by the palace walls and the coterie of servants that she is seemingly the only one who has not received word about the edict. Finally, she hears that something is greatly troubling her adopted father and former guardian and provider, but hasn't a clue what it is. So she sends a messenger to find out.

Mordecai conveys what has happened, and is careful to mention three particulars:

(1) The amount of money Haman has offered to see that his wishes are carried out — This would convey the gravity of the situation, what the Jews are up against in trying to put a stop to the bloody plans that threaten to wipe them from the face of the earth.

(2) The exact words of the edict, demonstrating the reality that the edict has the king's approval and has been published throughout the empire — In other words, the process is well in motion.

(3) The plan for how to resolve the situation — "Intervene on behalf of your people. Forget all etiquette and propriety, and throw yourself at his mercy. Beg, plead, cry, remonstrate — whatever it takes to get through to the king that his dearest is under terrible distress because of the plans he has put into play."

We are not told Esther's immediate reaction. But, once she has gained her composure and is thinking clearly, she sends a message back. She wants Mordecai to realize what kind of predicament she is in. If she approaches her husband without being summoned, she risks being executed. If she does nothing, her people will be slaughtered. The "30 days" (v. 11) likely indicates the chances of the king summoning her as a matter of routine are not good.

Mordecai's response is a bit confrontational. He is trying to put things into perspective. He has faith that the Jews will be saved one way or the other. Again, mention of God is conspicuous in its absence, but the sense of God's providential concern for the perpetuation of his chosen people permeates the passage. Mordecai is taking on a kind of prophetic role here, predicting calamity for

Esther "and her father's family" if she does nothing. In other words, Mordecai tells Esther, don't think that "queen" trumps "Jew" when it comes to determining your identity and fate should the edict be carried out.

Then Mordecai gets to perhaps the most often quoted phrase in the book of Esther: "for such a time as this" (v. 14). It is a profound and memorable statement of God's providential care for God's children, but in oblique language where the reader has to read between the lines to see the fingerprints of God.

Perhaps there is a lesson here. The activity of God in our lives is not always made explicit; it could be attributed to many other things — chance, destiny, our own resourcefulness, confluence of events, the wise counsel of friends, etc. But who maps out our destiny? Who directs the confluence of events? Who brings friends into our lives and guides them in their assistance to us?

Esther relents. She, like Mary, the mother of Jesus, is willing to carry this immense burden. But she wisely asks for some group solidarity to buttress her. The castle walls may separate her and her servants from the Jews on the outside, but they will feel a spiritual unity through the discipline of fasting. It will likely strengthen their resolve, clear their confusion and fear, and perhaps lead to insight and power from that unnamed source of all wisdom and power. When the three days of fasting are complete, Esther says, she promises to approach the king, despite the risk to herself. She will break the law, willing to pay the price with her life.

I can't help thinking of folks like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., as I reflect on this passage. These and other advocates of "civil disobedience," or "nonviolent resistance" to unjust laws, show no disrespect for the need for law and order. Yet they decide they must answer to a higher power, no matter the consequence, and do not resist arrest, imprisonment, even death, as the price for their actions.

In the New Testament, Peter and John give utterance to this principle: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" they told the authorities in Acts 4:19. And again, when arrested and reminded in Acts 5:28 of the orders not to teach in Jesus' name, they answer: "We must obey God rather than men." Such conviction is costly, but sorely needed as a corrective for an imperfect system of laws that is not always just.

Esther 4 ends with a reversal of the previous hierarchy. Up to this point Mordecai, as Esther's parental guardian, has instructed her in what to do, starting with keeping her Jewish



identity secret (2:10). As 2:20 puts it: “Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him” (RSV). This also applies to his telling her to approach the king on her people’s behalf. Now, however, Mordecai is doing everything “Esther ... ordered him” to do.

May 24, 2009

Esther takes a risk

Esther 5:1-8; 7:1-8:2

Interesting Tidbit: Esther is one of three or four books where additions — in this case, frequent mention of God — to the book can be found in the Greek Apocrypha.

We pick up the story on the fateful day Esther will approach her husband the king, without being summoned, to request that he intercede and revoke the decree that all Jews are to be killed. The writer gets straight to the point: “When the king saw Queen Esther ... she found favor in his sight.”

There is something to be said for the power of love here. (“What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom” — 5:3, RSV) The implication is the king’s love of his life, Esther, enters the room and the king forgets all about propriety and etiquette, law and order as his heart melts and he welcomes her with open arms and a smile (or the symbolic equivalent — extending the golden scepter).

We know right away that the king isn’t angry at Esther for coming into his presence in the court without being summoned. But as for the king’s response to Esther’s request, on this we have to wait a bit.

Esther, in her shrewdness, has apparently determined that it would best serve her purpose to “butter up” her husband first. The king has already shown a great propensity for gluttonous behavior, and Esther knows her husband well. The peculiar part is her inclusion of her enemy, Haman, in her plans. Remember that, while Haman knows of Mordecai’s Jewish identity, he apparently has no indication that he knows Esther is a Jew. So Esther is at a strategic advantage here. She knows who her enemy is and where he is, but Haman is oblivious to Esther’s plans for him. And apparently one dinner isn’t enough, for Esther insists on inviting the two men to a second dinner she has prepared, after which she promises to make her request known.

Haman is so oblivious to Esther’s plans, he is sure that her inclusion of him in the dinners is a sign of his prominence. But Esther

has Haman right where she wants him. He has been crushed and humiliated, forced to pay homage to that hated Jew, Mordecai, who had failed to pay him homage months earlier. And before he can recover his composure, he is dragged off to another banquet prepared by Esther, which Haman has presumably forgotten all about in his misery. So there he is, distracted and distraught, in the king and queen’s presence when Esther, over glasses of wine, reveals the extent of her distress.

This the king cannot stand — to see the one he loves so much so hurt. “We are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed,” laments Esther (7:4, RSV). Then, she uses two more synonyms to describe their impending doom. “Had we been sold as slaves,” says Esther, “I wouldn’t have bothered you. But sold to be annihilated? I’ve got to plead with you to intercede and prevent that.”

Notice that Esther has yet to reveal who “her people are” — but picture Haman. He may not be thinking clearly, but something tells me that Esther’s talk of a people’s ordered destruction cuts through his fog and grabs his attention. He realizes for the first time that the one person the king would put before him, trust more than him, is a Jew. “Can it get any worse?” he may be wondering. Then, in a courtroom-like setting, Esther points to him and declares, “There’s the man responsible for all of this — this wicked Haman!”

And it proceeds to get even worse for our villain. His pleading with Esther for his life is mistaken by the king as his trying to rape her. A servant, seeing the king’s anger about to blow, points out how convenient it is that a gallows has already been built — by Haman orders, intended originally for his enemy Mordecai’s execution! After Haman’s swift fall from second in the kingdom to hung criminal, the final *coup de grâce* is the distribution of Haman’s two most treasured assets. Esther gets the house, and Mordecai gets the signet ring — and the authority that goes with it, the king entrusting to him the administration of the largest empire in the known world.

May 31, 2009

The Jews prevail

Esther 8:3-9:3, 26-28

Interesting Tidbit: Esther is one of five books combined by Jewish scholars into one scroll, called the “Megilloth,” and also one of the books connected with a Jewish festival.

Today’s lesson would seem to be a bit of a

denouement, since Esther and Mordecai’s victory over the enemy who threatened to kill them is complete. But, as the writer presents it, there is still this matter of the royal decree. The king, in his anger, has the dastardly Haman killed quickly. But the king has done nothing to undo the edict Haman had broadcast throughout the empire.

And so, in a bit of *déjà vu*, but with less dramatic suspense this time, Queen Esther again approaches the king in the royal court; he again extends to her the golden scepter. Esther makes her desperate plea known once more. Perhaps, in getting caught up in dealing with Haman’s personal treachery, this larger matter has slipped the king’s mind. But then the king reminds Esther and Mordecai that they have already been given the authority to do what they are asking of the king. (It is a common theme in the Old Testament, this matter of Jews finding themselves in high positions in the court of a gentile ruler.)

A timeline review might help here. The story starts in the third year of Ahasuerus’ reign, when Queen Vashti is banished. It is more than four years later, in the 10th month of the 7th year of his reign, when Esther’s turn with the king comes around in the “contest” to be queen (2:16). It is again more than four years later, the 1st month in the 12th year of Ahasuerus’ reign, when Haman casts lots (*pur*) to determine when the slaughter of the Jews should occur. The “chance” of the lots determines that the pogrom is set for 11 months later, in the 12th month (3:7, 13). This provides the maximum time possible for the Jews to be miraculously delivered. Chance? Or the work of a certain unnamed being?

Now we find that only a little more than 2 of the 11 months have elapsed. (8:10 says it is now the 23rd day of the 3rd month). Yet a good bit of time (several weeks, we might guess) would have been needed to reach the far ends of the empire to formally pronounce the repeal of the previously proclaimed decree.

