

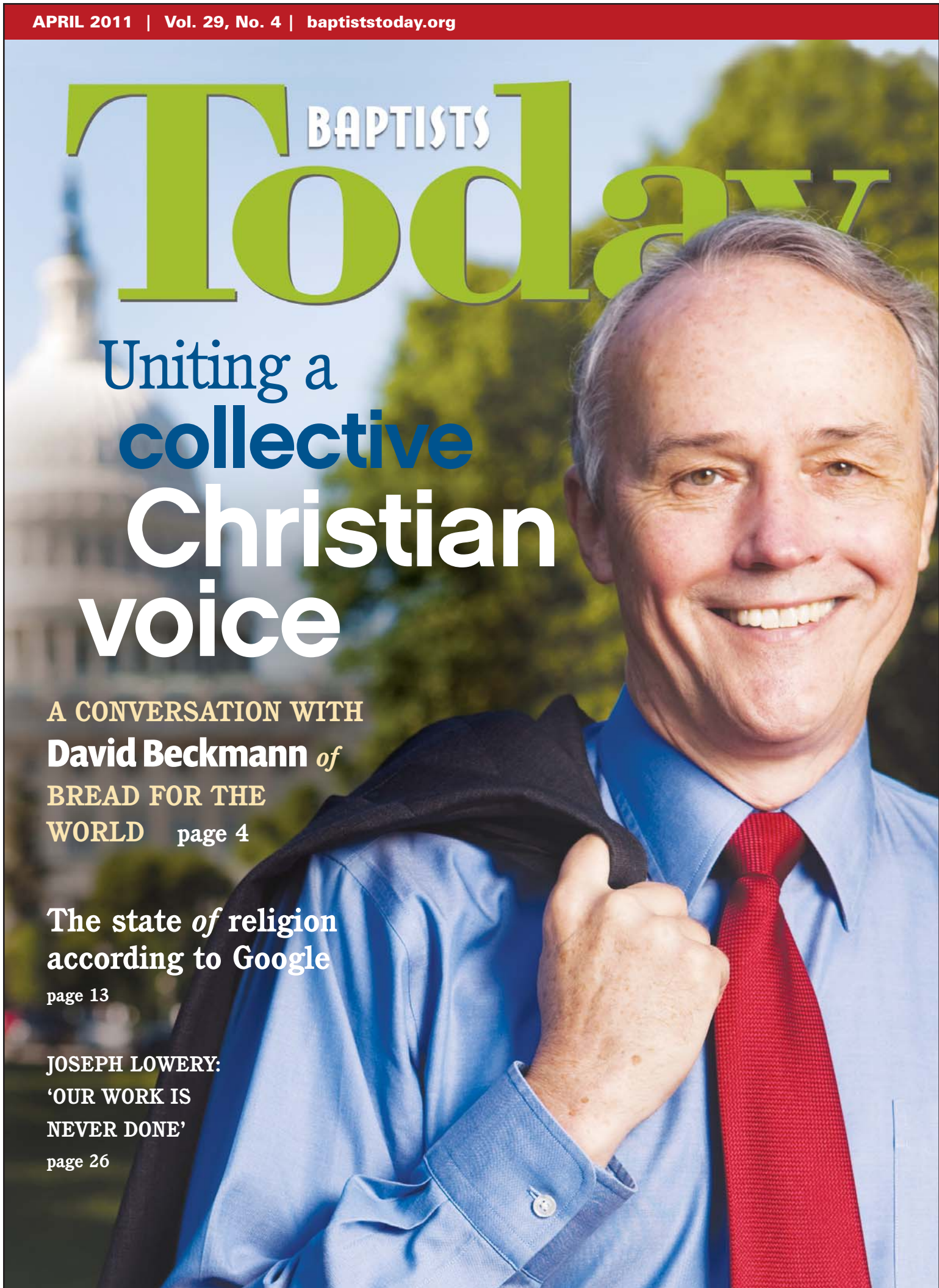
TBAPTISTS Today

Uniting a **collective** Christian voice

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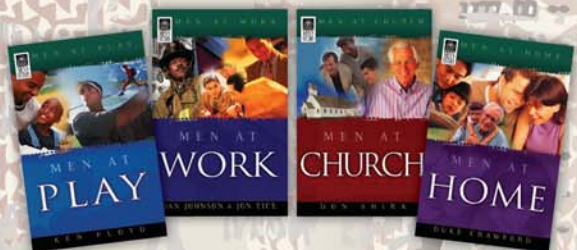
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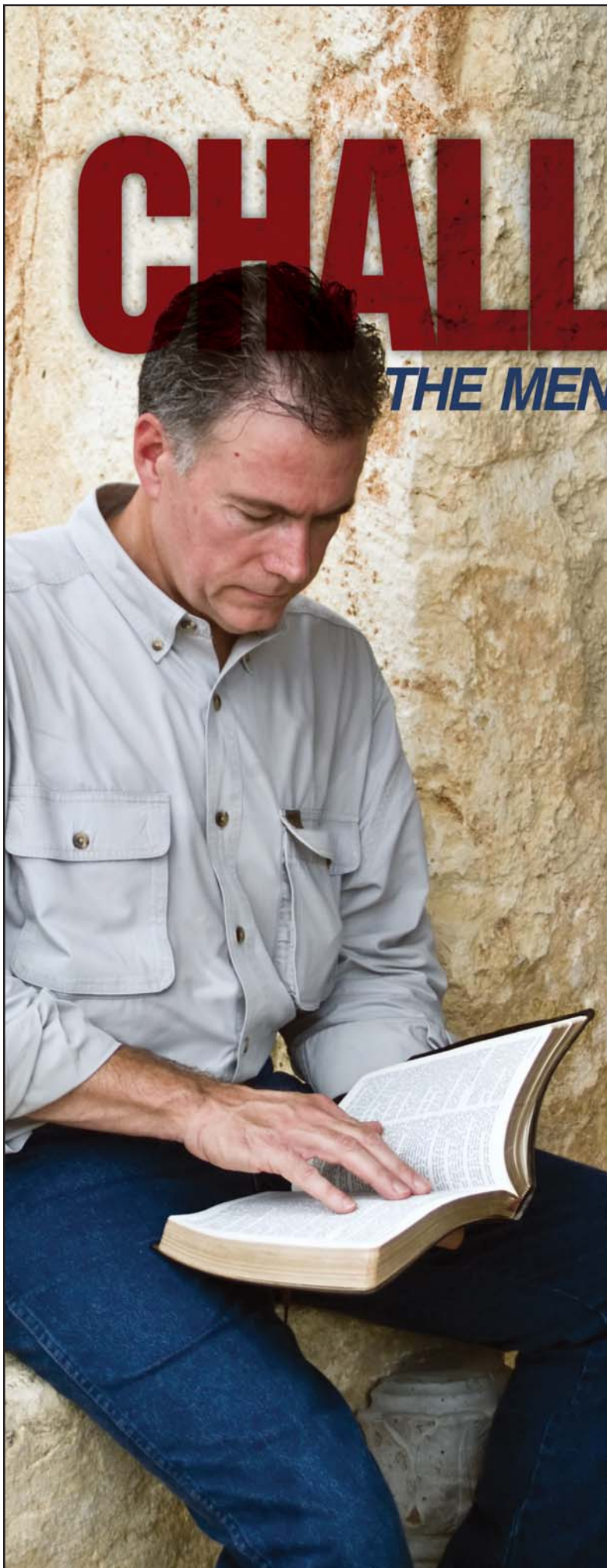
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An autonomous national Baptist news journal

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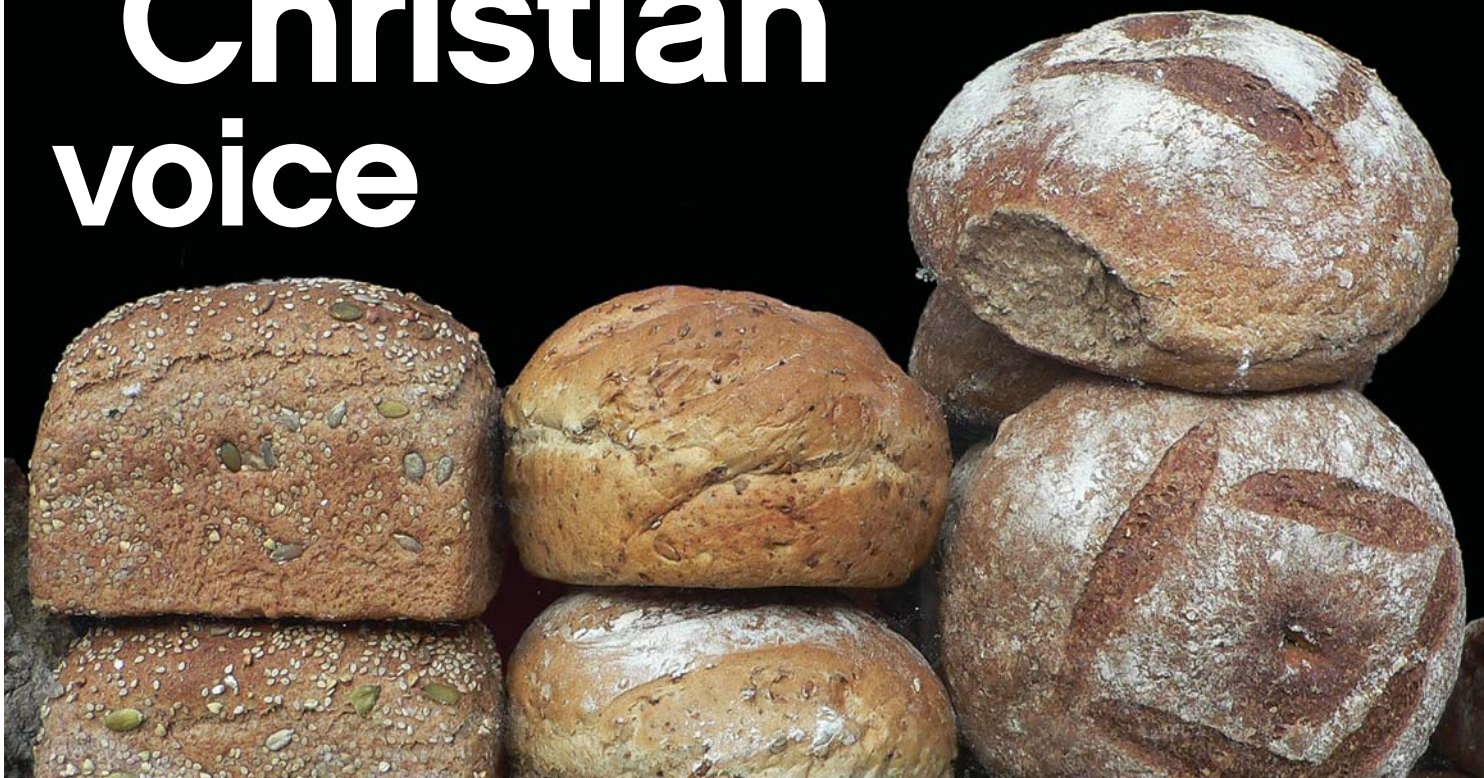
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A collective Christian voice

A conversation with
David Beckmann, president of
Bread for the World



BT: First, congratulations on winning the 2010 World Food Prize. In what ways will that award assist the efforts of Bread for the World?

DB: Well, thank you. The World Food Prize was a great reward for Bread for the World members because it recognized all that they — along with churches across the country — have done to get our government to help end hunger in our country and around the world. U.S. funding for poverty-focused development assistance has tripled over the last decade; nutrition programs for hungry people in this country have more than doubled.

This would not have happened without the advocacy of members and local congregations of Bread for the World. I hope the World Food Prize will encourage more people to get involved in changing the politics of hunger.

BT: Just by its name, Bread for the World might cause the unfamiliar to think you run a global relief effort or perhaps even an expansive baking company. What exactly is the mission of Bread?

DB: That's a great question — and a funny one too. Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad.

We are an advocacy organization, not a charity and definitely not a global bakery. We know that any effort to alleviate hunger is commendable and helpful, but if we are serious about ending hunger, our efforts must include getting government to do its part. That's what differentiates Bread for the World from other nonprofits.

BT: Many may assume that world hunger is a simple math problem: the result of too little food and too many people. But what are the real causes?

DB: Quite simply, hunger is sure to exist wherever poverty exists, anywhere in the world. This is not surprising.

The indicators are slightly different for each region, but governments around the

world have recognized hunger and poverty as inseparable for some time now. Despite decades of progress, a sudden spike in global food prices in 2007-2008 and the onset of a worldwide economic downturn plunged millions of families back into hunger and poverty. In 2010, an estimated 925 million people were suffering from chronic hunger.

In the United States, hunger is certainly not caused by a scarcity of food. There is more than enough food to feed everyone, and unlike many developing nations, we have the infrastructure in place to deliver it.

There is a network of interstate highways and a trucking industry ready to move mountains of food daily wherever it needs to go. And the supermarket shelves are stocked to the ceiling. But none of this matters if customers have no money to spend on the food that is available. Again, poverty plays a major role.

BT: You sound very hopeful about addressing these causes and seeing significant progress in the near future. What can realistically happen? And what is the basis of your optimism and hope?



David Beckmann

Bread for the World is a **collective Christian voice** urging our nation's decision makers **to end hunger** at home and abroad.

DB: In the United States, the fastest, most direct way to reduce hunger is through nutrition programs. People of faith may differ on various aspects of the tax package that Congress passed in December 2010, but the extension of tax credits for working poor families that was included will keep more than 1 million children out of poverty this year and provide billions of dollars in assistance to low-income working families.

Unfortunately, the House of Representatives recently voted to cut spending on key programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and emergency food aid. As long as these programs are on the chopping block, we must keep urging lawmakers not to balance the budget on the backs of their most vulnerable constituents.

Globally, Bread for the World has been advocating for improvements in U.S. foreign assistance to make it more effective in reducing hunger and poverty. Congress and the administration have taken the first steps toward reform, with Bread's encouragement. But there is more work to do to ensure that our foreign aid dollars go as far as possible and give the right kind of assistance — aid that enables the people who need it most to begin to build a better life for themselves and their children.

Foreign aid reform can open the door to an increase in U.S. poverty-focused development assistance — which will be necessary to meet the urgent needs of the poorest countries, so that self-sufficiency can become more than just a dream for the majority of their people.

Fortunately, none of these solutions are out of reach. I believe that ending hunger in our time is possible, but it will require ordinary citizens — especially people of faith — to work with their legislators to change the politics of hunger. It is within our power to help moderate what the economy is doing to hungry and poor people and to set the stage for rapid gains against hunger and poverty once the economy rebounds.

Young Baptist leader finds 'million reasons' to fight hunger

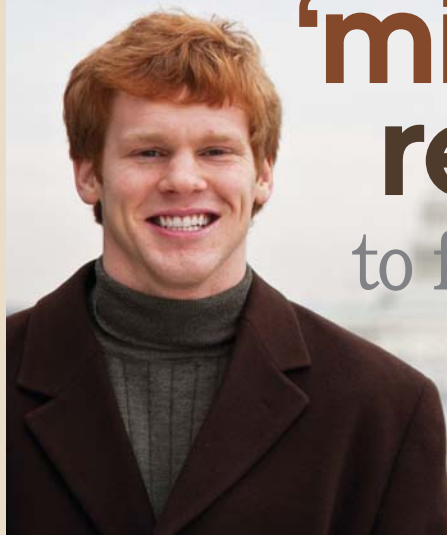


Photo by Laura Elizabeth Pohl.

After graduating from Samford University with a degree in journalism and mass communications, Luke Walker wanted to travel for a couple of years and do something meaningful while deciding on a career path to pursue. In his travels to 11 countries, the young Baptist leader saw hunger right in front of him.

So he chose to continue with work that is meaningful and helps people in need as a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Congregational Fellow serving on the staff of Bread for the World.

When asked why he was drawn to Bread for the World, Walker said,

"Pick one. There are a million reasons I could choose to work for Bread. Really, it was a perfect fit for me because it merged my communications and PR background with experiences in lobbying, outreach and advocacy — all for the common goal of fighting hunger."

Walker feels strongly about fixing the systemic problem of hunger through legislation and actually getting to the root of the issue to help others, versus simply giving aid and moving on to the next charity. He feels that both his Baptist background and his opportunity to work at Bread for the World are helping him do this every day. **BT**

BT: Concern about health and justice issues is found in people of all faiths and no faith. Yet Christians have a rather serious call to eliminate suffering. How can we bridge that oft-untapped Christian compassion and the action needed to seriously address hunger worldwide?

DB: God's grace in Jesus Christ moves us to help our neighbors, whether they live in the next house, the next state or the next continent. The great thing about Christians — and many people in general — is that they are already compelled to help by contributing to food banks and charities, so the compassion is

already there.

But while this is crucial, it is just not possible to "food-bank" our way out of hunger. All the food that churches and charities collect for hungry people combined is only about 6 percent of what is provided by government nutrition programs — programs that might have been cut last year without the advocacy of people like Bread members.

Our members come from varied backgrounds, but we are united in the mission of ending hunger. At some point in their lives, all our members were faced with making a decision about how to turn their compassion into action, and this led them to work with Bread.

Taking a cue from our members, all you

need to do to bridge that gap is to tell your elected officials that the needs of hungry and poor people are important to you. It is as easy as writing a letter.

BT: Often getting started is the biggest challenge. What first steps do churches or groups within the congregation need to take to make a meaningful difference?

DB: We know that confronting the problem of hunger — especially on a global scale — can seem overwhelming. But one person can make a big difference. Bread members write personal letters and emails and meet with their members of Congress. This outpouring of care and concern sends a strong message to lawmakers that we care about hungry people and are urging our elected leaders to help.

I want people to know that they are not alone in their goal of ending hunger — or in the work needed to meet this goal. Bread provides some great resources on our website for how to engage your church or community organization in writing letters to Congress.