And again, we see a tremendous reversal of fortune. Whereas the second most powerful man in the kingdom had sought to kill Mordecai a short time earlier, now Mordecai is publicly hailed as a hero and near equal to the king — crowned and clothed like one, too (8:15). And the Jews’ mourning and sorrow have turned to unrestrained joy and elation. Finally, to complete the reversal, whereas Mordecai had been wary of Esther revealing herself as a Jew for fear of reprisals, now gentiles are calling themselves Jews, out of fear and/or a desire to share in the good standing



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Jews have come into in the empire (8:17).

Would that the story ended here, with the Jews inaugurating the feast of Purim to be observed annually at this time of year to commemorate the delivery of the Jews from Haman's devious plans. But, as is often the case with Old Testament stories, the ones we are inclined to see as heroes commit the most horrific acts. We may question: What were God's standards in that day? Did God's people misunderstand his will in this matter? Did the writers simply get it wrong?

It would seem that, in the desire to make their victory complete, either the people of God or the recounter of the story have crossed the line. The third alternative, that such slaughter of and vengeance on enemies were sanctioned by God in those days, is simply unfathomable. No matter what the justification argument (ex: times were different then; they needed to be sure no one else tried to mess with them; they were under law, not grace), they all require a compromise with the idea of an all-loving, all-just, all-merciful God. And if the character of God is unchanging, that leaves us with the horrible prospect of our lives today being in the hands of a God who is

not all loving or all merciful.

Our choice of verses to focus on neatly sanitizes the story. But the fact is, Esther and her people are not satisfied with the 510 killed in the capital the first day, so they request another day when they can slaughter 300 more (9:13-14). And 75,000 are reported slain throughout the rest of the empire. It certainly leaves a bitter taste in the mouth of one reading this account of how a "day of feasting and gladness" (9:17, 18, 22) called Purim came to be added to the Jewish calendar. It would seem that the gift giving and acts of charity that were to characterize the observance of Purim (9:22) could appear a bit incongruent with the atrocities committed by indiscriminately slaughtering so many of God's children.

Alas, such are the contradictions and confusions we must wrestle with in mining the nuggets of truth and wisdom from God's Word as handed down to us by God's chosen people. God give us wisdom in this difficult task, and may God show mercy on us, and remind us to "love our enemies," as Jesus taught us, as we trust God to turn our sorrow into gladness (9:22). **BT**

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2009

The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Sonya C. Milam



Transforming children's church into worship training

About 10 years ago, as a new church staff member, I was given the task to rejuvenate our children's church. I naively attempted to recruit volunteers, purchase curriculum and think of yet another craft and some "child-friendly" songs. Thankfully, I was soon introduced to Robbie Castleman's book *Parenting in the Pew* (InterVarsity Press), which changed my quest for separating and occupying children during the adult service.

Ultimately, our children's church was transformed into worship training for preschoolers. Today, these youngsters continue to learn and practice liturgical worship in a child-sized setting through "WOW: Working On Worship."

Using the worship hour for worship training — instead of trying to extend Sunday school or create a new program — involves transforming attitudes, parents, volunteers, curriculum and resources, spaces, and semantics.

Jana Kinnersly, a veteran of children's ministry, feels that "we have worship wars today because we have a generation who was never trained in or encouraged to participate in corporate worship." This lack of training, added to our society's need to be entertained consumers, creates a frightening attitude about worship. The skills for liturgical corporate worship must be taught and modeled. Worship training can help young children be prepared to join their families for corporate worship and feel like participants — not spectators.

Teaching children to worship is different from just "being still and quiet." The ultimate goal for all worshipers is to be moved by God's presence and to offer him praise. Learning treasured rituals of liturgy and worship takes practice and patience. Because the first seven years of life present

Resources

Children and Worship: What Is a Church to Do?
(www.janicehaywood.com)

Come Worship With Me: A Journey Through the Church Year (Ruth Bolings, Mouse Books)

the best opportunity for learning and practicing skills, and also because children learn best by the repetitive observation of model behaviors, worship training is ideally suited for the preschool years.

Convincing parents that full participation in corporate worship for their children is an important Christian discipline worthy of the work required can be challenging. Therefore:

- Have early and frequent conversations with families about children's worship training.
- Create dialogues that invite their concerns. Acknowledge these while you reflect your experiences of worshiping with children.
- Provide resources throughout their children's milestones, of which *Parenting in the Pew* should be the first.
- Provide printed suggestions for preparing children for worship at home and church.

Anyone who is already participating in your children's ministry and who is committed to your worship practices are ideal workers. If someone can follow an order of worship, love preschoolers and commit to at least a month's service, this may be their niche. Ask parents to serve in your children's worship training so that they can experience the attempts you are making in training their children. If possible, provide volunteers with a recording of the worship service they miss on their service days.

Worship training requires minimal resources and expenditures. Simply condense your church's order of worship into a service

for preschoolers. "Play church" together. Teach songs from worship services. Show the colors of each church season. Teach common worship terms. Have visual reminders of your worship leaders and their roles.

We begin each of our WOW sessions by having an assigned preschooler serve as the worship leader. This coveted position gets to chime the hour, lead in the Doxology and Gloria Patri, pass an offering plate, and lead a prayer — all while being reminded of the meaning and importance of these rituals.

When worship training "graduates" are ready to enter the corporate worship experience, we supply them with tools needed for full participation. Our WOW bags include Bibles, bookmarks for finding pages in hymnals and Bibles, tissues, and pencils.

The worship training area is ideally located near the sanctuary and preschool areas. Our WOW meets in a foyer area — complete with child-sized pews — adjacent to the preschool Sunday school classes. Converted classrooms and chapel spaces are other options. Space should also be allowed for free play or center time.

We love for our children's programs to have names. For children's worship training, I've grown to dislike the traditional term "children's church" as it implies that children have a separate church. "Extended session" suggests a repeat of what has already taken place in Sunday school. Names such as "WOW: Working on Worship" or "PFW: Preparing for Worship" accurately reflect the purpose of a special educational experience.

I am happy to report that our first WOW graduates have now entered high school and seem to be engaged in our worship. I notice many sitting with their families and participating fully in the service. They have even become our best WOW volunteers. **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 Sonya C. Milam, former coordinator of preschool and children's ministries at First Baptist Church of Christ at Macon, Ga., who currently is a "stay-on-the road" mom and part-time student. Resource Page Archives are available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.

CLASSIFIEDS

First Baptist Church, South Boston, Va., is seeking God's leadership in finding a full-time **pastor**. We prefer someone who is called to the ministry and has a seminary degree, at least 5-10 years of pastoral experience, and a strong work ethic. We need a candidate who is a strong spiritual leader, missions-minded, and a good administrator. First Baptist Church is associated with the BGAV/VBMB and CBF. Please send résumé to: Pastor Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 815 N. Main St., South Boston, VA 24592, or youngm@gcronline.com.

Minister to Young Adults: Begin a full-time ministry in a unique urban setting ready for a progressive voice of faith among young adults. For a job description, go to www.hbclouisville.org.

First Baptist Church of Jefferson City, Mo., affiliated with CBF and BGCM, is seeking a full-time **associate pastor of discipleship**. This position will develop, administer, and promote an effective and holistic discipleship ministry for adults of all ages and life situations that will enhance spiritual formation and growth. Previous experience in discipleship ministry is desired. A bachelor's degree in a related field is required; a master's is preferred. Send résumés to: Dr. Doyle Sager, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, 301 E. Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101, or doyle@fbcjc.org. A complete job description is available at www.fbcjc.org.

Minister of Children and Families

A growing church of approximately 1,250 members, affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Southern Baptist Convention, is seeking a **minister of children and families**. Preferably he or she should be a graduate of a properly accredited seminary or divinity school and have a minimum of two years experience. This minister should feel called of God to fulfill the biblical model of ministry through service in proclamation, teaching, pastoral care and administration. Please send a résumé to: Minister of Children Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 815 Davie Ave., Statesville, NC 28677. For more information on the church, visit www.statesvillefbc.org.

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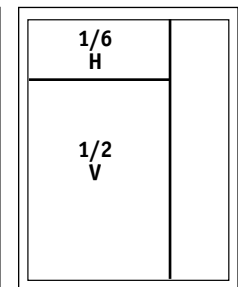
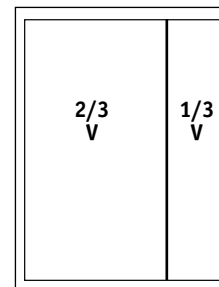
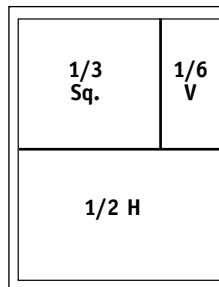
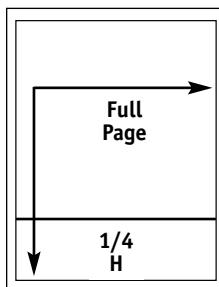
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readers' responses

Still searching the Bible for 'true woman'

EDITOR: I will not be signing the 'True Woman' document ("True Woman Manifesto sponsors seek counter-revolution to feminism," February 2009, page 17). I'm not even sure how to define a 'True Woman.'

I've 'searched and studied scripture' and find no definition of what it means to be a 'True Woman.' When I read the Bible I find wonderful examples of women who were led by the power of the Holy Spirit to rule, to lead battles, to embrace Christian leadership, to partner with men — including Jesus — to promote and empower the Kingdom of God.

In my searching of the scripture I have discovered women who were wise enough not to cower to the patriarchal religious rulers of their time and mothers who were wise enough to find ways to save their children from male dominance. In my studying of the scriptures I find wonderful stories about women who used their gifts and talents to serve God in spite of religious oppression by human authority and instead took their lead from the prompting of God's guidance and wisdom.

I read and experience a wonderful story of a young woman who said 'yes' to God when she was told that she would give birth to the Savior of the World, a very chosen and appointed woman. I suppose one could say that God is indeed a man with a 'full quiver' theology who was setting the example through Mary's obedience of what is a 'true woman.'

I too believe that women and men are meant to complement one another in their roles. However, my thorough study of scripture, which has led me to 'conclusions' and caused me to be 'theologically strong and scripturally strong,' leads me to understand that our working together as men and women is not about gender or women staying at home as pregnant teachers, but is instead about our God-given gifts, talents and calling.

"I too believe that women and men are meant to complement one another in their roles."

We complement one another when we place our emphasis on how God has equipped each of us to function with one another based on scripture and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is time for women and men to embrace a God who has created us all in God's amazing image and begin a movement that embraces spiritual giftedness and call rather than gender-based priorities.

*Kathy Pickett, Kansas City, Mo.
(Pickett is pastor of congregational life at
Holmeswood Baptist Church.)*

Let Christian-Muslim dialogue continue

Editor: The churlish reply of the Baptist World Alliance to the letter from Muslim leaders ("BWA responds to Muslim letter," February 2009, page 12) begs a response. For those who listen respectfully, the Quran gives ample content to initiate discussions between Muslims and Christians about Isa/Jesus, Allah/God, and the Holy Spirit.

In the Quran, Surah XIX: 17-21, Muhammad wrote, "... then We sent to her Our spirit... Marium replied to the angel, 'When shall I have a boy and no mortal has yet touched me, nor have I been made unchaste?' He said, 'Even so; your Lord says It is easy for Me: and that We may make him a sign to men and a mercy which has been decreed.'"

This verse in the Quran defines the role of the Holy Spirit in the birth of Isa/Jesus.

Surah IV: 157 says, "And their saying, 'Surely we have killed the Messiah, Isa son of Marium; and they did not kill him; neither did they crucify him....' Verse 158: "Nay! Allah took him up to himself, and Allah is Mighty, Wise," also connects Isa as the divine Son of God, and agrees with the Bible account *after* the crucifixion.

Coptic Christians of Muhammad's time argued that Jesus could not eat or hurt or die as humans do because he was God. This argument may explain the Koran's rationale here. In the Bible, God's "decree" of Genesis 3:15 says that Messiah would suffer physically in his battle to defeat Shaitin.

The capitalized pronoun "We" referring to Allah implies the same as the Hebrew plural Elohim. Grant R. Jeffrey in his book, *The Handwriting of God*, shows that Rabbi Simon ben Jocai and his son Rabbi Eliezer, writers of the Zohar, and the writers of the Targums, Jonathan ben Uziel and Onkelos the Proselyte, all taught the mystery of God expressed as 'Three in One.'

Let the "fuller exposition of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity" begin. A discussion of how the life of Jesus compares with moral living in the Quran could be interesting.

Susanne Dabney, Atlanta, Ga.

STORY CORRECTION

In the conversation with Wayne E. Ward (March issue, page 4), we incorrectly stated that his mother died when he was 9 years old. It should have stated that she was dying of kidney failure at that time when he was put in the care of his aunt Grace Kelley. We regret the error.

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BWA reports good news, bad news

By Tony W. Cartledge

FALLS CHURCH, Va. —The Baptist World Alliance executive committee heard good news and bad news about the organization's financial situation March 3-4 at the BWA offices near Washington, D.C.

During its semi-annual session, the committee heard General Secretary Neville Callam report that contributions to the general fund were down just 2.6 percent in 2008, to \$1.09 million, despite the severe economic downturn. Meanwhile, he said, expenditures were held to 4.6 percent below budget.

Callam expressed deep appreciation to member bodies, churches, and individual donors, whose total giving reached \$1.71 million, allowing the BWA to end the year "in a much better position than we thought likely in late September 2008."

That was the good news.

The bad news is that a 36 percent decline in the value of BWA's investments led to a sharp draw-down of reserves and led the executive committee to reduce the \$2.97 million budget for 2009 by \$862,000 — about 29 percent.

The BWA's budget generally anticipates income from a variety of sources, including previous donations that are in restricted accounts. After the book value of those donations declined by \$1.6 million during the first three quarters of 2008, the committee began divesting equities from its portfolio in order to protect the remainder. Losses continued into February before all stocks could be sold, however, totaling \$2.35 million in 2008 and more than \$200,000 in January and February.

BWA officials said their accounting policy does not allow restricted funds to decline in value, requiring them to transfer more than \$2.5 million from unrestricted reserves to the operating fund in order to protect the restricted funds. The transfers reduced reserves to about \$500,000, the minimum required by BWA policy.

With little or no anticipated investment income for 2009 and a best-case scenario of flat giving from donors, the budget committee anticipated an \$862,000 shortfall for the fiscal year. The executive committee voted to



Leena Lavanya of India will receive the 2009 Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award from the Baptist World Alliance.

reduce the budget by that amount while allowing spending to increase proportionally if additional sources of revenue are found.

Ellen Teague, BWA's finance director, said staff members will review and prioritize ministry plans for the year to bring spending in line with the new budget of just \$2.11 million.

As executive committee members expressed concern about the potential impact of such reductions, investment committee chair and former treasurer Clem Gimbert underscored the new reality. Because of the financial situation, he predicted, "BWA is going to change, and maybe in some radical ways."

BWA president David Coffey said, "This is a very sober moment in the life of our BWA family," but still expressed confidence: "God has been good to us for over 100 years, and he's not going to abandon us now."

Callam said BWA leaders have come to realize the need to build a much larger donor base and encouraged those who know the organization best — including those who were in the room — to set an example through financial contributions.

In other business, the executive committee voted to recommend Raimundo César

Lavanya attended a Baptist Youth World Congress in 1993 and responded to a call to surrender fully to Christ.

Barreto Jr. of Brazil as director of the Division of Freedom and Justice, a new office approved last year. The recommendation will require approval by the BWA General Council, which will meet in Ede, the Netherlands, July 27-Aug. 1.

Barreto holds a doctoral degree in Christian Social Ethics from Princeton Theological Seminary, as well as degrees from the McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University and from the North Brazil Baptist Theological Seminary in Recife. He also studied at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic.

He has worked extensively in academia in Brazil and in the U.S., and has conducted research on Christian and social justice issues in Latin America. He has special interest in working with organizations in human rights, and in advocating for those who have special needs.

The executive committee also named Leena Lavanya of India to be the 2009 recipient of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award.

Lavanya, granddaughter of a former vice president of the BWA, attended a Baptist Youth World Congress in 1993 and responded to a call to surrender fully to Christ.

Since then, she has developed and led "Serve Trust," an organization that operates residential homes for the aged, lepers, and adults and children living with HIV/AIDS; a school for children in a depressed area of the town of Narasaraopet in southern India; and training programs that seek to help female sex workers and their daughters break out of the cultural caste of prostitution into which their families were born.

Lavanya, who has often been described as the "Baptist Mother Teresa," will receive the award during the July meeting in the Netherlands. **BT**

North Carolina church sets example with shiny new eco-friendly building

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, which celebrates its 125th anniversary in 2009, is turning heads with a new eco-friendly building addition that eases overcrowding, allows for expanded missions and establishes a strong architectural presence along a prominent business and cultural thoroughfare in Raleigh, N.C. On Feb. 1, the church dedicated a metal-shingled 9,800-square-foot addition. Although it has already been affectionately nicknamed the “shiny diner,” architecturally it is tied in with Pullen’s original Romanesque brick-and-mortar sanctuary, built in 1923.

“We’ve been holding Sunday school in the hallways for more than 15 years, so it was clear the church needed a solution,” said Nancy Petty, the church’s co-pastor. More than 200 people have joined Pullen Memorial since 2000, according to the church website, bringing the church membership to 700 and active participants to more than 1,000. Youth and children make up a large part of the growth. Youth Sunday school classes previously scattered throughout three floors now have their own classrooms alongside a new nonprofit Hope Center to minister to the community’s homeless, jobless and marginalized.

A 2003 master plan set goals of making the building more welcoming and accessible and expanding the church’s mission. “The more we discussed it, the clearer it became that we also wanted to have as ‘green’ a structure as we could,” said Regina Parham, chair of the church’s design and construction committee. Building “as green as can be” while remaining affordable in a flagging economy provided a major challenge.

Since heating and cooling account for 30 percent of an average building’s energy consumption and power-plant emissions contribute significantly to air pollution, Pullen Memorial opted for a geothermal heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system.