We offer a brochure on church involvement, and we also have organizers in each region of the country who can provide information or help getting started. Please visit our website at www.bread.org for resources and contact information.

BT: Since Bread works legislatively and we live in an era of fiercely divided partisan politics, how do you accomplish your goals without the issue of hunger getting so politicized that some churches (with various political perspectives) are hesitant to engage?

DB: Hunger and poverty are not partisan issues. We work with both Democrats and Republicans to influence policies that affect hungry and poor people, and we have a track record of winning substantial support from legislators on both sides of the aisle.

We are able to connect with churches — no matter where they or most of their members are on the political spectrum — based on the unifying mission of alleviating hunger. To me, that's the bottom line.

The new Congress is focused on reducing the budget deficit. This is important, but the fact is that the money spent on anti-poverty programs makes a great deal more difference to low-income families than it would to reducing the deficit. The amounts are a drop in the

bucket of the budget deficit, but they mean the difference between eating and not eating for millions of young children, low-wage workers, elderly people and other Americans.

We urge Congress not to attempt to balance the budget at the expense of the country's most vulnerable people. One of our jobs at Bread is to make sure that programs that reduce hunger are not cut, particularly at a time when one in eight Americans receives SNAP (formerly food stamps) benefits.

BT: Misinformation often stalls good efforts. What are some of the common myths about hunger that need to be corrected?

DB: One common misconception is that overweight people cannot be hungry, when in fact you can be malnourished but still overweight. It costs a lot less to buy a bag of chips to put in your child's lunch than it does a bag of apples or grapes. This is the kind of choice



that low-income families often have to make.

Another myth has to do with foreign aid for developing countries. This is different from charity. The main driver of poverty reduction in the world is the hard work of poor people themselves. Given the opportunity to improve their communities and provide a better life for their children, they will seize it.

We need to make sure U.S. foreign aid reaches those who need it most and that it supports their efforts to lift themselves, their families and their communities out of poverty.

The last myth I'll mention is that you can reduce hunger without reducing poverty. Many of the challenges facing hungry and poor people are related and influence one another.

This is why Bread for the World tends to focus on overarching issues that are likely to affect not only people's food security and nutrition status, but their employment and economic situations as well. For example, in

2010, Bread for the World advocated for tax credits for low-income working families because a long-term solution to hunger must respond to all the challenges facing low-income families.

BT: Who out there is really helping the cause of reducing hunger and poverty, and what can we learn from them?

DB: There are several organizations that come to mind when I think of others in this advocacy space that are helping to reduce hunger and poverty. Internationally, the U.S. Global Leadership Campaign advocates for increases in the international affairs budget, making sure that the "smart power" tools of diplomacy and development are keystones of the United States' engagement with the world.

The Global Leadership Campaign is instrumental in ensuring that funding for initiatives like poverty-focused development assistance isn't cut.

Domestically, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Coalition on Human Needs focus on national and state-level fiscal policies and public programs that affect people in need. At the heart of all three organizations is a belief that we need to fund programs that help low-income people — because it is the right thing to do, but also because it helps keep the United States safer in the long run.

BT: You're a minister. Give us three brief points (no poem) on why Christians cannot avoid the subject of injustice.

DB: How about two? The Bible tells us to "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8-9).

Therefore, I believe God is calling us to change the politics of hunger and poverty by asking our government to address the fundamental reasons people are hungry and poor.

The Bible also says, "Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor" (Psalm 72:1-4).

To me, that sums up our call for social justice. Simply put, we must stand up for hungry and poor people because God *wills* it. **BT**



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Quotation

“ remarks ”

“When there are 20,000 people chanting your name night after night after night, if there’s no sense of faith, if there’s not a sense of something bigger than yourself, you can get lost.”

—Manager Scooter Braun, a producer of the 3-D concert film/documentary Justin Bieber: Never Say Never in which the 17-year-old celebrity’s Christian faith is affirmed (RNS)

“The evangelical ‘Veggie Tales’ cartoons — animated Bible stories featuring talking cucumbers and tomatoes — probably shape more children in their view of scripture than any denominational catechism does these days.”

—Russell Moore, dean of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., on declining denominationalism (Wall Street Journal)

“The church is strictly neutral in matters of party politics and will not comment at all on the personalities and platforms of candidates, whether or not they are members of the church and irrespective of their party affiliation.”

—A statement released Feb. 1 by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regarding the possible presidential runs by Mormons Mitt Romney and Jon Huntsman Jr. (Salt Lake Tribune)

“If we are to understand how others perceive our religion, we must receive the good, bad and ugly stories of members of our faith.”

—Religion News Service columnist Dick Staub, author of About You: Fully Human and Fully Alive

“Hollywood pushed the homosexual agenda in the sitcom ‘Three’s Company’ by making Mr. Furley look like a clueless dolt — thus poking fun at those who oppose the homosexual lifestyle.”

—Editor Gerald Harris in his Feb. 24 editorial in the Georgia Baptist Convention newspaper The Christian Index

“Whenever the apostle Paul went to Travelocity to make travel plans, he bypassed the others and went straight to the ‘prison’ tab, knowing he’d end up there.”

—Michael J. Brooks, communications professor at Judson College in Marion, Ala., noting that the focus of Paul’s writings was not on the ease of Christian living

“Preachers in mainline denominational churches, along with others who have tried to articulate values and beliefs that differed from the messages of right-wing talk radio pundits, often have lost credibility with those in their pews because their church members put more stock in what they heard on Christian talk radio than what they heard from the pulpit of their churches.”

—Baptist minister, author and sociologist Tony Campolo in an article titled “Why the Religious Right will dominate” (Christian Ethics Today)

“It just seemed like a lot of meetings and a lot of talk.”

—Pete Wilson, who dropped his Baptist ties but not beliefs, and started nondenominational Crosspoint Church in Nashville 10 years ago (htrnews.com)

“Does the faith community have high standards? You bet. But do we also understand that we all fall short of the standards? Yes, we do.”

—Robert L. Vander Plaats, an Iowa Republican leader, on efforts by former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, a twice-divorced Southern Baptist-turned-Roman Catholic, to win evangelical support for a potential presidential campaign (Los Angeles Times)

“There’s a double standard that Muslims are responsible for extremism by people who happen to be Muslim, but all Christians aren’t responsible for abortion clinic bombers or the KKK.”

—Peter Gottschalk, co-author of Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy and religion department chairman at Wesleyan University (RNS)

“Neither Christians nor Muslims like them, because they are a group with their own ideas, but the rest of the Muslims are good with Christians.”

—Eid Ibrahim, 41, an Egyptian Christian on concerns about the Muslim Brotherhood gaining power following the ouster of President Hosni Mubarak (RNS)

“The word ‘secular’ is a good word, not a bad one. Here I am not talking about that anti-religious, often atheistic, critique that would banish religion to the backwaters of privatized faith. Rather, I mean the more friendly form of secularism embraced by many people of faith who simply believe that government should be non-religious.”

—J. Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (Report from the Capital)

editorial

There is a better way than escalating the politics of marriage

By John Pierce

The National Association of Evangelicals, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Southern Baptist Convention leadership and other religious conservatives are pushing for congressional support of the misnamed Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), a 1996 law that is simply an anti-gay measure.

If marriage (as Christians and other faith leaders claim to believe) is a covenant between two persons, then its defense can only occur in each covenantal relationship.

While some politicians (even those with multiple marriages) will eagerly win points with religious conservatives by taking up their cause, there is a much better solution. It is one that fits wonderfully within the constitutional framework that our insightful national founders created.

A simple move from self-interest to logical thinking is all that is needed to figure this out.

The U.S. government, by grand design,

is secular. Yet it allows for full religious liberty for all persons.

The government grants legal status to married couples by providing a license and certain benefits (taxes, shared property, etc.). This is a legal (not religious) status.

However, most religious traditions refer to marriage as a covenant — a spiritual relationship built on vows made before God and to one another.

Therefore, it is called “holy matrimony.”

Secular government (again, by brilliant design) is not in the “holy” business.

Therefore, government should not be in the marriage business.

It would be better for government to call the legal unions of consenting adults something else — like, well, maybe a “legal union.” This license would extend benefits to

a couple regarding shared property, insurance, inheritance and medical privacy issues.

Marriage, as should be touted by religious leaders, would be a separate spiritual ceremony carried out according to the beliefs and practices of individual faith traditions or congregations. This would be done without the interference of government and the ridiculous current practice in which clergy become legal representatives of the state government.

Want to have a government-recognized, legal union? Go to the courthouse. Want to take spiritual vows and enter into a holy covenant of marriage? Go the religious congregation of your choice — and follow its rules about marriage.

It really is that simple — and violates no person’s individual rights or religious freedom. It only prohibits those religious leaders and politicians who love to misrepresent church-state separation and use government force to impose their beliefs on others.

Concerns about the definition (and defense) of marriage will then rightly leave the hands of a secular government and its posturing politicians and be determined by the various faith traditions, and (in the case of Baptists and others with local church autonomy) local congregations.

Sure, there will be some strong disagreements there. But these exist already. Most church wedding policy manuals rival the hymnbook and Bible in size. Yet communities of faith, with their unique doctrines and religious practices, are the right places to talk about the meaning of “holy matrimony” — not in the halls of Congress.

It just makes sense. But then, if some religious and political leaders couldn’t use emotionally-charged issues like this one to divide Americans and advance their personal causes, they might have to do something constructive and worthwhile for the greater good of us all. **BT**



Good news and gratitude

Baptists Today is pleased to announce that a generous gift from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation will fund a major redesign and expansion of the news journal. Beginning with the June issue, *Baptists Today* will become a 44-page, all-color publication with new church resources including weekly Youth Bible Studies sponsored by the Baugh Foundation and developed in partnership with Faith Lab.

A new “Nurturing Faith” center section in *Baptists Today* will provide children’s lessons and other church resources as well — including a new Bible study

series written by Dr. Tony Cartledge and sponsored by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Congregational Life office.

More information on the upcoming redesign and expansion plans can be found on page 39, the inside back cover of this issue. Thanks to all whose creativity and generosity help *Baptists Today* to fulfill its role as an autonomous, national news journal and give us the opportunity to expand the publication’s unique mission of providing “content for learning” (Bible studies and other resources) with the “context for living” (news, analysis and features).

John Pierce, Executive Editor

Constructive approaches to calling a minister

When a pastor search committee is working, it is the most important committee in the church.

Churches used to search for the best preacher for the congregation, and the denomination provided the few services needed to guide the process. Those were simpler times; today the search landscape has changed. It is far more complex.

Denominations are no longer homogeneous, churches must depend less on seminaries for help, and the leadership skills required to lead congregations extend far beyond teaching and pastoral visits.

What is needed today to call a minister? Certainly, two things have not changed — whether for a senior pastor or a staff minister.

One, every search process is unique and God's spirit must lead the process.

The other essential to calling a minister is establishing and adhering to a multi-step plan. The process should go in pre-determined phases. That way the committee can keep the congregation apprised of its progress by reporting on what phase it is in without divulging a confidence.

Stage One: Getting Organized and Acquainted

The committee members must get to know each other by sharing prayer, faith stories, experiences with former churches, pastors, etc. It is important that members bring forward any personal agendas and biases.

During this initial stage, the committee should select officers and establish the search process. It is important for the members to determine exactly how they will make the final decision. Will it be a unanimous vote or a majority consensus?

If the pastor is part of the committee searching for a staff position, will the pastor make the final decision? A coach or transition consultant can be helpful. Whatever the process, the committee must let the congregation know what is going on. Regular reports and requests for prayer are essential.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is part of a yearlong series titled "Transitions: Helping churches and church leaders in changing times," provided through a partnership between *Baptists Today* and the Center for Congregational Health (www.healthychurch.org) based in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Stage Two: Gathering Information

The second stage is crucial to calling a pastor who fits with the church. It is the same stage recommended for an intentional interim process. Although led by a team of lay leaders and clergy, often with an outside facilitator or coach, the congregation does the work.

Steps involve looking at a church's heritage — celebrating some parts, grieving and healing from others. It involves looking at the mission of the church — exploring the core values of the congregation —

and clarifying the vision. At every step of the search, the committee must seek alignment between the position for which it is hiring and the focus and mission of the congregation.

Leadership issues need to be determined during this second stage and connections with ministry partners/denominational alliances and relationships clarified. The direction of the church must be prayerfully considered and verbalized by examining the church's resources and core values.

Once that is established, members of the leadership team can develop a profile of the church and its demographics as well as a leadership expectations profile describing the congregation's expectations for its next pastor. This phase must not be rushed. A congregation must know who it is before calling a leader.

Stage Three: Considering Candidates

During the third stage, the committee gathers names for potential candidates from church members and friends, organizations, seminaries and divinity schools. As the committee begins to read and prayerfully consider

résumés, an outside facilitator can be helpful.

There are resources to help the committee prioritize candidates relative to the pastoral leadership expectations developed in Stage Two.

Stage Four: Contacting and Interviewing Candidates

In the fourth stage, the committee narrows the search to 5-10 high priority candidates, with the intention of interviewing at least three of those. A letter of inquiry sent to each asks about the candidate's interest, and includes the church, congregation and community profiles.

All interviews must be confidential, and the church should pay for travel, food and lodging. The initial interview should include the candidate's spouse (if he or she has one) and consist of carefully prepared questions. One important thing to learn about a candidate is the person's level of emotional intelligence. A candidate's ability to relate to people is as important as preaching ability or public persona.

A visit and worship in the candidate's church should precede a second interview. The committee should consider candidates one at a time and notify each in a timely manner as to where they stand relative to others in the process.

By the second interview, candidates should be offered an opportunity to interview with staff ministers who accept the principle of confidentiality, and know that while their observations are important, the committee must make the final decision. The committee should ask permission to conduct criminal and credit checks, and should check references carefully, even "going behind" by seeking additional references.

In consultation with the stewardship or finance committee, a compensation package should be prepared. In doing so, it is worthwhile to consider incorporating a sabbatical or study leave and vacation time commensurate with or greater than what the candidate has currently. Providing leadership coaching



for a new minister is a wise way to encourage success.

For new ministers, it is especially wise to offer coaching to help them transition from academia to the congregational environment. Some congregations provide in-church support teams. It is important to offer things unique to your congregation that can help your new minister to be successful.

In the third interview, the formal compensation package is presented — but not with the entire search committee present — and any lingering questions are answered. It is important to establish whether the candidate will accept if called. If so, then determine when the candidate can visit the church and present a trial sermon.

Stage Five: Presenting the Candidate

Now is the time for the candidate to visit the congregation. A warning: be careful when releasing the candidate's name and biographical information to the congregation, as he or she will want to carefully inform the home church. Coordinate that timing.

This is an exciting time for the congregation. When the candidate visits, opportunities must be set up for meeting as many people as possible ... dinner with the deacons, breakfast with youth leaders, a congregational reception after church and lunch with more leaders. Send the candidate home exhausted, and vote that very day. The next step is extending the congregational call as soon as possible and welcoming the new pastor.

Two items need to be emphasized about any search process. The first is to select the committee carefully. A strategically chosen committee, representing the various facets of the congregation, has more chance for success than a committee elected by popular vote.

The second item of importance is to treat every candidate with utmost respect. Retain confidentiality and let candidates know where they stand during the search process.

Conduct a search with authenticity, integrity and confidentiality. If someone feels mistreated, it can hurt the reputation of your congregation.

The stages spelled out above are tried and true. Skipping a stage can result in a bad fit. The process is spiritually deep and intensive, but the reward is worth the effort. **BT**

—*Jack Causey is coordinator of services to ministers for the Center for Congregational Health. The center's president, Bill Wilson, contributed to this article.*

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National debt new hot issue for evangelicals

WASHINGTON — Many economists warn that the government's huge national debt is a looming threat to long-term prosperity. But according to a growing number of conservative Christians, it is also immoral.

The concern is not only that the estimated \$14.13 trillion debt could cripple the economy, some conservative Christian leaders say, but also that borrowing so much

money violates important biblical tenets. And while religious conservatives have long mapped personal piety onto national politics, some of the moral arguments against excessive borrowing are getting a new hearing among Christians already anxious about the economy.

"America's growing debt is not just a financial issue, it's a spiritual one," said Jerry Newcombe, host of *The Coral Ridge Hour*

television program. "The Bible is very clear about the moral dangers of debt."

Likewise, the Washington-based Family Research Council has delivered "action alerts" about the debt to its network of 40,000 pastors and myriad state-based advocacy groups. The Christian Coalition, Concerned Women for America, and the Faith and Freedom Coalition, a new group led by GOP strategist Ralph Reed, are also warning members with increasing intensity that the deficit is reaching immoral proportions.

Reed said concern about the debt is not new, but has risen to the top of some Christians' agenda partly because of the rising tally and partly because the Tea Party and Fox commentator Glenn Beck have focused so much attention on the issue.

"You can't give the Tea Party enough credit in terms of raising the consciousness about this issue," Reed said.

John C. Green, an expert on religion and politics from the University of Akron in Ohio, said other factors, in addition to Beck and the Tea Party, have fueled interest in the deficit.

First, the national debt is a good mobilizing issue for the Republican coalition, able to unite social conservatives and fiscal hawks, whose alliance has sometimes been strained. Second, it allows religious leaders to ride the Tea Party wave of anger against government spending. And lastly, it broadens the conservative Christian agenda beyond such culture war battles as abortion and gay marriage.

While many evangelicals agree that the debt is a huge problem, some see partisan politics behind the recent surge in interest among conservatives.

"I wish the Family Research Council and Coral Ridge Ministries would have recognized the debt as a moral issue before they supported two unnecessary and immoral wars and endless corporate subsidies for years," said Jim Wallis, head of the Washington-based group Sojourners. **BT**



Jim Wallis

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Searching for answers

The state of religion according to Google™

Conventional wisdom holds that in the 21st century, interest in denominational Christianity is on the decline, while spirituality characterizes a growing post-denominational world.