Composed of 20 wells drilled to a depth of 375 feet to tap Raleigh’s average soil tem-



Photo of new building courtesy of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh.

perature of 64 degrees, the HVAC unit cost \$170,000 more than a regular heat-pump unit. But church leaders believe the system, with a 50-year lifespan, will begin paying for itself after 10 years.

The system is expected to save \$6,000 a year at current energy costs, and will stop more than 250,000 pounds of carbon emissions into the atmosphere — the equivalent of taking 22 cars off the road each year.

Other green features include orienting the building and placing windows to make best use of natural light. The design provides sunlight to 80 percent of the new space, including work and dining areas.

The addition also implements a “green roof” — covered with vegetation and soil over a waterproofing membrane — expected to reduce storm-water runoff, the No. 1 source of water pollution, by 25 percent. An underground cistern captures runoff from three areas, including the original church roof. The water will be used for landscape irrigation. Waterless urinals, dual-flush toilets and water-conserving appliances will further cut water use and save costs.

Recycled building materials were used where possible. The wall and roof shingles are made from recycled metal and never will need painting, while flooring is made of renewable resources.

Pullen Memorial has a high-profile location on Hillsborough Street, a historic Raleigh thoroughfare viewed as a front door to North Carolina State University and corri-

dor to the North Carolina Capitol, but primary access to the old building was from a smaller side street.

The new addition opens up access to Hillsborough Street. A contemplation garden of preserved trees and replanted flowers, shrubs and bushes adds a touch of green space open to the public to a crowded urban area.

The addition also allows Pullen Memorial to expand services to the working poor, an emphasis that characterized the congregation at its founding in 1884. Created for people who fall through the gaps in social services, the Hope Center contains two offices for staff, a multipurpose space with computers to aid job seekers, expanded space for tutoring programs and restrooms with showers and laundry facilities for the down-and-out.

Architecture critics have praised the building. *New Raleigh* magazine described its design as “simple,” “confident” and “sensitive.”

“This addition to a historic building melds the slope of the earth with new and redefined usable spaces,” the magazine said. “The lower story of the building addition cuddles up to the existing structure and acts to negotiate all of the elements of the project: a new chapel and fellowship hall, a roof garden, and a new entrance to the church. A courtyard space outside of the original sanctuary on the Cox Avenue side continues around to the rear of the building and becomes the vegetative roof of the new spaces. This exercise in placemaking yields an elegant transition that weaves the building and its surrounding landscape into a singular architecture.”

Another conscious decision for the church involved forgoing construction on undeveloped land. Instead of adding parking, Pullen Memorial members reduced their 28 parking spaces to 14, meaning most worshippers will continue to park at nearby businesses or on the street.

The new building cost \$3.7 million. A three-year capital campaign raised \$2.2 million in gifts and pledges. An unexpected bequest in 2008 left just 20 percent of total costs to be financed with a bank loan. **BT**

in the know

Keeping up with people, places and events

PEOPLE

Jason Edwards has been called as pastor of Second Baptist Church of Liberty, Mo. For the past two years Edwards has served as a pastoral resident at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas.

Tyler C. Gillespie is associate pastor for youth and student ministry at Highland Park Baptist Church in Austin, Texas. For the past two years, Gillespie has served as a Lilly pastoral resident at Hyde Park Union Church in Chicago.

Lanny Hall, president of Howard Payne University, will return to Hardin-Simmons University as president. Hall will be the 15th president in Hardin-Simmons' 118-year history, returning to the university where he started as a student more than 40 years ago and where he served a decade as president and then was named chancellor in 2001.

Henry V. Langford received the John Jasper Trailblazer Award on Feb. 15 from the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in Richmond, Va. The award is named for John Jasper (1812-1901), a former slave who became a revered preacher. Langford served Baptist churches in Georgia, Kentucky, Alabama and Virginia. For 21 years, he worked with the Alcohol and Drug Education Council of Virginia Churches and was known for writing letters and speaking out on behalf of social justice.

Bill Leonard will retire as dean of the Wake Forest University Divinity School in June 2010, but will continue to teach full time as professor of church history and Baptist studies in the divinity school and as professor of religion in the university's religion department. Leonard has served Wake Forest for 14 years. As founding dean, he recruited the divinity school's first faculty. The school now claims 12 professors and 163 graduates.

Rudy Sanchez died Feb. 7 in Dallas at age 72. He was a key Hispanic leader in the Baptist General Convention of Texas. **BT**



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ROBERT D. DALE is Special Assistant to the Executive Director for Leadership Development of the Virginia Baptist Mission Board and Leadership Coach. Dr. Dale is the author of "Seeds for the Future" and over twenty other books on congregational leadership. He also served as Professor of Pastoral Leadership and Church Ministries at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

ROBERT W. CANOY is the Dean of the School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb University. An accomplished academician, he has also served at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Canoy is also a veteran pastor serving churches in Kentucky, Iowa, Missouri, Maryland, and most recently First Baptist Church of Shelby, North Carolina.

For more information contact John Bridges, Director of Church Relations at Gardner-Webb University, at 704.406.3008 or jfbridges@gardner-webb.edu.

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Kay Warren: Following Christ means being ‘seriously disturbed’

WACO, Texas (ABP) — Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ means being willing to say “yes” unconditionally to God, knowing he likely will lead his followers into uncomfortable places, Kay Warren told a conference at Baylor University.

For Warren, it meant becoming a global advocate for people with HIV/AIDS, for orphans and for other marginalized and vulnerable groups.

Her husband, Rick, is pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Accepting Christ’s invitation to deny self, take up a cross and follow him means being “dangerously surrendered, seriously disturbed and gloriously ruined,” she told The Next Big Idea conference sponsored by Baylor’s School of Social Work, Truett Theological Seminary and the Leadership Network.

Warren told participants how she became “seriously disturbed” a few years ago by reading an article about AIDS in Africa.

“The article said there were 12 million children in Africa orphaned by AIDS. And I couldn’t name a single one of them. There

were 33 million people with AIDS. And I couldn’t name a single person who was HIV-positive,” she said.

“It rocked my world. It was a pivotal moment when I said ‘yes’ to God, and he broke my heart. It turned my life upside-down.”

That kind of “signpost moment” happens when a Christian becomes “so broken by brokenness, so disturbed, that you feel like you can’t live with it another second,” Warren explained.

Discipleship also means allowing Christ to “gloriously ruin” one of his followers for the normal life he or she knew before, she added. Warren explained that, for her, it meant transformation from “a suburban mom with a minivan” to an outspoken advocate for HIV-positive people worldwide.

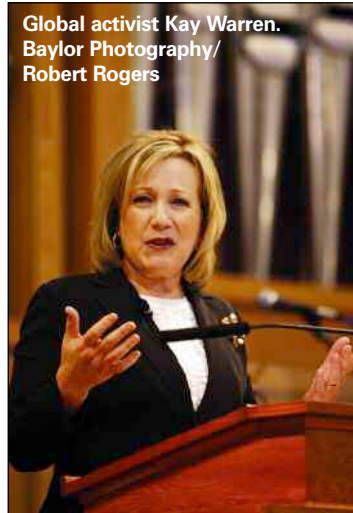
“The pursuit of the American dream in and of itself will ruin you. Pursuit of health,

wealth and happiness will ruin you. And so will following Christ. If you’re going to be ruined, why not be ruined for something that matters — something that lasts?” she asked.

Being “gloriously ruined” means following the example of Christ to “take on pain that isn’t our own,” she said. In Warren’s case, one of the first and most memorable examples involved an encounter with an HIV-positive woman who was living — and dying — under a tree because she had been expelled from her village.

“Nothing in my faith had prepared me to talk to a dying, homeless woman living under a tree,” she said. “Nobody should have to die alone.”

Being a disciple of Christ means doing what Jesus did — “making the invisible God visible” and caring for “the least, the last and the lost,” Warren said. **BT**

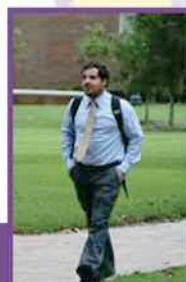


Global activist Kay Warren. Baylor Photography/Robert Rogers

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Consistently surprised

China offers early opportunities to build relationships with students

ATLANTA — Last fall, Brittany Phillips went back to college again. This time it's in another language, and it's in China, a country whose people grabbed her heart years ago and wouldn't let go until she returned to stay longer.

As a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship representative, Phillips lives and studies in Chengdu, China, where daily she makes new friends, has new experiences and is consistently surprised by the opportunities God places in front of her.

Though the cheerful, social type, Phillips has never been the life of the party like she became one Friday night on a local college campus. At "English Corner," Chinese students gather weekly to practice speaking English. So imagine the crowd and air of curiosity that a native English speaker like Phillips can draw.

"What do you like about China?" the students asked her. "Do you like Chinese food? What is life like in America?"

And then two questions Phillips didn't see coming, partly because they opened a door like none other: "Are you a Christian? What does that mean to you?"

"It was great to be able to share with them," Phillips said. "But, even better, on our way back to the dorm my friend asked me more about being a Christian. I was able to share so much more with her about why Jesus is important to me and why I believe and trust in Jesus."

That's the primary way the gospel travels in China — person to person, friend to friend. In the Sichuan province, where less than two percent of the population is Christian, Phillips is focused on outreach to university students and young people in the province's largest city, Chengdu. There, a church was started more than a year ago, and Phillips now teaches its first Sunday school class for college students.

"I hope that in making friends, teaching English, teaching Sunday school, and being obedient to other opportunities God puts in my lap that Christ can be seen in my life and



Brittany Phillips is developing a collegiate ministry at a fast-growing new church start in Chengdu, China. CBF photo by Carla Wynn Davis.

work," she said.

Commissioned in 2008 for a two-year term of service, Phillips first traveled to China while a student at University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Texas.

"I really didn't expect China to grab my heart the way it did," she said. "When I came to China I just really fell in love with it — the students, the culture, the life. I felt at home."

Determined to return, she didn't know how until Meadow Oaks Baptist Church in Temple, Texas, helped show her a way. One Wednesday night Phillips used CBF's missions education curriculum to teach the children about Bill and Michelle Cayard, CBF representatives in Chengdu.

Excited about ministry possibilities in China, Phillips applied to serve with CBF and months later found herself in Chengdu working with the same church as the Cayards. It's an opportunity she never saw coming, but she can't imagine living without.

"I'm overwhelmed with the love that I have for the Chinese people as I meet them," she said. "I just really hope that while I'm here I can take hold of every opportunity that God puts in front of me." **BT**

Information on the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Offering for Global Missions is available at www.thefellowship.info.

Chasing a rumor

By Lee Canipe

This is, of course, the way rumors get started. One evening, diners down at John's Seafood looked up from their plates and out the window to discover a peacock walking down Main Street.

The appearance of such an exotic bird caused quite a stir, and a number of folks ran to the door to get a better view. But when they peeked outside, the peacock had vanished.

I heard about it the next day at church. "Did you know there was a peacock walking down Main Street last night?" someone half-asked, half-told me.

It was, I confess, hard to believe. Such things simply don't happen in Murfreesboro, N.C.

Confronted by my sliver of doubt — "Really, now. A peacock? In Murfreesboro?" — the informant slowly backed away from the story. "Well, that's what I heard, at least."

As if to taunt doubters like me, the peacock soon began making other appearances around town ... in Jay and Elicia's backyard ... on the hood of Tommy's car ... atop John and Theresa's house.

As the sightings multiplied, it became more difficult to ignore the possibility that there might very well be an actual peacock on the loose in Murfreesboro, a peacock that was liable to turn up at any place and at any time.

Since I had not seen the peacock, I began to imagine that the people who had seen it were somehow different now than they were before: wiser, changed by the experience in a way that the deprived could never hope to understand.

Where did this peacock come from?

No one knew. But these folks — these chosen few — had seen the mystery for themselves. I could only imagine what it might look like.

One morning I was out for a run and, as usual, passed Bruce, Lloyd and Wayne walking in the opposite direction. "The peacock's around the corner," Bruce said.

I looked and looked and looked as I ran down Maple Street, hoping for a glimpse of the peacock. No luck.

It was only natural, I suppose, that all this was happening leading up to Easter, when we read stories in which Jesus shows up in the most unexpected places ... in a locked room ... on the road to Emmaus ... at the beach ... over a

campfire.

I began to sympathize with Thomas. Everyone had seen Jesus but him. He'd heard rumors that Jesus was on the loose, but Thomas had not seen a thing. Jesus? Alive?

Then one day it happened. On my way out the door for lunch, I looked over my shoulder and there it was.

Standing outside the glass breezeway at Murfreesboro Baptist Church. Brilliant blue and electric green. Tail feathers spread in a huge fan.

"Come here! Quick!" I hissed to the church secretary. "The peacock. It's here."

Alycia came into the connector, and the three of us looked at one another: Alycia, the peacock and me.

"Where did it come from?" Alycia whispered. "No one knows," I whispered back, "but I've been wanting to see it for weeks now."

Alycia: "I wonder why it came here?" Me: "I don't know, but I'm glad it did."

Neither one of us wanted to move, but it was lunchtime and we had to go. When I

turned to take another look, the peacock was gone.

As I walked home, still absorbed in the memory of what I'd seen, Alycia passed by me in her car. She rolled her window down and grinned. "Don't you just kind of feel blessed for having seen it?" she half-asked, half-told me.

"Yes," I answered. "I really do."

I remembered an episode at the end of John's gospel, the time Jesus appeared to Thomas. "You believe because you've seen," Jesus told him. "Blessed are those who believe and haven't seen."

Even now I sometimes find myself day-dreaming about the peacock, wanting to be surprised once more by its unexpected and happy appearance in the midst of my ordinary days.

This Easter season, at least, I am gracefully haunted by a rumor that turned out to be true. **BT**

—Lee Canipe is pastor of the First Baptist Church of Murfreesboro, N.C.

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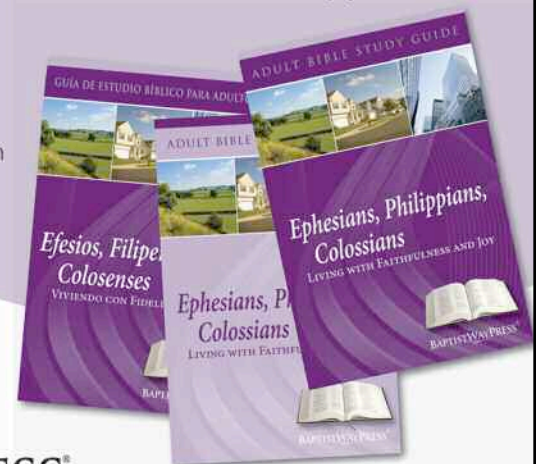
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Baptists Today

The Voice to Sustain Baptists Tomorrow

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN 2009-2011

Five Good Reasons to Support *Baptists Today*

Baptists Today is the only autonomous, national news journal serving the broader Baptist community.



Baptists Today is supported annually by more than 1,000 individuals who value both faith and freedom.

Baptists Today is celebrating 25 years of providing timely news, thoughtful analysis and inspiring features for a wide range of Baptists.

Baptists Today engages nearly 3,000 Baptist theology students and other young Baptist leaders preparing to lead a new generation of Baptist endeavors.

Having launched a popular Internet presence in 2000, *Baptists Today* in 2009 is taking a major initiative to redesign and expand its web site to provide more user-friendly access and continuously updated coverage of Baptist news and commentary throughout the world.

News journal launches campaign to expand services, ensure future

MACON, Ga. — The national news journal *Baptists Today* has embarked on a three-year capital campaign, with a goal of \$2.5 million in the initial phase.

The fundraising initiative, titled *Baptists Today: The Voice to Sustain Baptists Tomorrow*, will increase the endowment by \$1 million to support the publication's future goals, while also providing \$1.5 million for ongoing operational expenditures, improvements in design and coverage, and technology advancements enabling it to reach a broader, more diverse audience through the Internet.

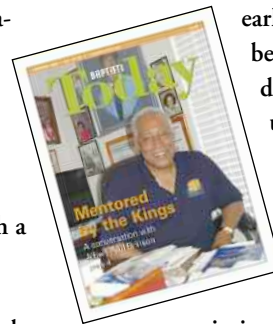
"For 25 years, *Baptists Today* has been a trusted voice for Baptists," said Gary Eubanks, a layman from Marietta, Ga., and chairman of the Board of Directors. "We must take the necessary steps to ensure the future of *Baptists Today*, which we, as Baptists, depend on to stay informed and connected. Now, more than ever, it is vital to embrace and support the mission of *Baptists Today*."

Founded as *SBC Today* by Walker Knight in 1983, the non-profit publication has provided Baptists with unrestricted news and perspectives for more than 25 years. *Baptists Today* remains the only autonomous, national news journal serving the broader Baptist community.

"This fundraising campaign will ensure that our readers receive full, dependable coverage of Baptist life in changing times," said Executive Editor John Pierce. "We will

expand our reach, especially to young Baptists and others who seek information from the Internet. We will be able to broaden and deepen our coverage — and remain affordable to churches so that their members can have access to important information about the changing Baptist landscape."

Although the campaign is in its early stage, more than \$400,000 has been pledged already. The campaign is designed to secure restricted and unrestricted funds for *Baptists Today*, addressing four broad areas of need:



1. The Keystone Fund will furnish operating monies to bridge the financial gap between subscription and advertising revenue and the actual cost of annual operations, as well as providing additional writers for expanded news coverage of Baptist life.

2. New Opportunity Funds will provide for improvements such as a more interactive, innovative web site and enhancements to the print edition to attract a larger readership and advertising base.

3. Reserve funds will provide for unexpected expenditures and rising printing and postage costs and needed upgrades.

4. Endowment funds will give the publication a firmer financial foundation on which to plan new areas of media coverage and outreach.

"I have supported *Baptists Today* over the years because I feel so strongly about its role in keeping us informed," said past *Baptists Today* Board Chairperson Winnie V. Williams,

a lay leader from Seneca, S.C., who is serving as chair of the campaign.