Among Baptists, some scholars and long-time observers are now cautioning that in the face of growing ecumenism and the emergent church movement, the name “Baptist” may well become a byword within the next four to five decades.

The 21st century, after all, is a world in which trends are closely watched and scrutinized, yet can change in seemingly the blink of an eye.

Remember MySpace? While in many ways MySpace launched the social networking craze, it is fast sinking into oblivion, while five-year old Facebook is the current face of the Web.

By the time Facebook reaches its teenage years, will it still be dominant? Don't count on it. Indeed, a website that does not even exist today might well overtake Facebook within four or five years.

But what of religion in America in the 21st century? Do the trends of the first decade of the century indicate that denominations are in the early stages of a death spiral? And where would one go to find a good measurement of large-scale public sentiment about religion?

One starting point is none other than Google. While there's no guarantee that Google will survive this decade, much less the century, the ubiquitous search engine is nonetheless systematically collecting data on

the real-time interests of hundreds of millions of Internet users. The search engines' vast treasure trove of data reveals some definite religious shifts over the past seven years (2004-2010).

Based on what Internet users search for through Google, interest in all denominations is indeed in decline, with searches for all major denominational groups dropping by roughly 40-60 percent from 2004 to 2010.

One might suspect, therefore, that post-denominational Christian topics are much more popular now than in 2004, yet the opposite is true. Searches for “emergent church” have dropped by approximately two-thirds since the term's peak in 2008, while “spirituality” is about half as popular as it was in 2004.

Christianity is not the only religion suffering a drop in interest. All major faiths are trending downward, with one exception: Islam has retained roughly the same level of interest throughout the seven-year period.

To be certain, there are a few notable upward religious-related trends from 2004 to 2010: Joel Osteen's popularity is much greater than in 2004, although it leveled off in 2007.

The biggest winner? The search volume for “atheist” in 2010 was roughly 70 percent greater than in 2004.

Baptists might yet find hope within certain cities, however. In proportion to all Google searches from within a given city, the following metro areas boast the highest level of interest in “Baptists”:

- Fort Worth, Texas
- Jackson, Miss.
- Nashville, Tenn.
- Rocky Mount, N.C.
- Birmingham, Ala.
- Oklahoma City, Okla.
- Louisville, Ky.
- Raleigh, N.C.
- Charlotte, N.C.
- Kansas City, Kan.

In addition, “Southern Baptist” is most frequently queried in Little Rock, Ark., while Sioux Falls, S.D., leads in searches for “American Baptist.”

By way of comparison, Louisville and Oklahoma City residents are tops in atheist-related searches; Californians are most interested in “evolution,” while the Ohio/Indiana/Kentucky area leads the way in “creationism”; Kalamazoo, Mich., dominates searches for “Calvinist,” and Jackson, Miss., for “Calvinism” (Louisville is second for both search terms); Baltimoreans are most interested in “fundamentalism,” and Nashvillians in “theology.”

And while “God is dead” in Pittsburgh and Portland, the “King James Bible” reigns in Memphis.

In the bigger picture, the center of “religion” in America is Salt Lake City. Portland is the most “ecumenical.” Louisvillians are most preoccupied with “Satan.” And the search for “God” is greatest in Nashville.

So, where will Baptists be by mid-century? We're still searching for an answer. **BT**

Note: This data was collected from www.google.com/trends.



Bruce Gourley

One might suspect, therefore, that post-denominational Christian topics are much more popular now than in 2004, yet the opposite is true. Searches for “emergent church” have dropped by approximately two-thirds since the term's peak in 2008, while “spirituality” is about half as popular as it was in 2004.

Godsey's provocative book concerns moral quality of human society

The psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg has proposed that human moral development moves through six stages. Those who reach the sixth stage are concerned not only about society and its survival, but also about society's being just, and they are prepared, when necessary, to engage in civil disobedience in order to help society move toward justice.

The vision that Kirby Godsey, chancellor and former president of Mercer University, displays in this book is, I believe, a sixth-stage vision.

He is intensely concerned about the entire human family, not just his own group. He is concerned not only about the survival of human beings, but also the moral quality of human society. And he is willing to take unpopular steps in order to help human society move toward justice and morality.

Since the objective of a flourishing society is not fully displayed until the third and final part of the book, I will begin by summarizing that part. It is titled "Building Bridges."



Fisher Humphreys

Faith, Godsey says, is different from belief. Faith is a commitment leading to a covenant relationship with God. The commitment is risky, a choice one must make without knowing for sure that it is realistic.

For Christians, it is the story of Jesus that makes possible the faith commitment to God. Members of other religions are able to make similar commitments to God because of the stories of their prophets and other leaders.

The human race is awash in injustice and violence. The violence has become so intense that it threatens the existence of the human race. Tragically, part of the violence issues from religious differences. But the religions can become a part of the solution and not just of the problem.

They can do this, as the subtitle of the book says, by creating a community of

conversation. Godsey thinks that such a community is possible because of seven themes found in all religions (he calls them "threads with which a new garment of understanding might begin to be woven").

1. Every religion can listen to the stories of the other religions.
2. Every religion can affirm that each human life has meaning and purpose.
3. Every religion must wrestle with the question of why God, who is good, allows suffering.
4. Every religion has holy books, holy times and holy places, and each can visit the others'.
5. Every religion has to deal with a fundamentalist distortion of its true message.
6. Every religion affirms compassion as its highest value.
7. Every religion provides its followers with hope.

To the extent that the religions appreciate these common themes, to that extent they are positioned to engage in a conversation, and not just that, but to experience a reformation. The book closes with these hope-filled words:

For the sake of all humankind, we need a new awakening, a new reformation, a new creation whereby our religious embrace becomes wider and our vision of God's presence becomes richer. Perhaps even now, God is brooding and hovering on the chaos created by conflicting faiths and speaking the creative word with us, "Let there be light."

Is God a Christian?
R. KIRBY GODSEY

A review of *Is God a Christian? Creating a Community of Conversation* by R. Kirby Godsey (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2011).

Our common calling as members of the world's faith is to become instruments of light in a world where the demonic forces of darkness that perpetuate themselves even in the environs of belief threaten to turn out the lights. God's grace enlightens us all and only the God above all our gods can light our path so that we can live beyond despair toward hope and human redemption.

Part II is easier to summarize than Part III. Titled "Touching the Faces of God," it is a fact-filled survey of the ways in which God is known in seven world religions, in this order: Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism.

Preceding the survey is a single chapter (5) in which the author outlines interpretive principles that support his conviction that these seven religions all know God. Those principles include:

- People everywhere are searching for a God they can trust.
- In their journeys toward that God, people sometimes need to set aside versions of god that they inherited ("your god is too small").
- People know God before they have language for God.
- God will always transcend all human language and thought.

Once these things are recognized, it becomes clear that, for all the differences in what the various religions say about God, people in all religions are seeking the same

God and God is graciously present with them.

Some Christian scholars of religions employ a three-part typology for describing the relationship of Christianity to other religions. Exclusivists say that Jesus gives the only revelation by which God may be known.

Inclusivists say that, even though Jesus gives the only revelation by which God may be known, people can benefit from Jesus' revelation and know God without having a relationship with Jesus.

Pluralists say that each religion has its own revelation by which God may be known. Godsey is a pluralist.

Part I is titled "Breaking Down Barriers." It begins with a chapter about how people meet God in unexpected places. Most of this winsome chapter is an account of the author's early experiences with God.

Even though Godsey thinks that much of the religion in which he was immersed as a child was wildly misguided, the important thing is that Godsey did encounter God. His childhood experience of the presence of God despite a lot of misguided religion seems to be reflected in the way he interprets God's presence in the various religions, including Christianity, of course.

In chapters 2 and 3 the author describes and criticizes the distortion, found in every religion, known as fundamentalism. He zeroes in on two fundamentalist problems: exclusivism and untenable claims of certainty.

His language about fundamentalism can be confrontational: "We have allowed the Christian religion to become captive to a horde of Bible-worshipping, chorus-singing, homophobic, fundamentalist bullies."

Fueled by fear and arrogance, fundamentalism turns up in all religions and constitutes a threat to what is authentic in each one of them. Godsey commends humility in place of arrogance and trust in place of fear, he calls for Christians to affirm the revelation Jesus brought without attempting to confine God's work to that revelation, and he urges everyone to embrace uncertainty as a place where God may be met.

If you worry that Godsey's attitudes toward other religions suggest he is a relativist, these criticisms of what is false in religions should put your worries to rest. He resists relativism in a number of ways, one of which is to offer this confessional statement:

Rejecting exclusivity does not require abandoning the central place of faith in our lives and rejecting exclusivity does not require abandoning our commitments. Being a Christian, I confess that my understanding of God and my sense of what it means to be here at all have been informed and shaped by the presence, the words, and the actions of Jesus. Without question, Jesus plays a powerful and enduring role in understanding my life and relationships. So, I confess my faith and invite others to experience the light by which I live. And while I am grateful for the light which comes to me through the presence of Jesus, I clearly am not fully enlightened or somehow magically devoid of shadows, of uncertainties, of valleys of distress and distrust and misunderstanding.

The fourth and final chapter in Part I is an energetic assault on fundamentalism. Godsey reminds us almost in passing that Jesus was killed because he had launched an assault on some of his contemporaries who exhibited arrogance and exclusivism and claimed too much certainty.

In this chapter the author disputes some teachings that are not the exclusive possession of fundamentalism, such as hell and the penal substitutionary understanding of atonement. Here and elsewhere, he expresses reservations about the entire enterprise of Christian theology.

Certainly practice is more important to him than doctrines. He associates doctrines with a variety of problems: too much certainty, too much complexity, lack of respect for mystery, being a distraction from practice, and others.

As readers of this review may be aware, Godsey writes in a provocative way, and my summary has not done justice to his provocations. For example, the author's answer to the book's title, *Is God a Christian?*, is "No." It is a startling answer, but, upon reflection, it seems unavoidable.

I am reminded of an experience I had in the early 1990s. I was leading a study in a church in Louisiana. On Saturday morning a church member arrived for the study early and approached me with an article from the morning newspaper. He told me he was alarmed to read that members of the Jesus Seminar had

arrived at the conclusion that Jesus did not write the Lord's Prayer.

I asked him, "Do you think Jesus *wrote* the Lord's Prayer?" He smiled and said, "Well, no. The only thing we know Jesus wrote was something on the ground."

Anyone who appreciates the message of Israel's prophets, and the message of Jesus, and the message of the Protestant reformers, should have an openness to hearing provocative messages. To me, the most important question to ask is, "What is the objective the author hopes this provocative message will accomplish?"

In the case of this book, the objective, as we have seen, is the moral and spiritual flourishing of the human race. If it takes some provocations to reach this objective, then we want to welcome them. For this objective is, I believe, also God's objective, the extending of the reign of God over the lives of humans so that they are empowered to live together in peace and with justice. Jesus called it the Kingdom of God. **BT**

—Fisher Humphreys is professor of divinity, emeritus, at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. Kirby Godsey's book, *Is God a Christian?*, is due out next month from Mercer University Press.

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Three days in May

Reflections on the first CBF General Assembly

Much has been written about the gathering of 3,000 moderate Baptists who assembled in Atlanta in August 1990 to contemplate their future beyond the Southern Baptist Convention. Less has been recounted about the convocation of 6,000 persons that met again in Atlanta the following May to form the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Those three days in May remain among the most formative in the 20-year history of CBF.

The 1990 meeting, following 12 years of losses in the battle for control of the SBC, had produced a new movement in Baptist life. Three hundred persons had been expected at Atlanta's Inforum; surprisingly, 3,000 attended.

An Interim Steering Committee was named, and Daniel Vestal was chosen as chair. A strong sense of resolve determined that new funding mechanisms and literature options would be explored and that "The Fellowship" would meet again the following year.

As co-chair of the convocation program committee, John Hewett wrote a letter in February 1991 and asked me to chair a Local Arrangements Committee for this first convocation to be held in the former Omni Coliseum in Atlanta on May 9-11, 1991. Hewett confessed that he had just signed a contract with the Omni for \$25,000, and, while uncertain that he had the authority to do so, he was absolutely convinced that we had little money to pay for the space.

We were about to plan a major Baptist meeting on three months notice, with only a promise of funds, and we were unsure how many people would attend.

Vestal, pastor of Atlanta's Dunwoody Baptist Church at the time, helped identify laypersons to serve on a Local Arrangements Committee. Quickly a group was recruited that included George Astin, Ron Brewer, Betty Dickens, Brantley Harwell, Henry Jasiewicki, Bob Johnston, Chester King, Gail Todd, Bill Trawick and Donn Wisdom.

None of us had much experience in planning a convention, let alone one that might attract as many as 6,000 persons. Yet, the responsibility was broken into a number of smaller tasks. One person handled arrangements for the stage, sound and lighting. Another recruited registration workers and ushers. Someone else arranged for musical instruments, while a physician staffed a first aid room.

Meanwhile, a separate Convocation Committee, co-chaired by Hewett and Oeita Bottorff, planned the program titled

"Behold, I Do a New Thing."

Interest grew in the meeting that was to begin on Thursday evening, May 9, 1991.

As I recall, the Interim Steering Committee met on Thursday morning of that week, which was also set-up day for the Local Arrangements Committee. We had contracted with a man whose company handled many public events held at the Omni — ranging from rock concerts to sporting events — and whose actual name was "John Wayne."

He and his rough-and-tumble crew of "riggers" began installing cables and sound equipment as well as a 40-foot lighting truss above the stage. As they finished, three simultaneously descended from the ceiling on long ropes — much like rock climbers rappelling down the side of a mountain — and exactly at that moment, Charles Wade and several

members of the Interim Steering Committee entered the room with incredulous expressions on their faces as if to ask: "Are we hosting a Baptist meeting in here or the Ringling Brothers?"

Since many of us had lived through contentious annual meetings of the SBC where messengers attempting to speak at floor microphones had been arbitrarily cut off in mid-sentence, great pains were taken to make sure that every person would be heard. Dan Martin and Gaye Eichler converted the Atlanta Hawks press area into a newsroom.

Michael Allen agreed to serve as photographer and Bart Tichenor as parliamentarian.

When the last seat had been placed on the coliseum floor, I thanked the crew chief for the help of his workers in making every preparation for the Baptists. He said: "I hope you have a good meeting.

But you might want to pray real hard because the roof leaks pretty bad when it rains."

More than 6,000 Baptists came — but, thankfully, little or no rain.

The Omni staff had provided our committee with a private suite one level up and overlooking the coliseum floor. When I heard that Brantley Harwell had invited longtime Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Dale Moody to attend as his guest, we elevated Moody to the private box. He spent the first night telling friends that he was merely doing what Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson had done from their infamous "skyboxes" at the 1979 meeting of the SBC held in Houston.

The Thursday evening program consisted of addresses by Vestal on "Foundations for Renewal" and Nancy Ammerman on "Freedom: Our Baptist Distinctive." Ann Quattlebaum gave her testimony, and Ben Loring preached a sermon titled "A Matter of Perspective."



John Finley



Friday morning featured a testimony by Jim Johnson, an address by Scott Walker on "Priesthood: Our Baptist Distinctive," and a sermon by Lynda Weaver-Williams on "Birthing New Life." In a business session, Patricia Ayres led in a discussion and adoption of a proposed constitution and bylaws while Alan Neely presented "Strategy Proposals for World Missions."

Perhaps the most descriptive statement of the night was the report of the Interim Steering Committee titled "An Address to the Public." Largely written by Cecil Sherman and Walter Shurden and presented by Shurden, the statement described why moderate Baptists were forming CBF, and outlined several basic differences with persons controlling the SBC, including views on the Bible, education, missions, the role of the pastor, women and the Church.

Because the Omni previously had signed a contract to host a Sandi Patti concert on Friday night, the Baptists dispersed to small work groups in various locations throughout the city during the afternoon and evening to consider "Strategies for Carrying Out the Great Commission," "Literature Options for Our Churches," and to hold 18 state and regional meetings.

Although the early sessions had been truly inspirational, there was a sense in which the convocation was slowly building toward the Saturday morning plenary session. That morning, following Buckner Fanning's testimony and Gary Parker's address on "Servant Leadership: Our Baptist Distinctive" and prior to Kenneth Chafin's sermon on "A Dream for Tomorrow," a business session was held where the gathered Baptists considered and adopted funding plans, a Fellowship budget, a proposal on World Missions, and a name for the fledgling organization.

The plan all along had been to recommend "United Baptist Fellowship" as the new name, but when Dwight Moody reported for the Interim Steering Committee that another organization already had registered the identical name with the Georgia Secretary of State's office, silence fell across the coliseum. "Cooperative Baptist Fellowship" was suggested as an alternate name, calling to mind a long-time Baptist virtue as well as many good associations with the heralded Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists. It was quickly approved.

A Nominating Committee report also was adopted, thereby electing a permanent coordinating council with John Hewett serv-



ing as the new moderator. In point of fact, Hewett came close to being seriously injured minutes before his election, when the two rear legs of the chair on which he was sitting slipped off the back edge of the elevated platform. When we parted the black drapery behind the stage, we were surprised to find that there was no safety railing in place and nothing to break one's fall except a number of concrete steps and a floor six feet below. Thankfully, he was uninjured.

In spite of the brief scare, the new moderator offered a few parting words to those assembled as everyone prepared to leave for home. Among many other observations regarding a shared 12-year journey and a future filled with much promise, Hewett coined a phrase that has described the Fellowship movement ever since: "We are free and faithful Baptists on mission to the whole wide world."

Reaction to the convocation was widespread and varied. The headline to an editorial in *The Atlanta Constitution* the following week declared: "Baptist moderates: free at last." While noting that CBF had been born in Atlanta the previous Saturday, the writer recognized "that many moderates may not yet be prepared to sunder all ties to the institutions of the SBC."