“Freedom is at the very foundation of our Baptist heritage. We cherish it. We trust in it,” she said. “Being well informed empowers us to preserve this precious freedom. This campaign gives readers the opportunity to demonstrate their support of *Baptists Today* and its role in retaining our freedom as Baptists.”

A number of gift and naming opportunities are available, from sponsoring special series on relevant topics to endowing named editorships, to providing student, church or leadership subscriptions. The campaign provides a wide variety of prospects for individuals to support the publication at whatever level they choose.

Gifts to the campaign may be paid over a three-year period and may include cash, stocks, real estate and bonds. Also, estate and planned gifts designated during the campaign will count toward the goal.

To learn more about the *Baptists Today: The Voice to Sustain Baptists Tomorrow* campaign, contact Keithen M. Tucker, Director of Development and Marketing, *Baptists Today*, by phone at 1-877-752-5658 (toll-free) or ktucker@baptiststoday.org. **BT**

Five MORE Good Reasons to Support *Baptists Today*

Baptists Today is committed to the highest standards of journalistic integrity in writing and publishing.

Baptists Today successfully completed a six-year *Friends of Freedom* campaign, raising more than \$1 million.

Baptists Today continues to grow in influence and achieved record circulation in 2008.

Baptists Today launched a North Carolina edition in January 2008 — a specialized version of the news journal with state-specific coverage — in partnership with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina and others.

Baptists Today has begun a new three-year campaign, which will secure the publication to serve the broader family of Baptists for generations to come, using the resources of print and the Internet to ensure that Baptists are informed through news and other helpful information that are current, accurate and inspiring. This campaign will provide needed resources for annual operations, website enhancement and endowment.



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Burleson late to the game

Conservative Southern Baptist pastor Wade Burleson details his recent three-year battle with fundamentalist forces within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in *Hardball Religion: Feeling the Fury of Fundamentalism*. He gives both play-by-play coverage and color commentary.

The playing field for most of the action is the trustee board of the SBC's International Mission Board (IMB) — where Burleson caught the wrath of denominational power-brokers carrying out a well-orchestrated effort to further restrict missionary qualifications (according to strict Landmark Baptist doctrine) and to undermine the leadership of IMB president Jerry Rankin.

Burleson's vocal opposition to these efforts — along with his public revelations via his blog about what he witnessed in and out of trustee meetings — led to his eventual censure in November 2007 and his resignation from the board in January 2008.

Although an earlier call to have him removed from the board was rescinded, he became the first trustee in convention history to be formally targeted for removal before his term expired.

Burleson, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Enid, Okla., and former two-term president of the ultraconservative Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, chronicles the power plays he encountered as an IMB trustee from 2005 until early 2008. He also notes other recent actions within the SBC — such as the removal of Hebrew professor Sheri Klouda from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary because of her gender — to reveal an aggressive fundamentalist agenda at work.

Repeatedly, Burleson points to SBC kingpin Paige Patterson, the president of Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, who ousted Klouda, as the powerful operative directing influential IMB trustees as part of a larger effort to narrow the doctrinal parameters for participation within the SBC.

Burleson describes efforts by IMB trustees loyal to Patterson to embarrass Rankin and other IMB administrators and to impose Landmark doctrine on the Southern Baptist mission enterprise through new requirements that disqualify missionary candidates who have “a private prayer language” or have been

A REVIEW — *Hardball Religion: Feeling the Fury of Fundamentalism* by Wade Burleson

(2009, Smyth & Helwys Publishing, www.helwys.com, ISBN 978-1-57312-527-7)

baptized in settings other than a Southern Baptist church or another congregation that teaches the doctrine of perseverance of the saints.

Burleson claims that, early on, he was recruited by this coalition of trustees set on removing Rankin — who has previously admitted to practicing a private form of *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues).

Burleson's refusal to support their pre-meeting caucuses (which he noted were in violation of board policy) and his willingness to expose these efforts publicly did not set well with the trustee leaders John Floyd from Tennessee, a disgruntled former IMB employee, and Tom Hatley from Arkansas.

“They had an agenda,” wrote Burleson. “I stood in the way. I asked too many questions, and I was too persistent, particularly for a ‘rookie’ trustee.”

Giving wide exposure to his fellow trustees' political activities and making public his own case against the narrow doctrinal requirements for missionary candidates — via his blog — infuriated trustee leaders. Burleson justified bringing such issues into the public arena by emphasizing the role of dissent in Baptist polity.

Burleson's Dec. 10, 2005 blog titled “Crusading Conservatives vs. Cooperating Conservatives: The Battle for the Future of the Southern Baptist Convention” shed a broad light on the new doctrinal requirements for missionaries as well as trustees' efforts to undermine Rankin. Strong reaction to the blog from fellow Southern Baptists — some in support of and others in opposition to Burleson's efforts — revealed a deep divide in Southern Baptist politics between those who think the revised *Baptist Faith and Message* doctrinal

statement of 2000 is a strong-enough guideline for determining participation in SBC life and those who feel that agencies — such as the IMB — should be free to add further requirements of belief and practice.

Trustee leadership responded to Burleson's persistent blogging by charging him with “gossip and slander” — and urging him to resign. Burleson refused — knowing that SBC messengers meeting in June 2006 in Greensboro, N.C., would have to hear his case in the large arena and then vote to remove or retain him as an IMB trustee.

Burleson humorously described one effort to get him to bow out quietly and quickly:

“[A]s I walked down the hall toward the building's exit, IMB trustee Bill Sutton, Paige Patterson's close friend and confidante, came running up behind me. ‘Wade, Wade, stop! Listen to me. Please. What do I have to do to get you to resign? I'll wash your feet; I'll kiss your butt. Please, just tell me, what can I do to get you to step down for the good of everyone involved?’”

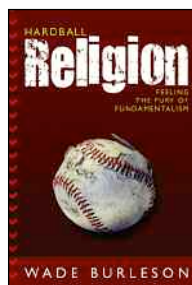
Burleson said he responded: “Bill, you still don't understand. This is a matter of principle for me. I can't resign. I'll see you in Greensboro.”

Fear of Burleson speaking to the convention — and the urging of top SBC leadership at a hastily called meeting — led IMB trustee leaders to pull their recommendation for Burleson's removal from the board. However, the chairman stripped him of influence by not giving him a customary committee assignment.

Blogging among Southern Baptists grew stronger leading up to the 2006 SBC annual meeting in Greensboro — with the media crediting electronic critics of the IMB trustee actions with influencing the election of Frank Page as SBC president over two candidates more closely associated with the convention's power structure.

Burleson, however, seems to overestimate the impact of Page's election as a kinder, gentler supporter of the rightward SBC as well as that of the so-called “Garner motion” that messengers approved at the 2007 SBC meeting calling the 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message* a sufficient doctrinal guideline.

Page's two terms in office were followed by the election of Johnny Hunt, a solid player



in the fundamentalist-shaped SBC. And Garner's motion was followed by quick responses from SBC agency heads arguing that their boards can and will add doctrinal parameters as they choose.

Yet Burleson seems optimistic about somehow stemming the growing tide of fundamentalism in the SBC. And, with so many vocal opponents of fundamentalism gone en masse from the SBC already, it takes significant optimism to make such a claim.

Throughout his book, Burleson reveals what many already know about the well-entrenched fundamentalism of the SBC, such as:

1. Some of the most hostile, unscrupulous people one can ever encounter are driven by religiously-masked political power.
2. Church leaders who espouse love and unity — and claim a higher commitment to biblical authority — can be very unloving and divisive people.
3. Fundamentalism has no room for dissent. Asking honest questions and challenging the ethics of those carrying out a fundamentalist agenda are considered signs of disloyalty.
4. Fundamentalists are punitive toward those who disagree with them or stand in the way of their goals.
5. Otherwise good people can become complicit in fundamentalist efforts out of fear, ignorance or opportunism.
6. Fundamentalists like to do their deeds in darkness. Secret meetings, false rumors, and stifled or controlled information are strangely excused in the name of biblical fidelity.
7. Ultimately, fundamentalism is about gaining or retaining power rather than about theology, spirituality or anything else.
8. Fundamentalists can't stop. The circle is always narrowing; the noose is always tightening. When original "enemies" are gone, enemies are created out of one another.

Burleson's insight into the strained relationships between IMB trustees and administrators is sadly interesting. He tells how communications leader Wendy Norville was treated disrespectfully when her vote count on a controversial matter did not match that of the chairman. And he recounts how Rankin would grovel before the trustee leaders and apologize for things he had not done.

While Burleson is a welcomed and needed voice in warning about the destructive nature of religious fundamentalism, he seems narrowly focused.

For example, he is rightfully outraged that a competent female professor at Southwestern Seminary would lose her position over gender.

Yet, Burleson — and Klouda, for that matter — should have known about Patterson's fossilized position on female subordination and not been surprised.

And did Burleson completely miss the 1994 firing of Southwestern Seminary President Russell Dilday? Or does he consider that action to be justified or somehow something other than the same fundamentalism at work that he has witnessed in recent years?