Truth to tell, those in attendance left the gathering convinced that they had created a permanent organization, while at the same time, many of them disavowed that CBF was anything close to a new denomination. SBC leaders, including President Morris Chapman and R. Albert Mohler, then editor of *The Christian Index*, tended to characterize the

Above: Current CBF Executive Coordinator Daniel Vestal, then an Atlanta pastor, addresses the assembly. **Below:** Reporters learn more about the young Fellowship from (l/r) David Rogers, John David Hopper and the first moderator, John Hewett. CBF photos



new Baptist body as a totally new denomination now in direct competition with the SBC.

Vestal, who in many ways had served as the spiritual guide of the Fellowship movement since its inception, had spoken for many moderate Baptists in saying: "We're here for reasons far greater than protest or resistance. We're here praying and sensing that God is doing a new thing in a movement that knits Christian people together in cooperation, blending our diversity into a hymn of praise to Jesus Christ and service to the world."

Twenty years later, while contemplating new economic challenges, budget shortfalls and a fresh vision for CBF, perhaps we would do well to remember what inspired those three formative days in May 1991. **BT**

—John Inley is a church historian and senior minister at First Baptist Church of Savannah, Ga.

readers' responses

Nonsense or naïve?

EDITOR: In the February 2011 issue (page 38), you printed “an analysis” of religion-freedom trends. This interesting article addressed several issues.

Charles Haynes, First Amendment scholar at the Freedom Forum and director of the Newseum's Religious Freedom Education Project, is quoted liberally throughout the piece. In the “Battles over Islam” section, Haynes cites the November vote in Oklahoma to ban the use of Sharia or Islamic law and contends that national politicians advocating anti-Sharia measures “are in peril of overplaying their hand.”

He warns that “it’s a big risk for people who do it — because it’s so transparently nonsense; ... the more it gets looked at, the more people will realize there is no threat from Sharia law in the United States.”

In the “Legal trends: Establishment and free exercise” section, Haynes expresses concern about the “erosion of free-exercise protection under the First Amendment.” He suggests that most people “take for granted that they have freedom of religion and are not concerned about government interfering with the practice of faith.” Haynes said people may not wake up until it is too late; that the government might preclude church expansion because of historical preservation or that a law might be passed saying that nobody can distribute literature in certain areas. He concludes: “You know, it just doesn’t hit people until it affects some practice that’s important to them.”

Amen to that! But it is interesting that he has juxtaposed his alarm for possible interference with religious freedom by our government with his complete lack of concern about Sharia law being accepted in one or more of our political venues.

Since such a possibility is “transparently nonsense” to Haynes, I would suggest he consider what has happened in Great Britain. Here’s a small excerpt from the *London Sunday Times* on Sept. 14, 2008:

“Islamic law has been officially adopted

in Britain, with Sharia courts given powers to rule on Muslim civic cases ... The government has quietly sanctioned the powers for Sharia judges to rule on cases ranging from divorce and financial disputes to those involving domestic violence ...”

In the time since that item ran in the *London Times*, we have witnessed the turmoil that Islamic fervor has produced in Britain and other European countries, not to mention the Arab world. In my opinion, Haynes is naïve to believe there is no threat from Sharia law in the United States.

Daniel A. Polk, Richmond, Va.

Haynes responds

EDITOR: The United States is not the United Kingdom. Under the First Amendment, religious courts may not replace or supersede civil law.

American Muslims are, of course, free to follow religious laws voluntarily — as long as those laws do not interfere with or contravene American laws. Just as many Roman Catholics voluntarily adhere to canon law and many Orthodox Jews follow Jewish laws, so many Muslims follow Sharia law in family and other matters.

The Free Exercise clause of the First Amendment protects the right of religious people to follow the laws of their faith. But religious laws may not be imposed on people involuntarily. And religious laws may not violate or contravene civil laws.

The idea that Sharia law (a set of principles with many different interpretations) can become in any way “official” in the U.S. is absurd. Such claims are merely scare tactics meant to stir anti-Muslim sentiment.

The same ridiculous charges were made against Roman Catholicism in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the U.S. The fear of a “takeover” by the Vatican, with Catholic law trumping the Constitution, was nativist propaganda intended to frighten the Protestant majority. Islamophobia, not Sharia law, is the real problem in America today.

Charles Haynes,

First Amendment Center, Washington, D.C.

Where are the Baptists?

EDITOR: (Re: Blake Kendrick’s “You are what you read,” p. 30, February 2011), I am surprised that the pastor of a Baptist church in Greenwood, S.C., who named the authors whose books influenced him had so little awareness of Baptist scholars. I only saw two on his list of 25 people whom I recognized as definitely being Baptists.

Right off the top of my head I could have given him the names of 10 respected, published Baptist theologians. If this is indicative of how little impact Baptist scholars are making in moderate circles, we have our educational work cut out for us.

Richard Pierard, Hendersonville, N.C.

(Editor’s note: When asked to name names, Dr. Pierard, professor emeritus of history from Indiana State University, responded: “How is this for starters? Glen Stassen, Molly Marshall, James Leo Garrett, Roger Olson, Michael Quicke, Ron Crawford, Phyllis Rodgerson Pleasants, Walter Shurden, David Gushee, Bill Leonard, James Dunn, Steve Harmon, Dale Irvin. Does my list sound convincing?”)

Grow the faith

EDITOR: The action taken by the Southern Baptist International Mission Board to pull out most of the physicians, nurses, clinics, water and farming specialists, etc., and send mostly pastors and evangelists is a big blow to our missionary statesmanship.

As a tree farmer, I prefer to plant trees in the ground where they will grow. The best I can learn of all the years of the modern missionary movement, we have not made a dent in any of the other world religions. In fact, I understand we are losing ground in total net numbers. And this is not the fault of our dedicated missionaries.

The Appalachian area of America could be a more nearly ideal place for missionary work. Let’s explore and try this area.

Henry V. Langford, Richmond, Va.

This forum gives readers a chance to participate in respectful, though often passionate, dialogue on important issues. Your opinion is welcomed. Please include your name, address and phone number, and limit your letters to 200 words. Send by e-mail to editor@baptisttoday.org, or by mail to Editor, *Baptists Today*, P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318.

2011 Bible Studies

These lessons follow the adult Formations studies from Smyth & Helwys Publishing www.helwys.com

May 1, 2011

God's righteousness revealed

Romans 3:21-31

There is no righteousness outside of God. The only way I can ever know righteousness is if it is a gift from God — given to me, graced to me, imputed to me. The word “impute” is sparsely scattered throughout the Epistle of Romans. It means to assign to, credit or attribute to. The Apostle Paul is clear throughout this grand epistle. The only way any human can know righteousness — be righteous — is if righteousness is given, graced, imputed to him or her by God.

I cannot become righteous by embracing the law.

Many of us Protestants — at least us Baptists — were saved on the “Roman Road.” For some it happened during Vacation Bible School. For others it was the annual trip to youth camp. Some of us actually endured consecutive nights of a week-long revival and were ushered down the Roman Road.

For those of you unfamiliar with these stepping stones of spiritual rebirth, it all begins with Romans 3:23, “All have sinned ...” The potential convert is then ushered to Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death ...” And finally to Romans 10:9-10, “If we confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead, we shall be saved ...” The first step of my childhood heaven acquisition and hell avoidance was that I had to admit I had sinned.

Romans 3:23 is the pinnacle of an argument Paul makes throughout the first two chapters of this letter. We often hear persons quote the latter verses of Romans 1 when they feel the need to reprimand, reprove or judge people who covet, gossip, murder, lie, disobey their parents, boast, envy and are gay. It's a great

list of “laws” to impose on other people. These same folk, however, rarely read Romans 2.

Paul continues the discussion by admonishing people of faith not to judge one another according to these laws. In fact, he argues that to judge someone according to the law is to embrace the law. And if we embrace the law, we must be judged according to the law. And if we break even one law, we are guilty of the whole law. And since none of us are perfect, it would behoove us to lay the law aside as a system of determining or acquiring righteousness. Because, as Paul states so eloquently on the first stone of the Roman Road, “All have sinned ...”

About a year ago I was leading a conference on the Book of Leviticus. During a time of discussion, one of the participants asked my opinion on the biblical admonitions with regard to homosexuality. I told him that it indeed was a part of the levitical code, but so were hundreds of other laws that I do not hold over my parishioners. I also stated my refusal to use Romans 1 as fodder for judging others since Paul tells me I am a breaker of all laws just by breaking any one. The young man scratched his head and looked bewildered. I decided to explain further. I asked him if he had ever eaten a cheeseburger (the mixing of meat and dairy is prohibited in levitical law) and he said he had. I looked at him and said, “Then you are a homosexual. If we break even one law, we are guilty of them all.” This is not the way we want to be judged, and it is not the path to knowing righteousness.

I can only know righteousness through the embrace of grace.

Righteousness is imputed to me by God. Righteousness is given to me. It is an absolute gift. I can't do enough or avoid enough to be righteous. As Paul says in verse 20 of today's text, “We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.”

I've said it of all three of my daughters at one time or another, “She's a perfect child.”

LESSONS FOR: Sunday, May 1-29, 2011

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



But here's the deal, not one of them “earned” that accolade. Not one of them successfully avoided every pitfall of adolescence. Not one of them sailed through the teenage years never saying — or at least thinking — something less than positive about their parents. Not one of them graduated with a 4.0. They are perfect children, however, because I have deemed them so. I have graced them with that identity within my home. I see them the way I see them — not because of their actions, but because of my love. It is perfection — righteousness — that is given, not earned.

I want to live with that kind of graceful righteousness. I need to afford others the privilege as well.

May 8, 2011

God's righteousness illustrated

Romans 4:1-25

We have a resource closet in the basement of our church. It is filled with items traditionally used in the religious education of young minds: popsicle sticks, pipe cleaners, construction paper and Bible story pictures. When a flannel board is not available, we pull out the Bible story pictures to illustrate the texts being relayed to the children. When Paul wants to illustrate God's righteousness, he pulls out a picture of Abraham.

Abraham, after all, was the father of the faith. He was the original patriarch of the first holy family. If anyone could adequately personify the reception and incorporation of God's righteousness into a human life, it would be Father Abraham. As we review his life, however, we find he was not that different from us. The simple similarity helps us believe that we can have and hold God's righteousness as well.

It's not what Abraham avoided that made



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him righteous. Avoiding particular behaviors and sins does not allow a person to be deemed righteous by God. It may provide space for a little self-righteousness, but not the righteousness of God.

Avoiding particular behaviors have often been equated, however, with some degree of righteousness within religious circles. We've all heard the adage, "I don't drink and I don't chew and I don't go out with girls who do." We laugh when the line creeps into conversation, but we often use such limited criteria to bolster our own standing before God or to tear down someone else's.

Who would choose to be an alcoholic? I have no problem avoiding alcohol addiction. I can enjoy a glass of wine and never ponder a successive glass. Or, I can simply drink something else with no craving or desire for the wine at all. How often have we judged those who — because of a disease, not a rebellious desire — cannot avoid such substances? We deem them less than righteous because of what they cannot avoid.

Abraham was reckoned to be righteous, not because he avoided every negative behavior. The biblical text records his struggles and downfalls.

It's not what Abraham did that made him righteous. In today's text, Paul makes it clear that Abraham's righteousness was reckoned to him prior to his circumcision. Circumcision might have easily been interpreted as a sign of righteousness. It was an act performed to show one's identity with God and obedience to God. This alone, however, was not a hall pass to the room of righteousness.

Mrs. Maggie Pearson was the matriarch of the little church where I spent my formative years. She sat on the third pew, right side as you faced the pulpit. My family sat on the second pew, right side just in front of her. She never missed a Sunday ... and never missed an hour of Sunday school. We always knew when she was settling behind us because we could hear her Sunday school perfect attendance pin collection slapping the back of our pew. Mrs. Pearson was well past 80 years of age, and her collection of pins was almost at her hem. Every year our pastor would latch another one on, and the ensuing additional weight would further disfigure the fit of her blouse. I don't think Mrs. Pearson felt her pins made her righteous, but a lesser soul might have certainly garnered such a thought. After all those hours in Sunday school, I'm sure she knew

that what she did had nothing to do with the righteousness she experienced.

In Abraham's life, righteousness was the result of his faith and hope. In verses 18-21 of today's text, we are told, "Hoping against hope ... [Abraham was] fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness." Abraham knew the limits of his age and his body. Abraham knew that nothing he avoided or accomplished could bring about God's promise of child and nation. And let's not assume or assert that Abraham's levels of faith and hope were superhuman. More than once, Abraham questioned God concerning the promise. More than once, Abraham tried to take matters into his own hands. Even these seemingly vivid acts of faithlessness were not enough to deter God from being generous and graceful. Whatever measure of faith and hope Abraham was able to muster was enough for God. And that is good news for all of us!

May 15, 2011

God's righteousness incarnate

Romans 5:1-11

The Apostle Paul begins Romans 5 with some pretty lofty language, "... we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand ..." This grace in which we stand is not just an idea.

The bulk of our spiritual adventures is eventually whittled down to words. That seems to be the natural progression of things. We have a religious experience; something "happens" to us. The experience is then described, and we've created a "testimony." We want others to experience spirituality in the same manner in which we did, and a "dogma" emerges. Before we know it, terms are tied down into a manageable package and we've got ourselves a religion. Within this progression, the final form of faith may be quite dissimilar from our original experience. And we still aren't through.

These fond phrases, which describe the depth and breadth of our religious experience, must then be pondered and probed by theologians and scholars. Appropriate boundaries

must be established to protect us from all ethereal episodes that fall outside the bell curve of orthodoxy. Creeds are established — except for us Baptists, although we do pen documents and attend conventions and pass resolutions with regard to the opinion of theologians and scholars. In the course of time, our experiences are minimized to mere — but powerful — words.

Grace is one of those words. We see grace when ... A prodigal son returns home and is unconditionally loved and welcomed by his father. An adulterous woman is within moments of losing her life to first century capital punishment, but Jesus calls down her accusers and calls forth her best self. The Apostle Paul is on a zealously murderous rampage through the countryside, but is blinded by a light, ministered to by a stranger named Ananias, and embraced as an instrument of the gospel by the risen Lord. Simply speaking the word "grace," however, while forgetting the experiences that prompted the term, leaves the word empty.

Grace isn't just an idea; grace is a person.

Mrs. Morgan lived three doors down from us in the town where I grew up. She was an elementary school teacher and apparently had all the kids she could stand during her days at school. She made it clear to the neighborhood kids — and their parents — that she did not want us on her property. The problem with her request? She had the nicest, whitest concrete driveway on our street. It was the perfect distance, the perfect grade and the perfect shade of white for riding your bike as fast as you could, turning into her driveway, slamming on brakes, and seeing how long of a black streak your back tire could leave. We only performed these feats when we knew Mrs. Morgan was not home. Five or six or more neighborhood kids would enjoy a grand competition in her absence.

As chance would have it, during one of our competitions she drove up unnoticed. We were caught. She knew us all. There was no escaping. She pulled into her driveway, quietly got out of her car, and walked into her house — to call our parents no doubt. Then, she came back outside ... with a tape measure. She began measuring the marks we had left, posted them on a piece of paper beside our name, laughing and applauding our best efforts at marking up her world. We never marked up her driveway again after that. She came out and played with us; we never had



May 29, 2011

God's righteousness sets free

Romans 8:1-11, 31-39

My grandmother loved gardening. Surrounding her little Jim Walter home were flower beds brimming with annuals and perennials: marigolds and lambs ear, zinnias and touch-me-nots. She had one bed completely filled with purple irises. They only bloomed for a short time each year, but when they bloomed it was spectacular. At the back of her yard was a delightful vegetable garden. Every season of the year, except the coldest, there was always something growing there. In the farthest corner of the yard laid her compost pile. I can recall many walks to the steamy mound to dump supper remnants, the skins of fresh-hulled peas or the morning coffee grounds.

In addition to the gardens, there was an assortment of trees and bushes. A pecan tree towered near the side road; I hated when pecans were wasted under the tires of cars. A very climbable magnolia tree was on the border of the front yard. A couple of peach trees and mimosas were scattered here and there. She had flowering camellias, forsythia and even a pomegranate bush. My grandmother was poor in earthly goods, but she loved the rich earth.

Her favorite plant in the yard was a bush she called "the bird of paradise." I have not seen once since. I'm not sure if that's the actual name of the bush. I just know that she treasured the bush. It was situated at the very end of one of her flower beds at the back corner of her home.

One day my sister and I were playing chase at my grandmother's. While running from my faster and older sibling, I cut the corner at grandma's house a little too close. I plowed directly into the delicate bush, ripping a couple of its flowering branches from their tender source. My sister let out the expected childhood exclamation, "Ooooo, I'm gonna tell on you!" I begged her not to. I knew Grandma loved the bush. I told my sister I would do anything if she didn't tell.

Well, I did anything and everything all day long. I had to play dolls. I had to take the trash to the compost pile when Grandma asked her to do it. I had to set the table when she was asked to do it. I had to

the heart to disappoint her again. That's grace ... transforming grace.

The Apostle Paul says in verse 8 that God's love was proved to us in the death of Christ; that while we were in the process of marking up his world, he came to be with us ... allowed himself to die for us. Or as Paul says in Philippians, Jesus emptied himself of all his heavenly stuff to come and be one of us; he was obedient, even unto death. Once Jesus has come to be with us, giving up all that is precious to him in order to do so, we don't have the heart to disappoint him anymore. That's grace ... transforming grace. It's not just an idea; it's a person.

May 22, 2011

God's righteousness brings life

Romans 6:1-14

Everyone is baptized into something. Everyone is immersed into something. Much of what the world immerses itself into impedes its ability to sense and embrace God's kingdom. I have friends immersed in occupation, hobbies, family and even church. While none of these areas are necessarily bad within themselves, they do have the capacity to call us away from the true purpose of life — the glorification of God.

In today's text we hear baptismal language. We hear the righteousness of God bringing life to the believer. But before we wistfully wallow in this new life that is ours, we need to read the language carefully. Yes, God's righteousness does bring us life. But we need also to affirm that the first baptismal words are words of death. Paul says it this way in verse 3: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"

Concretely connecting the ideas of baptism and death is counter to our typical religious practice of baptism. We tend to make baptism all about life. From christening gowns to white robes, the event typically emphasizes the idea of life. Smiling parents are photographed with covenant-covered children, and the church celebrates its continued expansion and growth. Again, this is counter to the image of death evoked by baptism. In some Christian communities in Latin America, baptismal processions begin with funeral songs. It is not until the end the service that songs of

joy are sung. In these regions where faith is often disdained or even threatened, baptism and death are not strange partners.

This death of baptism need not be a literal death, however. The Apostle Paul could have held both a literal and spiritual death in mind. Even in regions where faith is tolerated and accepted, baptism is still the beginning of the Christian's "life of death." The followers of Christ lived on and always will live on the edge of death. We will identify with those who face death. We will stare death — in its worst forms — in the face and confront it with our belief and faith in the one who holds life. Baptism is the beginning of our death watch and death experience. We do not fear death, however. We particularly do not fear the worldly death that threatens. In baptism, we have already died to this world. We readily accept the idea that life is good ... but life is not God. We are immersed in Christ.

God's righteousness brings death, but God's righteousness also brings life. So Paul ends verse 4 of today's text by affirming that "... we too might walk in newness of life." And in verse 11 he concludes, "... consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Musician, songwriter and recording artist, Kyle Matthews, performed at our church a few years ago. One of the songs he shared with us was titled "I've Been Through the Water." The verses of this song take us through the chapter of one man's life. We see him as a child in baptismal waters. We see him as a husband in the prime of his life. We see him as a grandfather in the final chapters of his life. In each verse and chapter there is a challenge — the taunting of childhood friends, the temptations of marital infidelity and the final befriending of death. In the face of each challenge Kyle's lyrical character calls upon his baptism to define his life. He has "been through the water," and that makes all the difference in the world in the way he lives and dies.

God's righteousness does bring us life. It is not a life, however, that denies or escapes death but one that looks death square in the eye. It is a life that befriends, rather than bemoans, death; that defeats death rather than fears death. It embraces a death that puts our old life behind us and allows us to be "raised to walk in a newness of life."

God's righteousness brings both death and life.

watch what she wanted to watch on television. Finally, I had had enough. I went to my grandmother, head hung low, and told her what I had done. She put her hand under my chin, lifted my head, looked at me and said, “I saw you do it. I had already forgiven you. But, I’ve been wondering all day how long you would let your sister make a slave out of you.”

Romans 8:1-11 reminds us that God’s righteousness frees us from our internal torment.

The second portion of today’s text, Romans 8:31-39, reminds us that God’s righteousness frees us from external torment as well. Paul says it in a multitude of ways in these few short verses: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” “Who will bring any charge against God’s elect?” “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?”

The righteousness that God imputes to us frees us from the typical external torments of “... hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril.” We can be convinced “... that

neither death, nor life, nor angels ... nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Not even my sister can externally torment me anymore. Why? Because I know who and whose I am. I know that I am God’s beloved — and I was my grandmother’s beloved. The internal freedom of Romans 8:1-11 makes room for the external freedom of Romans 8:31-39.

God’s righteousness truly sets us free — internally and externally. We no longer need to live with the “shoulds” and “oughts” imposed upon us by our internal guilt barometers or our external judgmental brothers and sisters. We are free to live connected to and comfortable in the care of God. We won’t take advantage of a love like that. We won’t intentionally respond to that kind of unconditional care with intentional irresponsible living. We will naturally love the things that God loves, since God’s the one who set us free. ... A broken bird of paradise bush became somewhat of a shrine for me. **BT**

in the know

Keeping up with people, places, and events

Clint Dobson, 29, pastor of NorthPointe Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, was found dead inside the church March 3, the apparent victim of a crime that left a ministry assistant severely beaten. Dobson was a graduate of Baylor University and Baylor’s Truett Seminary.

Donald V. Dowless has been elected as president of Shorter University, a Georgia Baptist Convention school in Rome, Ga. He succeeds Harold E. Newman. Dowless comes from North Greenville University in South Carolina where he served as vice president for academic affairs. An ordained Baptist minister, he is a graduate of the University of North Carolina, Southeastern Seminary and Baylor University where he earned a Ph.D. He formerly served at Charleston Southern University as well.

Tom Elliff has been picked to head the Southern Baptist Convention’s International Mission Board. A former SBC president, he served as pastor of First Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., (1985-2005) and as IMB vice president for spiritual nurture and church relations (2005-2009). Elliff, 67, and his wife Jeannie were IMB missionaries in Zimbabwe from 1981-1983.

Keith Herron, pastor of Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo., has been nominated as moderator-elect for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and **Renée Bennett** of Macon, Ga., chief operating officer with Morningstar Children and Family Services, is the nominee for recorder.

John H. Tullock of Delano, Tenn., died Feb. 26. He was pastor of churches in Tennessee and North Carolina, and taught at Belmont University in Nashville for 34 years where he chaired the department of religion. He was the author of *The Old Testament Story*, just released in its ninth edition. He and his wife of 64 years, Helen, took two one-year sabbaticals at Belmont to serve in Nigeria. **BT**

Are you under 40 with something on your mind?

The newly updated *Baptists Today* web site has a blog spot just for you.

Seeking younger voices

Devotional, personal reflections or issue-oriented opinion pieces on a variety of subjects — as long as they are well written, relevant and free of slander — are welcomed inclusions.

These submissions can be never-before published, previously published with the writer retaining first rights, or something posted on a personal blog site. Just tell us if/where it’s shown up before.

While the only remuneration is the glory of being published online or perhaps gaining a little traffic to a personal blog site, please send your submissions to editor@baptiststoday.org.

Go ahead. Express yourself!

Senior Pastor: Midway Baptist Church is seeking an ordained Baptist minister to fill the position of full-time senior pastor. We prefer someone with both a bachelor's and seminary degree and also six years ministry experience, with three-plus years as senior pastor. Midway Baptist Church is a dually aligned CBF/SBC church that serves its members with both traditional and contemporary services. The church is also served by other part-time staff positions. The church's vision statement is "pointing the world to Christ through love and service." Midway is a quaint, small town in the heart of the bluegrass surrounded by horse farms, close to Lexington and the interstate. Additional information regarding Midway Baptist Church and its ministries can be reviewed at www.midwaybc.net. Send résumés to: office@midwaybc.net or Midway Baptist Church, P.O. Box 352, Midway, KY 40347.

Minister of Education and Outreach: First Baptist Church of Mooresville, N.C., with an average attendance of 500 in morning worship, is accepting résumés until April 15 for a full-time minister of Christian education and outreach. Address résumés to: Search Committee, 150 S. Church St., Mooresville, NC 28115.

Minister of Students: First Baptist Church, Carrollton, Ga., seeks a person with a college and seminary degree who would be responsible for leading the youth and college programs. Send résumés to: steve@carrolltonfirstbaptist.com.

Minister of Children and Youth: First Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tenn., is seeking candidates for minister of children and youth to serve as the staff coordinator for all programs and ministries for children (birth–grade 5) and youth (grades 6–12). The church is seeking a person who will work to engage the children and youth of the church and community to become the faithful and mature Christians whom God has created them to be. Candidates should have or be completing a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent. Ministry experience is preferred. The congregation's primary partner for global missions is the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Please submit résumés to: judy@1stbaptistcha.org or Minister of Children and Youth Search Committee, First Baptist Church, 401 Gateway Ave., Chattanooga, TN 37402.

Associate Pastor for Children: A Master of Divinity or equivalent degree is required from an accredited seminary. The candidate must have experience in planning, developing, supervising and coordinating a ministry of children ranging in age from birth to sixth grade. For more information, visit www.tabernacle.org. To apply, submit résumé by April 15 to: linda.bohannan@tabernacle.org or Children's Pastor Search Committee, Tabernacle Baptist Church, 150 Tabernacle Dr., Carrollton, GA 30117.

Church Administrator: This position reports directly to the senior pastor to assist him in the efficient administration and leadership of the business affairs of the church and the allocation of resources that enable and enhance the church's ministries. Overall duties include but are not limited to: fiscal operations, financial and stewardship management, human resources and supervision, facility management, building usage, and office operations. Candidates must possess a bachelor's degree in business administration, finance or accounting or have significant related experience. Excellent computer skills in Microsoft Office and Publisher as well as demonstrated skills in budget preparation, finance and staff management are preferred. The successful candidate must be able to work independently, have good organizational skills, maintain confidentiality, and possess the ability to perform in accordance with the mission, vision and values of the church. A full job description may be viewed at www.fbcjc.org. Benefits and paid expenses are included. Interested persons may submit a résumé to: doyle@fbcjc.org or 301 E. Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.

Advertising ministry positions
in *Baptists Today* opens the
right doors.
jackie@baptiststoday.org

Georgia pastor Bill Self announces succession plan to congregation

By John Pierce

ALPHARETTA, Ga. — William L. (Bill) Self informed the congregation of Johns Creek Baptist Church in the northern Atlanta suburb of Alpharetta on Sunday, Feb. 20, of his intent to retire upon a successful search for his successor and a three-month transition period. Self, 79, told *Baptists Today* that he will remain as pastor through whatever period of time it takes for the congregation to identify and call a new senior minister.

"About five years ago I became convinced that the traditional Baptist pastoral transition model would not be suitable for this church," Self said in a letter read to the congregation. "After much prayer and research, I began to work with a group of our leaders to develop a plan for this church, which was approved two years ago."

The plan calls for a "seamless" succession to be initiated solely by the pastor. Self told the congregation on Feb. 20: "The time to implement the pastoral transition plan has come."

Self, who rose to prominence in denominational life as pastor of Atlanta's Wieuca Road Baptist Church from 1964 to 1990, took the pastorate of nearby First Baptist Church of Chamblee, Ga., in 1991. He helped lead the 118-year-old church to relocate to a growing suburban area and change its name to Johns Creek Baptist Church. The congregation has experienced phenomenal growth in membership, finances and facilities.

The church has built four buildings on its McGinnis Ferry Road campus, including a 2,000-seat sanctuary with a Ruffati pipe organ. The expansive facilities that house a wide range of ministries were completed at a total cost of \$50 million — and the church's annual operating budget now exceeds \$5 million.

Self said the succession plan he has now initiated is designed to maintain the church's forward momentum during the pastoral leadership transition. In making his announcement, he assured the congregation of a hopeful future.

"I fully believe that this period can be

the best in our history," he said. "Our new children's facilities will soon be ready and we are exploring the possibility of an additional worship service, as well as several new Sunday school communities. We have a very competent and dedicated staff poised to take us into the next chapter in our church life."

Love for the congregation, said Self, is what led him to initiate the transition at a time while his "health is good and the church is doing so well."

In retirement Self said he intends to speak, write and provide mentoring to younger pastors. The former president of the Georgia Baptist Convention, vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and president of the SBC's Foreign (now International) Mission Board, is now aligned with the more moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

An annual lecture series on preaching at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology was established in Self's honor in 1997. He has been guest lecturer and preacher on several college and seminary campuses and at numerous conferences. **BT**

Baptist Gomes, Harvard minister, dies at 68

By Adelle M. Banks
Religion News Service

Peter Gomes, the longtime minister of Harvard University's Memorial Church who was hailed as one of the nation's top preachers, died Feb. 28 at age 68. He defied stereotypes throughout his life with his atypical attributes — a black Republican and openly gay minister who grew up in Plymouth, Mass.

"A more colorful colleague none of us ... could ever imagine, nor a more faithful friend and steady presence," said Harvard Divinity School Dean William A. Graham in a message to students and faculty following Gomes' death.

The American Baptist minister spent most of his career at Harvard, serving first as assistant minister at the Memorial Church in 1970. In 1974, he became a professor of

Christian morals and the church's minister.

He was featured in pulpits across the country and named by *Time* magazine in 1979 as one of seven "star preachers." He participated in the inaugurations of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush and Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick.

"He was one of the nation's truly great preachers and one of Harvard's truly great scholars," said Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Gomes wrote best-selling books on the Bible and preaching and published 11 volumes of sermons. In a 1998 interview he explained why he described his preaching style as "a precise tornado": "There's a lot of energy and there's a lot of enthusiasm and a



lot of wind and a lot of motion and movement, but it's heading toward a precise target."

Long known as a conservative, Gomes made a surprise announcement in 1991 that he was gay in response to anti-gay rhetoric on campus.

"I acted not as an outraged homosexual, but as an outraged Christian," he said after the incident.

Leaders of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force praised Gomes for being a courageous model for religious people who affirm gay rights.

"He came out as a gay man when it was scandalous for clergy of his position and caliber, of any caliber, to do so," said Rea Carey, the task force's executive director. "And yet, he did so with a clarity and grace that provided theological shelter for many a young person struggling with their sexuality." **BT**

Evelyn Stagg role model for Baptist women

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Evelyn Stagg, a trailblazer for Southern Baptist women in ministry, died Feb. 28. She was 96.

Born Evelyn Owen in Ruston, La., she was married for 66 years to Frank Stagg, a professor at two Southern Baptist Convention seminaries for more than 30 years, who died in 2001. In 1978 they co-authored *Woman in the World of Jesus*, a work that inspired a generation of women preparing for ministry until more conservative voices seized control of the denomination and went on record against women's ordination.

The book addressed women's roles in the contemporary church by exploring the status of women in the world that Jesus entered, how Jesus related to women in his ministry and the status of women in the

New Testament church.

Between 1935 and 1938, while Frank Stagg was enrolled in the master of divinity program at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., Evelyn took the same classes and sat for all the exams.

In those days the seminary did not grant degrees to women, but she performed well enough that she was asked to grade papers for beginning students in New Testament Greek.

Throughout their marriage, she worked behind the scenes as the first reader

and unofficial editor for dozens of journal articles and 10 books written by her husband. In later years Mercer University awarded her an honorary degree to recognize her early scholastic achievement and lifetime of shared ministry.

She is survived by her three children, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. She donated her body to the University of Louisville School of Medicine. **BT**



Oeita Bottorff, 87, helped launched CBF

By Bob Allen
Associated Baptist Press

DALLAS — A key leader in the moderate response to the Southern Baptist Convention inerrancy controversy in the 1980s died Feb. 25 after a long battle with Alzheimer's Disease.

Oeita Theunissen, 87, known professionally and in church leadership as Oeita Bottorff, was director of Baptists Committed, an organization formed by Baptists to oppose a movement in the nation's second-largest faith group known alternatively as the "conservative resurgence" or "fundamentalist takeover."

She was a key organizer of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship — a group that celebrates its 20th anniversary this summer — formed after it became clear that denominational loyalists would be unable to hold onto SBC leadership through political means.

Prior to the controversy she was recognized as a leader among Southern Baptists in youth recreation ministries. She worked a number of years with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission on issues including Texans Care for Children. In 1996 she coordinated a major project, "Violence, a Christian Response."

She is survived by her husband, Bruce, two children, a grandson, two sisters and two stepdaughters. **BT**



Belmont not alone

On evangelical campuses, rumblings of gay acceptance

In February, the provost of Belmont University in Nashville, Tenn., announced that the school officially had recognized its first gay student organization.

The announcement came barely a month after the Christian school changed its anti-discrimination policy to include homosexuals, after a popular women's soccer coach was forced out last December because her lesbian partner was expecting a child.

The gay student group had twice been turned down for official recognition. Belmont Provost Thomas Burns said the change of mind reflected an "ongoing campus dialogue about Christian faith and sexuality."

The thing is, that dialogue isn't just limited to Belmont.

Belmont's policy changes are the latest in a series of incidents at evangelical Christian campuses involving issues surrounding homosexuality. Some observers now wonder whether a major shift in opinions about homosexuality might be occurring among younger evangelicals.

The answer seems to be yes.

Last month, the student newspaper at Westmont College in California printed an open letter signed by 131 gay and gay-supportive alumni who said they had experienced "doubt, loneliness and fear due to the college's stance on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues."

"We offer our names as proof that LGBT people do exist within the Westmont community," their letter said.

In 2009, Hope College in Holland, Mich., banned *Milk* screenwriter Dustin Lance Black from screening his Oscar-winning film or talking about gay issues on campus. College officials said Black's "notoriety as an advocate for gay rights would not



Photo courtesy of Belmont University. www.belmont.edu

contribute constructively to the ongoing exploration and dialogue on our campus."

Eventually Black, who had been invited to Hope by students and faculty, screened *Milk* at a public theater in Holland — an event organized by the group Hope is Ready, founded by college and community members to foster dialogue about gay issues.

Wheaton College in Illinois, the alma mater I share with Billy Graham and countless other evangelical leaders, is widely considered the pinnacle of evangelical Christian colleges. Earlier this year, several gay (and gay-affirming) Wheaton alumni started a Facebook page.

The group is working to produce a collection of "It Gets Better" videos to show their solidarity with and concern for young gay and lesbian students at their alma mater and elsewhere.

While some of the policy changes are new, the conversation isn't. It's just more open.

Since 2005, activists from the gay civil rights group Soulforce have taken their "Equality Ride" to Christian campuses to spur dialogue about homosexuality. They've been welcomed with varying degrees of hospitality.

Whether the train of change among young evangelicals has left the station is certainly a matter of debate. Yet either way, some observers sense a rumble on the tracks.

"Clearly attitudes are changing," said David Gushee, director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University in Georgia. "The activism of an

entire generation of Christian right leaders had left its mark. Unfortunately the mark wasn't mainly to change the culture; it was to make Christianity look bad."