Likewise, Burleson's concern that many good Southern Baptist missionary candidates are now being excluded from service by non-essential doctrinal restrictions is laudable. But where was his voice in 2002 when these same agenda-driven IMB trustees — with Rankin's wimpy compliance — required the entire overseas mission force to affirm the 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message*?

Dozens of committed Southern Baptist missionaries (as addressed in the book, *Stand with Christ: Why Missionaries Can't Sign the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message*, 2002, Smyth & Helwys) were terminated or forced to retire by the imposition of these new doctrinal requirements on their consciences. Yet Burleson affirms this narrow doctrinal statement as "sufficient" although it violates the historic Baptist principle of congregational autonomy

and handcuffs missionaries working in settings where women routinely lead churches.

Ironically, Burleson has spoken out in defense of women ministers. In his book he writes: "The focus on keeping women from church leadership makes no sense in China and other places where house churches are mainly composed of women."

That is precisely why Burleson's defense of the 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message* — that states "... the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture" — and his outrage over the removal of a female theology professor and the addition of a couple of more narrow doctrinal requirements for screening new missionaries are hard to reconcile.

Burleson's courage to stand toe-to-toe with abusive powerbrokers, to expose the misuse of denominational authority and resources, and to defend those harmed by heavy-handed tactics is commendable.

Yet his recent "discovery" of fundamentalism in the Southern Baptist Convention shows just how late Burleson is getting to the game. The rough-and-tumble hardball he describes in this book has been going on in the SBC's power structures for more than a quarter-century now. What Burleson is experiencing is just extra innings. **BT**

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On interpreting the Bible

By Alan Culpepper

The story is told that when William Tyndale was a young man, a priest told him it was better that the Bible was in Latin (a language only a few Englishmen could read) and that the church told people what to believe, so false teachings could be contained.

Tyndale responded, “If God spare my life, I will cause that the boy that driveth the plow shall know more Scripture than thou dost.”

A revolution in human history started with that declaration. Tyndale translated the New Testament into English. His translation richly influenced the King James Version and later English translations, and English-speaking people have been able to read and interpret the Bible for themselves ever since.

But if we are not going to depend on a church official to tell us what the Bible means, then we face the task of interpreting the Bible for ourselves — a challenge so daunting that we all need to approach it with a great deal of humility and seek all the help and guidance we can find.

Here are just a few suggestions about how to enrich your Bible study and how to work through the interpretation of difficult passages, hard texts and divisive issues:

1. Consult several translations. The King James is beautiful and irreplaceable, but it is Elizabethan English, and we have more accurate Greek and Hebrew texts today. Read a word-for-word translation (ex: New American Standard), a middle-of-the-road translation (ex: New International Version, Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version), and a translation that renders meaning rather than words (ex: Contemporary English Version, New English Bible).
2. Use a good study Bible (ex: HarperCollins Study Bible, New Oxford Annotated Bible). The notes at the bottom of the page are brief but valuable comments on the text. Learn to use the marginal or cross references to lead you to related passages.
3. Buy a good one-volume commentary on the Bible (ex: *The Mercer Commentary on the Bible*, HarperCollins Bible Commentary). When you need to understand the issues, the history of interpretation and the arguments for

various interpretations, consult a good multi-volume commentary (ex: *New Interpreter's Bible*, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary*).

4. Take a broad view. Look at the context of the passage, the historical setting and the major themes of the book in which it appears.



5. Consult other passages in the Bible that speak on the same subject. The Bible often speaks differently to different settings, so we have to be careful about taking any one passage to the exclusion of others on controversial social or ethical issues.


6. If the Bible says different things in different places, look for an ethical or theological progression. Ask: Which verses reflect the grace and love of Jesus, or Jesus' uncompromising

call to discipleship, most clearly? How does Jesus offer a context for understanding the Old Testament? How did the early church interpret Jesus and his teachings? Where is the Bible crossing longstanding boundaries? Where is the Bible simply echoing the culture of its day?

7. Seek the guidance of a pastor, teacher or friend. None of us has all the truth or is right all the time. Keep an open mind on subjects where the Scriptures are not clear. Above all, pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

One of the most rewarding aspects of studying the Bible is that every time we work through a book or passage carefully, we gain insights we had never seen before. Thank God, even the “boy that driveth the plow” may hear a word the rest of us have missed. **BT**

—R. Alan Culpepper is dean of Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta. This column is provided by Associated Baptist Press.




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Any unemployment for non-profits?

By Tony W. Cartledge,
posted March 2, 2009
www.tonycartledge.com

So, the nation's economic malaise finally worked its way down to your job as a staff minister, support person, or preschool teacher at a church or other non-profit organization. That's bad, you think, but at least you can draw unemployment while looking for another job.

Think again. While most employers are required to make quarterly payments to cover the cost of state-run unemployment insurance programs, religious organizations are exempt. So, even though a newly unemployed person might meet all the normal criteria for unemployment benefits, they won't get any if they've been working for a church or other non-profit organization — unless they live in one of the few states that require non-profits to participate in the program.

Patty Edwards Shaver, a Raleigh-based career planning and employment specialist, explains it this way: "Many years after the

unemployment insurance program began, the Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA) was amended to exclude 501(c)(3) organizations with religious affiliations. Although these organizations must pay FICA and other taxes, they have special tax-exempt status and are not liable for FUTA taxes."

This means laid-off employees from these organizations are not considered eligible workers and are not entitled to unemployment insurance. There's one possible exception, according to an employee with the Economic Security Commission, who told Shaver that non-profit employees who have worked for another employer (presumably one that pays FUTA taxes) within the past five years could still be eligible.

In some cases, both employer and employee may be unaware that the familiar channel for unemployment benefits is not available to them. But "it doesn't have to be that way," Shaver says. Churches and non-profits can plan ahead and be prepared to protect their employees. There are, in fact, private insurers that specialize in

unemployment insurance for nonprofit organizations, including First Nonprofit Companies.

Another option, Shaver suggests, is that churches or non-profits set aside funds for severance packages based on employees' salary and longevity. These could help make up for the lack of government benefits available to them. Churches or non-profits should also consider providing career planning and employment transition assistance to help laid-off employees return to the work force, she says.

"Many managers state that the worst part of their job is letting people go," Shaver says. "Knowing that they can prepare for tough economic times may help both employer and employee rest easier."

Today's economy, like a late-season snowfall, brings with it more than enough cold and unpleasant surprises. Churches and non-profits should plan ahead and do what they can to cushion the blow for workers they can no longer afford.

For more information, Shaver can be reached at patty@raleighjobsite.com. **BT**

Pastorate is tougher now

By John Pierce, posted Feb. 14, 2009
www.bteditor.blogspot.com

Pastoral ministry, I am convinced, is more difficult today than in decades past. There are a variety of reasons for such a strong claim.

First, there are simply more options (religious and secular) vying for people's time on the weekends and also less guilt about what God will do if you don't show up to church, tithe and check at least 90 percent of the boxes on the offering envelope.

Second, population shifts and unprecedented pluralism are obvious factors. In most church settings it is simply more difficult now to bring people in and keep them engaged.

Third, the embarrassing public image of this humble and honorable profession is fortified daily — and especially on Sundays — by the pulpit showboats of the airways.

Fourth, and more locally, there are always those members who think their favorite pastor in the '50s, '60s or '70s would have no problem doing successfully today what he did back then. So the

current pastor — though equally or more gifted and committed — is constantly being held to an unfair comparison.

Fifth, denominational conflict has taken its toll on many Baptist pastors. Systems and structures that once felt like home to them have radically changed. Finding a place to belong — and one that the congregation affirms as well — can be challenging.

The historic Baptist principles of freedom and personal responsibility that many pastors were taught to embrace and advance — from Training Union through seminary — are now being repudiated by the very leaders of their denominational powerhouse. Yet churches are slow to recognize and react to such fundamental — and, in the case of the Southern Baptist Convention, fundamentalist — change.

As one talented but burned-out pastor friend told me when he threw in the towel a few years ago: "I've just concluded that, regardless of what Southern Baptists do, this is always going to be a Southern Baptist church, and I'm not a Southern Baptist pastor anymore."

A sixth reason for my conclusion is that, within many congregations, worship

wars continue with the pastor caught somewhere between the battling parties. Finding compromise between congregational subgroups with very strong but differing opinions about what constitutes "true worship" is difficult and costly.

And, seventh, regardless of church size or theological bent, most pastors spend way too much time and energy on trivial pursuits that have no significance in Kingdom matters. This is not their desire. But hearing and attempting to pacify a few high-maintenance church members seem to take up a significant amount of a pastor's attention.

While the number seven is symbolic of "completion," this list could surely grow. But there is a strong-enough case here for me to conclude that the pastoral task is more difficult today.

Sure, there are those rare times when a pastor fails to fulfill the basic responsibilities of the job. But in most cases we need to simply give him or her a break.

How would you like to attempt to satisfy such opinionated and inflexible people as you and me? And, remember, this is the person who answers our crisis calls in the wee morning hours with: "I'll be right there." **BT**

An 'Amish' heater the Amish can't use?