As Gushee puts it, evangelicals — but especially younger evangelicals who have little taste or patience for the political battles of their parents' generation — are looking for a course correction.

"We can't have the name of Jesus certainly associated with hatred or contempt for homosexuals," Gushee said. "And in general we should be known by what we're for rather than what we're against."

A 2010 poll by the Public Religion Research Institute and Religion News Service found that a majority of young adults favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry and adopt children. Researcher Robert Jones said there is no other issue with such a generation gap than the gay question.

Gushee cautioned, however, that a difference in attitude doesn't necessarily equal a difference in belief, even as one might shape the other.

"The possibility that the church has been wrong on the ethics of committed homosexual behavior — that's a momentous question," Gushee said. "It's obviously one that people in the broader culture have determined a long time ago that the church was wrong about. But I would say that, from the perspective of any kind of understanding of Christian doctrine and Christian ethics, it is not an easy thing to throw (overboard) the majority position of more than 2,000 years." **BT**

'Our work is never done'

Civil rights leader Joseph Lowery reflects

Civil rights activist Joseph Lowery, who worked alongside Martin Luther King Jr., has always combined his work on secular causes with a sacred message.

At age 89, the retired United Methodist pastor has written his first book, *Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land*, in which he shares sermons and memories of his work on race relations and human rights. Some comments have been edited for length and clarity.

Q: As one of the more well-known living leaders of the civil rights movement, do you feel you have a particular responsibility to continue its message with those who come after you?

A: Every generation ought to take the fight just a little closer to the goal. And I think I have a responsibility to do all I can to make it clear and to facilitate their witness.

Q: Your book is filled with sermons you have preached over the years. How important were sermons for motivating and achieving the goals of the civil rights movement?

A: We've always been spiritually oriented. Dr. King said make it plain that we are rooted in the faith, and that without the basis in God and religion and spirituality we would not be who we are. That's why I've always had no difficulty mixing. I didn't divide the world between sacred and secular. I think that it's all sacred, all God's world and all God's will.

Q: You spoke of the sacrifices of working for equal rights, including your

wife who barely avoided being shot during a demonstration in Alabama. Did you ever think of stopping your work because of the danger?

A: If we did, it was only a fleeting moment. It didn't last long because we didn't think we had any choice. It was a calling.

Q: You often say that despite the accomplishments in race relations, there's a ways to go. What are the most important goals still to be accomplished?

A: We're still only 60-some percent of the median income, 10 percent of the net worth. I think there's a little bit of a new kind of slavery under the criminal justice system. We are jailing black men — and now women — far out of proportion to the population, and it's going to impact our future.

Q: You wrote that Christians who don't vote aren't good Christians. Why do you feel that way?

A: We can't love each other if we deny each other opportunity and rights, and voting is a sacred part of that. We are just as wrong to neglect the vote as they are wrong who would deny us the vote.

Q: You wrote that white people, including a Christian woman who hated not being able to serve you in a restaurant, were changed by the movement. What did that mean to you?

A: I think it indicates the comprehensive nature of the movement. The movement

freed everybody. You can't keep a person in a ditch without part of you staying down with them. When we got out of the ditch we freed white folks — our oppressors — from having to stay in the ditch. She was saying I want to serve you. I want to pay for your meal. What she was saying was "I'm free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, I'm free at last!"

Q: You got into a little trouble for your comments at Coretta Scott King's funeral, when you spoke of "weapons of misdirection" just feet away from George W. Bush. Do you think some don't understand black church funerals?

A: At a funeral we celebrate the life that we are mourning, but we also challenge the people who remain. If you really want to honor this person's life, don't stop at just mourning. Pick up the mantle. And that's what we were trying to do at Coretta's funeral.

Q: You seem concerned that people are too sentimental about King. Are people not remembering him or his message the way you would like?

A: I think they're remembering him more than they are the message, and I think we got to learn to do both. I think we are celebrating the preacher but we are minimizing the sermon and the message. It is good to exalt the missionary, but we got to remember the mission as well.

Q: What do you think about the future of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which you founded with King, now that his daughter, Bernice, has chosen not to be its president?

A: I think it's in deep trouble. It's got new leadership again. I'm hopeful because I think there's a need for an SCLC. SCLC was an independent moral force that was good for the country. I'd like to see it survive. Whether it will or not, we just have to pray.

Q: You received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Is your work mostly completed now?

A: Our work is never done. A Christian's work is never done. The spiritual says we've always got "one more river to cross." **BT**



Blacks bristle at notion of ‘slave of Christ’

For evangelical author John MacArthur, the best way to explain a Christian’s relationship to Jesus is what appears to be a simple metaphor — one often used by the Apostle Paul himself.

“To be a Christian is to be a slave of Christ,” writes MacArthur, the pastor of a non-denominational church in Sun Valley, Calif.

His new book, *Slave: The Hidden Truth About Your Identity in Christ*, explores the varied practices of Bible translators regarding the controversial term. It’s also drawing mixed reactions among African-American Christians whose ancestors were slaves in 19th-century America.

MacArthur views the issue in almost conspiratorial terms: While biblical texts use the word “slave” to describe actual slave-master relationships in biblical times, English translators often opt for the word “servant” when describing a believer’s relationship to God.

“The stigma was just too great with that word to use it to refer to believers, even though they knew that was what *doulos* meant,” the white pastor said, referring to the Greek word for “slave.”

In most translations, the Apostle Paul describes himself as “a servant of Jesus Christ” in Romans 1:1, but the Southern Baptists’ Holman Christian Standard Bible has him using the term “slave of Jesus Christ.”

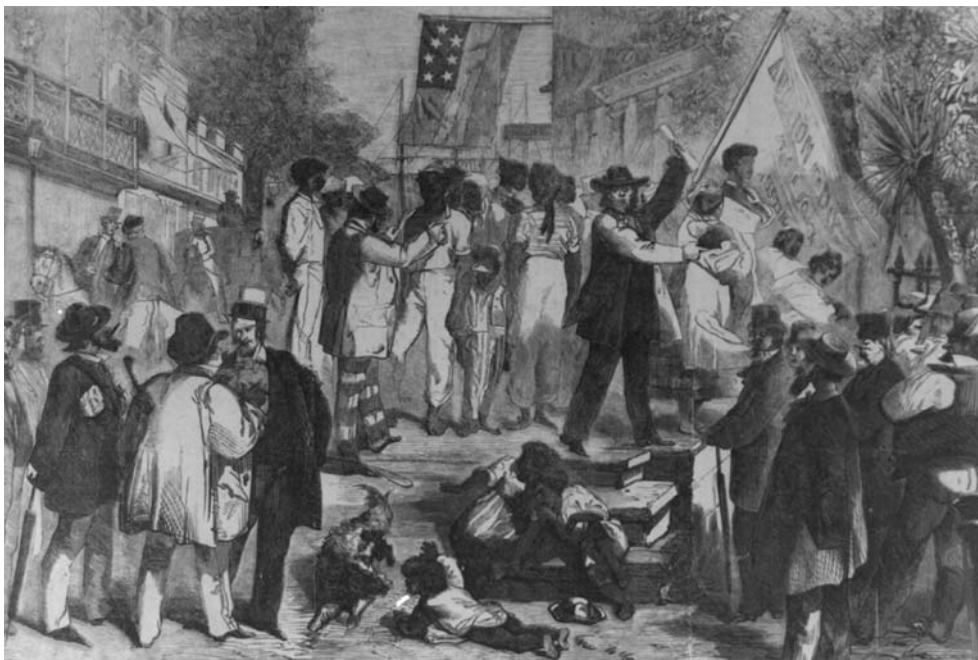
It’s the same in Luke’s famous Nativity account, where the Virgin Mary calls herself “the Lord’s servant” or “the handmaid of the Lord” in most versions, while the Holman Bible calls her “the Lord’s slave.”

Ray Clendenen, who was the associate editor for the 2004 Holman Bible, said he suggested the use of “slave” in such passages. “We weren’t trying to produce a traditional Bible,” he said. “We were trying to produce an accurate one.”

Some African-American leaders have long stayed away from the slave language, and differ with MacArthur’s view that it’s the best way to relate to God.

“Your will is broken in slavery, and I don’t think God wants to break our will,” said retired United Methodist pastor and civil rights icon Joseph Lowery. “I’m a little slow to accept the word slave because it has such a nasty history in my tradition.”

MacArthur argues that using the word “slave” is just one of many concepts in the



An 1861 image by Theodore R. Davis depicts a slave auction in the South. RNS photo courtesy Library of Congress.

Bible that might be unappealing — hell’s not a crowd-pleaser, either — but are nevertheless key to reading and understanding the sacred text.

“You can’t let the Bible usage of the concept of slavery be informed by the abuses of the African slave trade,” said MacArthur. “That’s not the context in which it was written.”

But MacArthur said there’s an important theological meaning to the term “slave,” however politically incorrect the word may be: “You give obedience to the one who has saved you from everlasting judgment,” he said.

When the more inclusive New Revised Standard Version of the Bible was being developed in the 1980s, its translation committee sought advice from African-American scholars about whether to use “slave” or “servant.”

Cain Hope Felder, a New Testament professor at Howard University School of Divinity, recommended “slave” when describing the institution of slavery, which was a part of the Greco-Roman world known by biblical writers. But he said descriptions of church leaders are “a totally different matter” and “servant” is more fitting.

“A slave’s self-esteem is almost negligible,” said Felder. “Not having self-esteem, not having rights, that certainly runs counter to the whole thought in the New Testament.”

Mitzi Smith, an associate professor of New Testament at Detroit’s Ashland

Theological Seminary, said it is inappropriate to “sanitize” the word by changing it to “servant,” but she disagrees with the idea that the master-slave relationship is the ideal image for God and Christian believers.

“We have so many more examples to show how to be in relationship with God,” she said. “A slave-master relationship is not one of willing obedience and what God seeks is willing obedience and a relationship of love with us.”

Other African-American leaders, however, embrace both the use of “slave” throughout the Bible — and MacArthur’s interpretation of it.

Vicar Dallas H. Wilson Jr. of St. John’s (Episcopal) Chapel in Charleston, S.C., hosted a three-day workshop in February to promote MacArthur’s book. Once, the black pastor thought it “ludicrous” to embrace slave terminology, but MacArthur convinced him that it is “a biblical command.”

“I think what we have done is we have translated slavery ‘servant’ and watered it down,” said Wilson, who leads a predominantly black congregation of about 70 people. “Instead of condemning the system, we should condemn the abuses.”

Darrell Coulter, a black Southern Baptist pastor in Charleston who attended the workshop, agrees.

“The slave has always been a piece of property with no relationship,” he said. “But with Christ, it’s different.” **BT**

the lighter side

A preacher looks at 50

By Brett Younger

Maybe the only thing I have in common with Bono, Amy Grant, Julianne Moore, Antonio Banderas, Cal Ripken, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Wayne Gretzky, George Stephanopoulos and Fabio is that we all recently turned 50. I've been thinking about how to commemorate my Jubilee year. My friend Julie Pennington-Russell celebrated her 50th year by climbing Stone Mountain 50 times, so I'm considering eating 50 pizzas or watching 50 episodes of *MASH*.

Carol gave me an elliptical for my birthday — which I'm trying to figure out how to take as a compliment. I've heard that every minute you spend exercising adds another minute to your life. The problem is that you've spent that minute exercising.

Turning 50 wasn't really news to me. I've been getting older for some time. My mother stopped giving me a dollar per year 10 birthdays ago. I no longer order spicy food. I am afraid to drink Dr Pepper after 7:00. I eat less and weigh more. I haven't

*I'm only 50 years away
from Willard Scott wishing
me a happy birthday.*

been to Luby's yet, but I hear the food is very good. Sometimes I nod my head when I have no idea what the person on the other side of the table just said. I'm this close to buying a magnifying glass. I take more time between haircuts. I have trouble remembering the capital of Vermont — Montpelier — even though I knew them all in the fourth grade. I am comfortable knowing that I will never again be awake for the end of the Oscars. It's almost certain that more of my life is behind me than ahead of me, but perhaps I'm only 50 years away from Willard Scott wishing me a happy birthday.

People seem confused about what to say. One 53-year-old offered this word of encouragement: "Turning 50 isn't the end of the world." One of my students exclaimed,

"Happy quarter of a century!" — as though half a century was too antiquated to even imagine. Any minute now I will be replacing Wilford Brimley as the spokesperson for Quaker Oats.

I've been told about a dozen times that "50 is the new 30" — which makes no sense. I like to think that the writer of the country song with the line, "I'm old enough to know better, but still too young to care" is 50, but he's probably 30.

I understand the temptation to be the grumpy old man who complains that television shows don't tell stories, the music on the radio is noise and the Google machines are making us stupid, but the truth is I am happy to have an AARP card. I'm old enough to skip the cake and have my son bake a pie. My niece assures me that "The Bieber Decade" is going to be great.

Jimmy Buffett sings about "growing older but not up," but it is a good gift to recognize that you are growing older and up. I am not planning to be a late bloomer. I've figured out that some things are not going to happen, and I am fine with that. I'm not going to run a marathon or be on *Dancing with the Stars*.

Being 50 gives you perspective. When you're moving slower, you see more. Forgiveness comes easier. Prayer seems more natural. Most of my troubles are not nearly as big as I used to think.

My parents point out that 50 isn't 70, but it's not 30 either. Fifty is old enough to understand that life is too short not to live it like you will wish you had lived it when it is over. Fifty is an opportunity to give up on impressing anyone and enjoy the things you love while you can. Recognizing that we are on borrowed time helps us appreciate each day.

Fifty is a good time to ponder the rest of the path. There is still time for new beginnings, risks and dreams, but you also know to look for small wonders. I like being 50. I feel young again. **BT**



Blurring the lines

By John Pierce

Posted Feb. 9, 2011

www.baptiststoday.org/johndpierce-blog

During a recent work-related trip, I was enjoying breakfast and watching the various people come in for their morning caffeine and nourishment. One woman placed her order and was asked the familiar question: “For here or to go?”

Her reply was less than direct. The employee simply wanted to know whether to put the bagel on a plate or in a bag.

“Well, I don’t know,” the customer responded, as if mulling over the final Jeopardy answer. “I guess you can put it in a bag. But I’m probably going to sit over here and eat some of it ... then I might take the rest of it home ...”

Of course, she could have put it another way: “To go, please.”

I smiled, thinking this woman was much like my mother in that she always told restaurant servers, grocery store

cashiers and other service people more than was necessary.

When I’d returned home to visit as a young adult, Mom had to introduce me to everyone, everywhere we went including restaurants. “This is our second son; he lives in Marietta; he went to college at....”

I’d usually jump in and add: “... and he would like the baked chicken, pinto beans, turnip greens and cornbread, please.”

But, before the server could head for the kitchen, Mom would pick back up with a detailed explanation of how much I always enjoyed the pinto beans and cornbread she made for me growing up — but that she didn’t prepare turnip greens although one of her relatives served them every Sunday.

To my mother, there was no difference in the way she spoke to a cousin or longtime neighbor and to the persons who sold her milk, shoes or cheeseburgers.

Like the woman who recently offered a long discourse on how and where she planned to eat her bagel, my mother

routinely blurred professional and personal relationships. Sometimes it embarrassed me.

However, I’ve decided that approach to human interaction isn’t all bad. I’d rather a customer tell a service employee too much personal information than treat him or her in a dismissive, disrespectful way.

And now I’ve noticed some blurring of professional/personal lines in my own life. For example, Facebook has brought together a wide and odd assortment of some 700 persons I’ve known throughout my life. [FB friends, you can decide whether I’m calling you wide or odd.]

Some are relatives and longtime friends while others have more professional connections. But Facebook calls you my “friend,” so I will treat you as one.

Similarly, some persons who began as professional colleagues, subscribers, supporters, vendors, etc., have evolved into personal friends as well. That’s a nice transition.

There is something gratifying when those lines get blurred a little — if it leads to new friendships and treating people more respectfully. **BT**

Prospecting with the Bible

By Tony W. Cartledge

Posted Feb. 28, 2011

www.baptiststoday.org/cartledge-blog

Did you know the Bible predicts the discovery of vast oil reserves deep beneath Israel? That’s what John Brown, chair of Zion Oil and Gas Co., believes, and he’s been prospecting in Israel for the past three years because of it, according to an article in *The Tennessean*.

Brown was inspired by a passage from Genesis 49, which is a catalog of blessings given by an aged Jacob to his 12 sons. Joseph, the favorite, gets the most elaborate blessing (vv. 22-25, NRSV):

“Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. The archers fiercely attacked him; they shot at him and pressed him hard. Yet his bow remained taut, and his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, by the God

of your father, who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb.”

The blessing appears designed to wish that God’s beneficent care of Joseph will extend from the heavens above to the depths below, from the breast and from the womb. The wish is probably related to fertility: it begins with “Joseph is a fruitful bough,” and in a dry land that is prone to drought, fruitfulness/prosperity comes from water, which falls from the heavens as rain and wells up from the depths as springs and rivers.

Brown, however, prefers to think that “blessings of the deep that lies beneath” is a reference to oil, even though the only oil Jacob knew came from olives or animal fat. So, Brown started an oil exploration company that has recruited about 15,000 investors who think he’s on to something. Some of the investors are

almost certainly theological dispensationalists, who have long considered the oil crisis to have prophetic significance.

While it’s highly unlikely that old Jacob had petroleum or natural gas in mind when he blessed Joseph, interest in exploring Israel for energy has grown in recent years. For example, Rupert Murdoch and Jacob Rothschild have invested in the Genie Energy Corp., which is investigating oil shale projects in Israel, according to *The Tennessean*. It’s been known for some time that Israel has large deposits of oil shale, but only recently has the combination of improving technology and shrinking resources made the extraction of oil from shale economically feasible.

Brown says he believes what the Bible says, is willing to stake his money on it, and that the discovery of oil will prove the Bible is true. Personally, I’m glad that the value of scripture will not rise or fall on finding gushers of black gold. Indeed, the truths we find so self-evident there are clearly far more precious than any treasure, even vast reserves of oil. **BT**



Empowerment and Celebration

Global Baptists observe International Women's Day for 100th time

Last month the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) joined in the centennial anniversary of the observance of International Women's Day by reminding Baptists that, as Christians, the BWA is dedicated to the empowerment and celebration of women.

International Women's Day was first observed in 1911, making the March 8, 2011 observance the 100th commemoration of the designated day. Organizers of the global celebrations said the aim of the anniversary was to "make the women of the past proud, the women of the current inspired, and the women of the future envisioned."

The strides women have made toward equality were remembered while participants were challenged to continue the quest for justice.

The BWA reported that its longstanding commitment to women centers on honoring both the gifts of women and seeking equality for them. For example, in 1988 the BWA General Council passed a resolution on women that states: "We celebrate the multiple gifts and sensitivities women bring to the service of Jesus Christ

and the work of the Baptist family around the world."

In 1955, the BWA established its Women's Department, with a call "to encourage and celebrate unity in Christ among Baptist women of the world."

One way the BWA Women's Department seeks to

meet this goal is by providing materials for the annual Baptist Women's World Day of Prayer held on the first Monday of November.

The Women's World Day of Prayer unites the Baptist world as women from across the globe gather in their own locations to bring common prayers for each other. Also, the BWA Women's Department challenges its constituents to "dare to be a dangerous woman on International Women's Day." For resources and additional information of the work of the BWA Women's Department, visit www.bwawd.org.

While the recent International Women's Day 100th commemoration marked much progress in the realm of gender equality, organizers stressed that girls are still less likely to receive an education worldwide. Disparity between genders increases at each educational level, and illiteracy is more prevalent among women.

Occupationally, women of the world are underpaid compared to men and are

relegated mainly to service industry employment. Women often experience inequality at home as well.

The most shocking statistics, said organizers, are the alarming numbers of women and girls who face poverty as well as those who are still victims of various types of violence in all spheres of life.

"The BWA realizes that many women around the world still suffer from immense discrimination and injustice," said a BWA report on International Women's Day.

In 2006 the BWA General Council resolved that it "deplores the violence against women and children and affirms that they are created in God's image with the right to live free from violence and exploitation."

In recent years, the BWA Women's Department has sent a delegation to the annual United Nations

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which is "dedicated exclusively to gender equality and the advancement of women." The meeting held this winter focused on gender education with an emphasis on science, technology and employment.

A stated goal of BWA leaders is that "all Baptist Christians would ascribe to the principles set out in Galatians that 'there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28b)." **BT**



Baptists Today's representation at meetings of the Baptist World Alliance and coverage of the global Baptist movement are enhanced by a generous gift from **Roy J. and Charlotte Cook Smith** of Winston-Salem, N.C.

BAPTISTS AND THE CIVIL WAR

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

In early April, Confederate army volunteers throughout the Deep South prepare for what is widely viewed as an imminent war between North and South. Samuel Boykin, editor of Georgia's *Christian Index*, on April 3 calls upon white Southern Baptists to support the Confederacy:

Whether the secession of the plantation states was justified or not — whether the Government of the Union has violated the Constitution and oppressed the South and imperiled our institution of slavery, and therefore made Southern life insecure, or not ... we see ... a special interposition of Providence. Behold what God has wrought! ...

Fort Sumter, off the coast of Charleston, S.C., proves to be the trigger that starts the war when Confederate forces bombard the fort on April 12 and force the Union to surrender the structure two days later.

U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, relieved that the South fired first, presses the border states to remain in the Union, calls for army volunteers, and pronounces a blockade of the South. In turn, Lincoln's call to arms prompts Virginia to secede on April 17, becoming the eighth state to do so. Arkansas, North Carolina and Tennessee remain uncommitted.

As the month draws to a close, Georgia Baptists meet in Athens for their annual convention and issue a statement "on the present political crisis" that declares:

Whereas, the state of Georgia, in the legitimate exercise of her sovereignty, has withdrawn from the Confederacy known as the United States of America; and, for the better maintenance of her rights, honor and independence, has united with other States in a new Confederacy, under the name of the Confederate States of America; and whereas, Abraham Lincoln, the President of the United States, is attempting by force of arms,



150 YEARS AGO

April 1861

to subjugate these States in violation of the fundamental principles of American liberty; therefore,

Resolved, By the members of the Baptist Convention of the State of Georgia, that we consider it to be at once a pleasure and a duty to avow that, both in feeling and in principle, we approve, endorse and support the Government of the Confederate States of America.

Resolved, That while this Convention disclaims all authority, whether ecclesiastical or civil, yet as citizens, we deem it but a duty to urge the union of all people of the South in defence of a common cause; and to express the confident belief that, in whatever conflict the madness of Mr. Lincoln and his government may force upon us, the Baptists of Georgia will not be behind any class of our fellow citizens in maintaining the independence of the South by any sacrifice of treasure or of blood.

Resolved, That we acknowledge with devout thankfulness to Almighty God, the signal favor with which, up to this time, He has blessed our arms and our policy ...

Resolved, That the Confederate Government be requested to invite

the churches of all denominations within the Confederacy, to unite in observing days of fasting and prayer.

Yet, Northern Baptists also laid claim to the righteousness of the (opposing) Union cause. In 1884, an early historian of the Narragansett Baptist Association of Rhode Island (that state being the original home of Baptists in colonial America), founded less than a year prior to the Civil War, recalled how the organization's 20 member churches responded to Fort Sumter and the resulting war over black slavery:

Before a year had passed, Civil War burst forth in the land as suddenly and as unexpectedly to most as the tornado on a delightsome summer afternoon. The thunders of Sumpter fell upon the ear like that from lightning in a clear sky; its fall was as the descent of an angel from on high calling with clarion tone, to arms! The churches heard the summons; they recognized the mandate of the Supreme, and promptly obeyed. Their younger sons, clad in the full panoply of war, and remembering what Inspiration saith, "the powers that be are ordained of God" and "therefore he that resisteth the power withstandeth the ordinance of God," what their fathers had suffered to secure the priceless heritage they enjoyed not only through the turmoils of war, but from imprisonment and bonds and stripes, and what their Master had endured that whosoever believeth may have eternal life, at once entered the held, enthusiastically singing, "As He died to make men holy let us die to make men free."

And thus, Baptists South and North, in addition to many taking up arms, from the beginning of the war squared off in a verbal contest to define and defend freedom and liberty. **BT**

For a daily journal along with references to source material, visit www.civilwarbaptists.com.



Baptists Today posed a series of questions to the presidents of several colleges and universities with Baptist identities. The first questions and answers appeared in the March issue. This is the second and concluding part of this exploration of the challenges and opportunities facing leaders in higher education.

Challenges & Opportunities

College presidents talk about the state of higher education

BT: How do you use terms such as “Baptist,” “Christian” or “faith-based” to define your school? And do you have to redefine them since they carry pejorative meanings?

JAMES “JAY” MOSELEY, Franklin College, Franklin, Ind.: “We say that Franklin College is related by voluntary covenant to the American Baptist Churches USA and that faith is one of the five primary values that define our institution.”

DAN LUNSFORD, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill, N.C.: “We usually use ‘Christian’ and ‘faith-based’ more often, with an emphasis on Baptist heritage. There is still a market for Christian faith-based institutions; but with the changing denominational landscape, the Baptist name is of lesser importance to the consumer. Institution size and faith expression and development remain very important for many people.”

BILL ELLIS, Howard Payne University, Brownwood, Texas: “We regularly and consistently use ‘Baptist,’ ‘Christian’ and ‘faith-based’ to describe Howard Payne. Our mission

statement describes us as ‘Christ-centered.’ While some colleges are moving to terms like ‘evangelical’ or ‘historically Christian,’ we are remaining very much as we have been — an unapologetically Christian university, affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

“We all recognize that the Baptist world has been in a period of significant realignment and redefinition. However, for the foreseeable future, we have no plans of departing from our Texas Baptist heritage.”

JERRY MCGEE, Wingate University, Wingate, N.C.: “Regretfully, a few institutions seem to have damaged these previously respected terms. At Wingate University we are very pleased with the way our faculty and staff model a Christian lifestyle for our students.

“While universities are not churches, a meaningful education program understands and includes opportunities for faith development. We feel that being a faith-based university is more important than just including such language in your admissions materials.”

ANDY WESTMORELAND, Samford University, Birmingham, Ala.: “I often say that

we aspire for Samford to be a Christ-centered institution. Many of my colleagues use the same term when referring to the institutions where they serve. I think that it captures our great hope — that we would seek to follow the example of Christ in all we do.”

MICHAEL CARTER, Campbellsville University, Campbellsville, Ky.: “We are very open about the historic mission of Campbellsville University which has been, and remains, to provide a Christ-centered educational experience in the Baptist tradition. In today’s world, there is great need for such higher education institutions.

“*Vision 2025 — Preparing Christian Servant Leaders*, which is a strategic blueprint for the future adopted by our Board of Trustees, speaks to our commitment to providing quality Christian higher education in the Baptist tradition. Baptist higher education has a very rich history and tradition, and our commitment is to continue in that vein in the years ahead. As I often say to various groups, there has never been a greater need for Christian higher education than in 2011 and beyond.”

CHRIS WHITE, Chowan University, Murfreesboro, N.C.: “Chowan does use the terms ‘Baptist,’ ‘Christian’ and ‘faith-based’ to describe our school. The term ‘Baptist’ is the most tricky, for many in the South automatically assume ‘Baptist’ means ‘Southern Baptist.’”

REX HORNE, Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, Ark.: “We embrace Baptist, Christian and faith-based. Since true evangelical schools represent a very small percentage of institutions of higher education, we believe that authentic, caring and challenging Christian schools have a great role to play in education and in the shaping of difference-makers of tomorrow. Ouachita is unapologetically committed to fostering a love of God and a love of learning in a Christ-centered learning community.”

LANNY HALL, Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Texas: “Hardin-Simmons University is a Christian institution and is unapologetic about that. In 1891, the founders of this institution said that this would be an institution that would “... bring young men and women to Christ, teach them of Christ and train them for Christ.” During its 120 years, HSU has remained committed to that mission.

“Since 1941, HSU has been affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas. One-half of our students come from Baptist backgrounds. While funding from Baptist sources has declined significantly in the last decade, HSU’s relationship with Texas Baptist churches remains strong. We provide ‘an education enlightened by faith.’ Thus, the Christian dimension of our institution is central to who we are as a university.”

BT: How do you distinguish your college/university’s missions from other private, public or for-profit schools?

MOSELEY: “Franklin College prepares men and women for significant careers through the liberal arts.”

LUNSFORD: “This is most difficult. We use service/undergraduate research/community as themes of emphasis. We also emphasize that the educational experience at Mars Hill can be transformational for the student who engages him or herself in the life of the institution.”

ELLIS: “We are a small, residential campus of

high academic quality. We focus on premier services and quality-of-life enhancements for our students. We provide more than a college degree to our students, in that we seek to offer opportunities for spiritual, social, emotional and character development.

“Many private and all public and for-profit schools do not concern themselves with spiritual development and only provide limited emphasis on social, emotional or character development. Being a smaller institution affords us the opportunity to educate students as individuals, matching professors, coursework and support services to specific student educational needs. Because of our size, we can focus on ensuring that each individual student receives every support necessary for him or her to succeed at HPU.”

MCGEE: “We simply design our student experience with one thing in mind — no matter what students plan to study, they can come to Wingate University and major in having a great life.”

WESTMORELAND: “Our common bond, of course, is that all our institutions seek to improve the condition of society through education. Where we differ is with the constitutional protection enjoyed by institutions like Samford to delve into matters of faith. You might guess that I would also argue that Samford has an advantage in forging personal relationships with our students, given our relatively small size.”

CARTER: “Yes, we are Christian in the Baptist tradition, but we have many students, including those from our primary service area in the heartland of Kentucky, who are not professing Christians. We are literally seeing the ‘world coming to Campbellsville’ with the largest number of international students among Kentucky’s 20 nonprofit colleges and universities and ranking 18th in the nation among baccalaureate institutions in the number of such students.

“We are committed to all students who attend Campbellsville having the opportunity to hear the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and we find that many of these students do in fact receive Christ as Savior and Lord while here. However, the Gospel is presented in a gracious and loving manner, and our goal is to help all of our students to become Christian servant leaders — to give of themselves in service to others — to be

“I believe there will always be a need for real teachers working directly with real students in real time in a real place.”



Jay Moseley

“Our commitment is to use the technology but not be used by it.”



Dan Lunsford

“We provide more than a college degree to our students, in that we seek to offer opportunities for spiritual, social, emotional and character development.”



Bill Ellis

“While universities are not churches, a meaningful education program understands and includes opportunities for faith development.”



Jerry McGee

“The key for places like Samford is to be nimble, not always the earliest adopter, and spend our money with as much wisdom as possible.”



Andy Westmoreland

engaged in servant evangelism and committed to ministering to the ‘least of these.’”

WHITE: “Chowan is a publicly acknowledged Christian institution. Christian words and symbols appear on the website and publications. However, we are careful to emphasize terms such as openness, inclusiveness and moderation.”

HORNE: “We speak of who we are as a Christian, liberal arts university. We are comfortable with who we are and do not represent ourselves as a fit for everyone.”

HALL: “HSU clearly emphasizes our Christian perspective as part of our mission. We embrace the liberal arts tradition with our Foundational Curriculum combined with the distinctive dimension of a Christian worldview. HSU’s faculty-student ratio is an important part of the way we deliver higher education, thus emphasizing the relational aspect (faculty to student) of learning/mentoring.”

BT: What is technology doing to the way higher education is and will be delivered? Do you expect revolutionary change in the next few decades? Is the concept of students coming to campus and sitting in classes going to change? Is there risk as well as advantages to what technology offers educational institutions?

MOSELEY: “I think it’s too early to know whether new modes of technology have enhanced learning. I believe there will always be a need for real teachers working directly with real students in real time in a real place.”

LUNSFORD: “There is a risk of students becoming isolated through the use of technology. However, as technology advances and the usage increases, all of higher education will have to participate. Our commitment is to use the technology but not be used by it.”

ELLIS: “Technology is a tool. Education is, always has been, and always will be relational. Education is more than the dissemination of information, and for our university, it is more than merely preparing students to obtain a job upon graduation.

“No one imagines elementary school education will become a series of online courses. Of course, college students are not children;

however, the necessity of positive and direct relationships between teachers and students is analogous to the education requirements of young children.

“Those of us who have taught online courses know that it is, in fact, more time-consuming work than face-to-face instruction, in part because the professor must work to build the teacher-student relationship through the limitation of electronic correspondence. I find it interesting that large online universities are now busy buying and building physical campuses.

“This is not to say that online education isn’t here to stay nor that technological advances will not bring dramatic changes to the way universities are structured and interconnected. However, in the same way that TV church is a poor substitute for physically attending worship with fellow believers, I believe the best form of education occurs through the face-to-face interactions between teachers and students. Without intending to demean quality online education, I still believe physically attending a university provides the most successful higher educational experiences.”

MCGEE: “Technology can be a wonderful tool to help deliver educational opportunities. Institutions, such as Wingate University, believe that the great opportunity we have is to use technology appropriately but to value the total university experience which features personal growth opportunities achieved through international travel, campus cultural events, leadership development, small classes and one-on-one relationships with great teachers.

“The graduation rate at many of the name-brand online institutions is between five and 12 percent — which is atrocious — and they often are very expensive, therefore raising serious questions about their value. There is little doubt that technology will continue to provide new opportunities for all institutions of higher education. Using it appropriately is the challenge we face.”

WESTMORELAND: “I think that there is still a bright future for ‘students coming to campus and sitting in classes.’ Our approach to education is built around that concept, and there is a strong market for it.

“Just the same, I believe that the use of technology will continue to alter the ways that we teach and learn. I think that our libraries will continue to change in dramatic ways, and very quickly. For instance, I’m a dinosaur, but I get most of my books on Kindle.

“Are there risks with technology?

Certainly, as with everything else in life. The key for places like Samford is to be nimble, not always the earliest adopter, and spend our money with as much wisdom as possible.”

CARTER: “Technology is having a major impact on higher education — resulting in more online courses and programs, having classrooms adequately wired for technology, use of smart boards in classrooms across the campus, Wi-Fi connectivity across the campus, video streaming of conferences and chapel services, interactive teleconferencing allowing us to connect teaching sites around the state and world, etc.

“Campbellsville University is utilizing these and other technology advancements and enables us to reach students and constituencies literally around the world. One approach that we’re using very successfully is that of ‘blended programs’ in which a portion of a degree program is offered online coupled with a portion offered via the traditional classroom setting.

“There are certainly risks in technology that must be addressed — assuring quality of the student experience, and allowing sufficient time for interaction between the faculty and students. Looking to the future, technology provides numerous alternative approaches to the delivery of higher education — the positives outweigh any negatives. At the same time, there will continue to be need and demand for the tradition of students coming to campus and sitting in the classroom.”

WHITE: “Chowan sees increasing growth in online classes and degree programs. Given the pace of electronic innovation, it would be foolish not to expect revolutionary changes in the next decades. However, we think the concept of students coming to campus and sitting in classes will persist. For a significant number of people, comfort is tied to a face-to-face interaction with a real person.”

HORNE: “While we do not ignore the opportunities technology affords, we believe the place of professors and students learning in a face-to-face classroom situation will be preferable for many. We may in the future be in the minority, but those committed to excellence in this approach will continue to do well.”

HALL: “Technology is enhancing the way we deliver education. It is important that we embrace and harness the best that technology

has to offer to our students. Just as there have already been dramatic changes in past decades, we will, no doubt, see unanticipated improvements in the future.