CANTON, Ohio — It sounds absurd. An Amish miracle heater? Really? “It’s a joke because the Amish couldn’t use the heater itself,” said Donald Kraybill, an Amish expert at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania. “It’s kind of like Quakers selling Quaker guns. It’s sort of an oxymoron.”

Even so, that oxymoron has sold thousands of Roll-n-Glow electric fireplaces for Canton company Heat Surge LLC.

They’re two feet tall, 1,500 watts, wrapped in a mantel of oak (\$547) or cherry (\$587). And in hokey commercials and full-page newspaper ads, they’re touted by women in bonnets, men in straw hats, a couple driving a buggy — and, in some publications, two nearly naked women in bed.

“Amish man’s new miracle idea helps home heat bills hit rock bottom,” screams one ad, fashioned to look like a newspaper article. “You’ll instantly feel bone soothing heat in any room. You will never have to be cold again.”

It’s an enticing prospect although a \$20 hardware-store space heater provides the same amount of heat. It just doesn’t have the Amish name, or a flickering fake fire.

The Amish brand represents “hand-made quality, old-fashioned values, rural charm,” said Erik Wesner, who writes a blog called Amish America.

He calls the heater ads “pretty hilarious. . . . It’s mind-boggling because they’re making associations with things not typically Amish.”

The questions — Is the fireplace really made by the Amish? Are those real Amish people in the ads? — are debated on blogs and consumer Web sites all over the country.

“I’m somewhat suspicious,” Kraybill said. “I think it’s an English (non-Amish) company exploiting the Amish name and image.”

The Canton Better Business Bureau has received 39 advertising complaints (and 238 complaints overall) about Heat Surge

since the company was founded in June 2007. All have been resolved, according to the bureau, which toured Amish workshops in Ohio’s Geauga and Holmes counties as part of its investigation into the complaints.

The company employs more than 300 people in Holmes County, said Commissioner Joe Miller, who grew up Amish. That includes English (non-Amish) workers as well as Old Order and the more-liberal Beachy Amish sects, some of whom use electricity in their shops.

“Are they being exploited by this? Absolutely not,” said Miller, who knows the man standing front and center in the ads and says he’s Amish. “It was a shot in the arm this winter,” he said.

In Holmes, workers build the mantels in their own homes and barns, then insert Chinese imported heaters in a Winesburg assembly shop, said John Armstrong, Heat Surge’s chief administrative officer. In Geauga, most of the work is done in a Middlefield shop.

The mantels have a solid oak top and trim, Armstrong said. The sides are a wood-plywood combination with wood veneer — “not the particle board, press-board you typically see in a Chinese manufacturer in big-box stores,” Armstrong said.

Hence the non-big-box price. And the marketing philosophy.

Roll-n-Glow ads follow the as-seen-on-TV method, using toll-free numbers promising special deals for customers who call in the next few hours, said A.J. Khubani, president of Telebrands Corp., which also makes the Ped Egg and Clever Clasp, among other household goods.

As the economy has tanked, the rates that TV stations can charge for commer-

cials has dropped. The cheap airtime has allowed low-budget, over-the-top commercials usually seen late at night to get prime-time exposure.

“This is what America responds to,” Khubani said.

Jerry Sykora of Brooklyn, Ohio, responded to it. He bought the heater for his son, Paul, for Christmas, and so far, it’s doing its job, allowing Paul Sykora to keep his Parma thermostat at 60, yet stay warm and comfortable.

“It’s a nice-looking piece of furniture,” Jerry Sykora said. “It looks like a real fireplace.”

The success of the Roll-n-Glow mirrors the Snuggie, the blanket-with-sleeves phenomenon, Khubani said. Folks are drawn to the chance to save money and stay cozy.

“They’ve got a good thing going,” Khubani said of Roll-n-Glow maker Heat Surge. “From what I know in the industry, sales on that have been tremendous.”

The tremendous sales originally caused delivery delays, which have since been resolved, according to the Better Business Bureau. Other complaints revolved around the company’s claim that the heater uses less energy than a coffee maker.

The company — which got in trouble with the BBB last summer for selling “free” digital TV converter boxes with \$100 warranties — has since dropped the coffee maker claim. It now tells customers the heater costs about 8 cents an hour to operate on the 750-watt setting.

It’s also working on other Amish collaborations, such as an infrared grill on an Amish-built wooden cart, bookshelves and entertainment centers.

“You don’t have to be Amish to make a quality product,” Armstrong said. “The thing about the Amish, however, is that most people at some point in time have come into contact with one of their hand-crafted items. People have firsthand knowledge of the quality.” **BT**

—Laura Johnston writes for *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, Ohio.

Yearbook notes membership declines for both Catholics, Southern Baptists

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

NEW YORK — The nation's two largest Christian denominations are experiencing slight but statistically significant membership declines, according to the latest edition of the National Council of Churches' *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches*.

Released Feb. 23, the 77th annual compilation of church statistics reports membership in the Roman Catholic Church declined 0.59 percent last year. It also reported a 0.24 percent drop in the Southern Baptist Convention's membership.

Roman Catholics are still America's largest denomination, with 67 million members. Southern Baptists still rank second, with 16.2 million.

Given the groups' respective sizes, neither decline is earth-shattering, authors of the study said. But the report raises eyebrows because both groups have in the past grown steadily but now may be joining virtually every mainline church in experiencing persistent membership decline.

According to the *2009 Yearbook*, just four of the 25 largest faith groups grew last year. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is up 1.63 percent, to 5.8 million members in North America. The Assemblies of God are up 0.96 percent, to 2.8 million members. Jehovah's Witnesses grew 2.12 percent and now number 1.09 million. The Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) is up 2.04 percent, to 1.05 million.

According to membership figures compiled by churches in 2007 and reported to the *Yearbook* in 2008, the Catholic Church lost 398,000 members in a year, while Southern Baptists lost nearly 40,000.

Churches with the highest rate of membership loss include the United Church of Christ (down 6 percent), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (down 3.1 percent) and the Presbyterian Church, USA (down 2.79 percent).

While still losing members, the American Baptist Churches USA cut its previous decline rate in half, from 1.82 percent to 0.94 percent.

Overall membership in the top 25 groups declined 0.49 percent, to about 146 million.

Eileen Lindner, editor of the *2009 Yearbook*, said the annual ranking is often viewed as gauge for relative vitality of communions reporting either increases or declines in membership, but in reality counting those numbers "is a rather imprecise art."

Some churches, Lindner said in a title essay published in the new *Yearbook*, count children who are baptized as infants as members, while others wait until they are confirmed. Still others rely on a "born-again" experience or "believer's baptism" for counting members.

Some churches, particularly Orthodox and African-American communions, estimate their membership based on numbers of their constituents living in a community. The National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., sixth-largest faith group with 5 million members; National Baptist Convention of America, Inc., with 3.5 million members and ranked No. 8; and Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., ranked 11th with 2.5 million members, all fall under that category.

Further complicating the picture, Lindner said, many church members relocate, join other congregations or drop out of church without removing their names from the rolls. Some traditions, by assessing dues based on the number of parishioners, encourage local churches to cull their membership rolls regularly. But others, like those that reward numerical growth, encourage padding.

Non-denominational and megachurch congregations often permit or encourage people to attend but not join. Emergent-church fellowships don't always place emphasis on formal membership, but may instead measure church effectiveness by the number of meals served or other forms of ministry.

Studies show younger generations are either mistrustful of institutions or find them irrelevant, making them less likely to join a church.

Lindner said all this calls for rethinking church membership as a measure of congregational health.

In the 1960s, for example, growth of evangelical churches while mainline churches declined prompted some to believe that conservative churches grow because they maintain traditional teaching and place high expectations on members while liberal churches, by nature, become secularized and tepid.

Later studies attributed those patterns to demographics, suggesting that higher birth rates and younger memberships explain growth and decline better than theology.

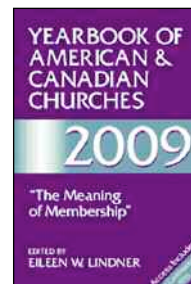
Still others said declining numbers forecast a gradual secularization of American culture similar to what happened in Europe following World War II.

"Today it appears that another dimension of this discussion has been opened," Lindner wrote. "Now a variety of expressions of church has become a part of the American religious landscape, and these expressions have begun to alter, once again, the place of numerical assessment of patterns of religious affiliations."

"Whether or not church membership counts remain the most common measure of church vitality in the long term may be open to question," she wrote. "There is little doubt that the topic of church membership and its meaning are undergoing a review in the life and organization of many church bodies."

She said Rick Warren, for example, a Southern Baptist megachurch pastor and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, has reasserted the importance of membership by developing an elaborate "Covenant of Membership" for those who would affiliate with his Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif. **BT**

Editor's note: The 2009 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches is available for order at www.electronicchurch.org. A book by Albert W. Wardin Jr., The Twelve Baptist Tribes in the USA: A Historical and Statistical Analysis, goes beyond reported membership statistics for better understanding the size of various U.S. Baptist groups. It is available at www.baptisthistory.org.



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