“Online education will continue to flourish. The number of hybrid courses (combining online and face-to-face instruction) will increase dramatically. I believe there will always be a place for the traditional, residential Christian higher education institution; however, the definition of “traditional” will change as new technology enhances what we have heretofore known in the “traditional” institution.

“Rather than be anxious about the future, I believe we must embrace it. This will require thinking and acting in different ways than we have known in the past.”

BT: How important is innovation in leading an institution of higher learning today?

MOSELEY: “We are trying to strengthen and improve our institution to deliver its mission most effectively. We are not trying to innovate ourselves into a unique kind of institution.”

LUNSFORD: “Innovation is crucial in areas of programs, delivery and marketing. The various publics expect it, and yet we have to maintain a focus on our missions.”

ELLIS: “Innovation is essential to leadership. It is often observed that managers manage the status quo but true leaders create change. While there is a great deal of management work in the day-to-day tasks of a college president, there is also the essential work of the ‘revolutionary’ — the agent of change.

“Certainly, most Baptist colleges have a history of struggling financially, and Howard Payne is no exception. However, in today’s economy the margin for error is shrinking. If a college is standing still, it is losing ground to the competition. One must be willing to take measured risks.

“We must find innovative ways to position ourselves in the marketplace and to distinguish ourselves from our competitors. We must be flexible in meeting our students’ changing needs. In short, university leaders must have creative wisdom.”

MCGEE: “It is absolutely vital! Creative and visionary leadership seems to be driving our most successful institutions of higher education. However, no matter how innovative your

plans might be, you must be able to fund them properly in order for them to be successful.”

WESTMORELAND: “I think that innovation has been important throughout the entirety of my three decades in higher education, but the problem now is that it is even more difficult to tell the difference between a fad and the next really big thing.

“As president of Samford, I need to have around me people who are in tune with the trends, and I need to read widely so that I can also anticipate change. After all, that’s the approach we are trying to stress to our students. We need to model it for them in our own work.”

CARTER: “Innovation is essential to the success of any leader of a large organization. While holding on to basic values that survive the test of time, a successful university president must be able to contend with numerous constituencies and expectations. Innovation is at the heart of Campbellville’s *Vision 2025* strategic blueprint as we work to make Campbellville University one of the premier Christian universities in the nation.

“We must look at innovation at all levels of institutional life — from energy efficiencies and green technologies in the construction and renovation of facilities to the use of state-of-the-art technologies in the classroom to the use of social network media venues to communicate the message of Campbellville to the involvement of students, faculty, and staff in servant evangelism to using innovative means of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. Innovation is absolutely necessary.”

WHITE: “Innovation is important. However, I suggest that flexibility and adaptability may be more important.”

HORNE: “Innovation is a part of leading, but clear communication, a passion for your university and conviction about the role of one’s university are essential.”

HALL: “As we have developed HSU’s strategic plan for the next decade, we have chosen the following vision statement: ‘Hardin-Simmons University will be an innovative community of servant scholars engaging the mind and nurturing the spirit of future Christian leaders.’

“Thus, we have chosen to make innovation a centerpiece of our future work. If we are to be ‘an innovative community,’ we must

“Innovation is important. However, I suggest that flexibility and adaptability may be more important.”



Chris White

“Rather than be anxious about the future, I believe we must embrace it. This will require thinking and acting in different ways than we have known in the past.”



Lanny Hall

“Baptist higher education has a very rich history and tradition, and our commitment is to continue in that vein in the years ahead.”



Michael Carter

“While we do not ignore the opportunities technology affords, we believe the place of professors and students learning in a face-to-face classroom situation will be preferable for many.”



Rex Horne

embrace and accept innovation as a way of life. Those institutions that do not focus on innovation and change may be left behind.

“We have formed a ‘vision team,’ composed of faculty and staff who are not a part of the formal administrative structure. A major charge to this group is to review any and all innovations that are proposed and to bring the best innovative ideas to the table for implementation. This is, indeed, an exciting time to be in higher education!” **BT**

Wondrous privilege

More Baptist women in N.C. serving well in pastoral roles

Women can preach, as more and more churches are learning when they invite a woman to the pulpit for a Sunday during the February “Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching.” A smaller, but growing, number of churches have learned that women are quite capable of far more than a periodic cameo role. They have called them as pastors.

Barbara Bell has been pastor of Goshen Baptist in Leland, N.C., for 13 years. The church is in a rural setting, but members tend to have a higher-than-average educational level, and had a long history of female deacons and women in leadership positions.

They wanted a well-educated pastor, and Bell fit the bill: she had a Master of Divinity degree and was almost finished with a Ph.D. when they called her.

A similarly educated, married male would have been unlikely to respond to a call from a small church that could not offer the salary and benefits of a larger or more urban congregation, Bell said, but as a single female, that wasn’t as much of a factor for her.

When Lystra Baptist Church near

Chapel Hill, N.C., called Virginia Taylor four-and-a-half years ago, it was one more step in recognizing women as leaders. The church elected its first woman deacon in the ’70s, Taylor said. Good experiences with strong women leaders made the congregation more open to considering a woman as pastor.

Andrea Dellinger-Jones, pastor of Raleigh’s Millbrook Baptist Church for the past three years, is that congregation’s first female pastor, but the church has a tradition of being progressive. Millbrook ordained two women deacons in 1922 and actively voted to seat people of all races in 1963.

Dellinger-Jones said the church was seeking a younger pastor. They considered her résumé along with 200 others, and then proceeded without regard to gender.

Susan Pasour is also the first woman pastor at Mount Adar Baptist Church in Mebane, N.C., where she is in her third year. The congregation has strong women leaders, and ordained a woman back in the ’80s, Pasour said.

Bad experiences with two previous pastors — both male — may have made the prospect of a woman pastor sound like a good risk, she said.

Julie Merritt Lee and Susan Joyce both followed women as pastors. Joyce’s predecessors at Antioch Baptist Church in a rural area near Enfield, N.C., included two women pastors and a female interim. Merritt Lee is the

second pastor at Providence Baptist in Hendersonville, N.C., where Gail Coulter was the founding pastor.

Merritt Lee said she was drawn to the church because she didn’t have to first prove that a woman could be a pastor. “I was thrilled to go to a place where we could focus on what matters — the gospel,” she said.

Being a woman pastor brings with it both potential advantages and disadvantages.

Dellinger-Jones said some members might be less inclined to take her word as “law” than they would a male minister. She considers that a good thing, however, because that fits into her preferred model of congregational leadership: “I am happy for Millbrook to be lay-led and clergy-counseled.”

Bell said people treated her differently in her former career as an engineer, and she senses some of the same thing in the church. A few senior adults seemed to find her intimidating at first, and some members are more likely to call her “Miss Barbara” than “Reverend Bell,” she said, but “on the whole, I get plenty of respect from those persons who have been around long enough really to examine me as a pastor.”

Bringing a medical background to the pastorate may have more to do with the response she gets from some members than her gender, Pasour said. “Both men and women seem to be very open about physical problems,” she said, including concerns



Barbara Bell



Virginia Taylor



Susan Joyce



Andrea Dellinger-Jones



Susan Pasour



Julie Merritt Lee

about bodily functions.

“I definitely think my relationship with women in my church is different than it would be if I were a man,” Taylor said. “I wouldn’t call it crossing boundaries, but we definitely talk about personal things related to women that I don’t believe they would feel comfortable talking about with a man.” But, she said, “I imagine that there are some things that the men don’t talk with me about because I’m a woman. That’s why we need both men and women in the ministry!”

Clothing appears to be more of an issue for women than for men. Bell noted that some parishioners are more likely to comment on her blouse than on the sermon as they exit the sanctuary.

Merritt Lee recalled that in a previous church, she tended to get a lot of comments about her dress or jewelry. Following the tradition of wearing a robe at Providence has been a welcome change, she said.

“Guys can throw on a pair of khakis and a nice shirt or a dark suit and a tie and be fine in any setting,” said Dellinger-Jones, but “there are higher expectations for what women ministers wear.”

Being in a church where ministers wear robes resolved that issue for her, she said.

Ministerial robes are not the tradition at Mount Adar, but Pasour said she deals with the clothing issue by going simple, wearing a low-key jacket and slacks.

“I do not want people to wonder how much money I spent on an outfit,” she said, “or if it matches my shoes.”

The most rewarding aspects of pastoral ministry are two-fold for Bell. The first, she said, “is when I come to understand how a person’s own story is impacted by God’s story. I find people endlessly fascinating, and I love

to hear the narrative of someone’s life. When I am able to join in — to become a character in that person’s narrative — and to assist him or her in seeing how God is involved in building him or her as a human being, that is powerfully fulfilling.”

Studying the Bible and teaching or preaching from it, talking about it, and seeking to convey its meaning to others “is a wondrous privilege,” she said.

Taylor finds preaching to be rewarding, too. “It’s hard work and humbling work, but I enjoy the privilege of being used by God to speak to God’s people every week,” she said.

But building relationships comes first, she said. “I love the people in my congregation. It is a real privilege pastors have to be so intimately involved in people’s lives. I don’t take that for granted, and really treasure that trust.”

Seeing people grow in faith as a result of pastoral planning and work is also rewarding, she said.

As an associate pastor in a previous church, Dellinger-Jones fell in love with the “high holy moments like baptisms, communion, ordinations, dedications, funerals and weddings.” After three years of regular preaching at Millbrook, though, she has grown to love that challenge.

“I love the time spent in studying scripture and looking for a new angle,” she said. Finding something new is like discovering a diamond, “and I really like diamonds ... I love sharing the good news.”

But relationships are also important. As an extrovert, Dellinger-Jones said, “pastoral visits in the hospital, home or coffee house are life-giving for me.” Helping people find their place of service and fulfillment in the community is also rewarding, she said.

Pasour also likes helping people find their place to grow and serve. “It is just awesome when the shy lady becomes a Sunday school teacher or the man who is lost in parenting becomes a caring, effective deacon. It is thrilling to see a woman who has been in a devastating car wreck find her ‘new reason for living’ as church treasurer, when a lady I would never expect to be open to it becomes a deacon, and a recent widower finds his place as usher.”

“Being involved in the fullness of the lives of my congregation gives me great joy,” Joyce said. “Because Antioch has a small number of members, I am able to get to know extended family and friends and enjoy a familiarity and camaraderie that I might not find elsewhere. In that vein, pastoral care and flock-tending and living out the gospel in deed is what keeps me going on those days when I ask, ‘Why me, Lord?’”

Merritt Lee likens her role as pastor to that of a midwife. “I’m not the key player — the one giving birth — but it excites me to have a part in helping and guiding the church through gestation and labor, where the Holy Spirit continues to move, bump up next to us, turn things over occasionally until we are birthed anew into the likeness of Christ.”

“In practical terms,” Merritt Lee said, “this means having the privilege to ask and hear people say where they encountered God in their week. And in doing so, all of us listening are transformed. This is powerful and holy. I can’t believe I get to be a part of this.”

Joyce said she hopes more churches will get beyond the issue of gender and be open to women pastors. “... They have told us it was OK to knock on their doors, that God has gifted and called women. Now it is time to open the door all the way and let us in.” **BT**

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- Gail Linam (Dallas Baptist U)
- John Ragosta (U of Virginia)
- Stephen Stookey (Dallas Baptist U)
- Mark Tew (Howard Payne U)

Registration Fees:

- Fellowship of Baptist Historians Meeting **\$20**
- Individual Society Member **\$75**
- Member and Spouse **\$110**
- Individual Non-member **\$85**
- Non-member and Spouse **\$130**
- Student (School ID required) **\$50**
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Mail registration form and check to: Baptist History and Heritage Society, 151 Broadleaf Dr., Macon, GA 31210
 Online/credit card registration, program and lodging information: <http://www.baptisthistory.org>

LifeWay backs off warning label for *The Shack*, other books

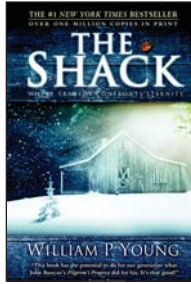
Southern Baptist bookstores have quietly suspended a four-year-old program that warned customers to read with “discernment” books by several up-and-coming authors whose books “could be considered inconsistent with historical evangelical theology.”

Chris Rodgers, director of product standards and customer relations for Nashville-based LifeWay, said the warnings were discontinued because they were “irrelevant to our customers.” Rodgers said. “No one asked about the authors.”

The program flagged the writings of several emergent authors with labels that provided the address to a website to learn more about the work or author; the website has since been disabled.

The program recently came under attack in a blog post from Christian

musician Shaun Groves, who was upset that LifeWay was willing to warn customers about a book but still continued to sell it. The label read: “Read With Discernment. This book may contain thoughts, ideas, or concepts that could be considered inconsistent with historical evangelical theology. Therefore we encourage you to read it with extra discernment.”



LifeWay, the official publisher and bookstore of the Southern Baptist Convention, downplayed the program and the decision to end it, saying the labels were an attempt to provide customers with more information. “The program has been called controversial, (but) the only real controversy was the Groves blog,” said Rodgers.

Some authors of the marked books, including popular authors Rob Bell, Donald Miller, Brian McLaren and William Young, were happy with the decision to terminate

the program. McLaren, a sometimes controversial emergent author whose books were flagged, said a decision to censor writings by another Christian went against the Baptist tradition of personal conscience.

“I think it is concerning when, especially a Baptist bookstore acts as if a central organization can make decisions on which books are accepted and rejected,” McLaren said. “Yes, I am very pleased (to see it ended).”

Young, who wrote the *New York Times* best-seller *The Shack*, said he wasn’t bothered by the program, but still thought that LifeWay made “a good move” in ending it.

When Young heard his book had been labeled, he shared a laugh with his family and friends. He feels, however, that LifeWay had good motives and understands the difficulty of their situation.

“Lifeway has a tough job, they have to figure out how to be a part of a world in which ideas are larger than their community, but still maintain their allegiance to their denomination,” Young said. **BT**

Living Leviticus: Isn’t just reading it hard enough?

By Cathleen Falsani
Religion News Service

When viewed through the lens of modernity, Leviticus — the third book of the Hebrew Scriptures that contains the laws, large and small, that God gave the Israelites — seems to be an arcane, strange and wholly irrelevant book.

Take, for example, what it has to say about acne: “Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’”

Why would God care about the condition of our skin? Or what kind of meat we eat? Or whether we wear a cotton-polyester blend T-shirt? Or ask us to sacrifice pigeons to atone for our sins? Or need to remind us not to have sex with our stepmothers, nephews or pets?

It’s no wonder, then, that many pastors, preoccupied with attracting — not repelling

— people choose to ignore Leviticus altogether. But Daniel Harrell, while a minister at Boston’s evangelical Park Street Church, launched a preaching series on Leviticus. More than a few folks thought he was crazy.

“Leviticus is that graveyard where read-through-the-Bible-in-a-year plans go to die,” Harrell says. “They looked at me as if I were attempting sermon suicide... Who’d get up on a Sunday to hear a homily on mildew?”

Also Harrell convinced 19 of his congregants to join him for a month-long experiment in trying to obey the laws put forth in Leviticus. Some rules had to be observed in spirit since most municipalities, including Boston, frown on animal sacrifice.

Harrell chronicled the adventures of his would-be Levites in the book, *How to Be Perfect: One Church’s Audacious Experiment in Living the Old Testament Book of Leviticus*. While the book is peppered with laugh-out-loud anecdotes, Harrell’s aim was quite serious.

Many Christians simply dismiss

Leviticus and its odd edicts as the “old law” — one that Jesus fulfilled, replaced with grace and is no longer applicable to believers. But if Christians really believe that God gave all of the Bible to humankind to show us how to live, then what does Leviticus mean to faithful living?

Harrell decided the best way to answer lingering questions about the laws of Leviticus was to attempt to follow them in real life. Keeping kosher, not cutting their beards, keeping their bodies and their homes as meticulously clean as possible, and strict adherence to Sabbath-keeping was as difficult as he and his flock had anticipated. But also more rewarding than they imagined.

Rather than affirm the idea that you can either embrace grace or the law, Harrell found that a faithful life involves both. “No one can be perfect by following Leviticus’ laws ... and realizing that leads, necessarily, to the understanding that no one can be perfect apart from God’s grace.” **BT**

Coming in June!

An expanded, newly designed *Baptists Today*

When the June issue of *Baptists Today* lands in your hand, you will see and feel **SOMETHING DIFFERENT**. But don't be alarmed: you are simply getting **MORE THAN BEFORE**. The expanded, newly designed news journal will have all the features of the current publication along with new Bible studies and other resources for churches — and a fresh look. Expect it to be noticeably different, yet recognizably *Baptists Today*!

WHAT'S THE SAME?

The mission of *Baptists Today* remains unchanged: to provide churches with a reliable source of unrestricted news, analysis and features about relevant issues.

As always, the news journal enjoys **unthreatened autonomy** and editorial freedom that is boldly protected by an independent Board of Directors.

The focus of *Baptists Today* is broad, not limited by state or convention lines. Attention is given to the larger Baptist family.

The qualities that have made *Baptists Today* unique for 28 years will remain unchanged.

So what's new?

Thanks to helpful feedback from readers, a long creative process and the generous support of friends, the June issue will have a fresh look and feel.

Most noticeably, the publication will have an **updated design** with full color and more pages of content.

An expanded new center section titled **"Nurturing Faith"** will feature Bible studies written by Dr. Tony Cartledge — as well as other church resources. Extensive teaching materials will be provided online, including lesson plans by Rick Jordan of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.

Studying the Bible with Dr. Tony W. Cartledge



Starting in the June issue (with lessons that begin in July), *Baptists Today* will provide weekly Bible study lessons written exclusively by contributing editor Tony Cartledge and sponsored by CBF Congregational Life.

Dr. Cartledge, who also teaches at Campbell University Divinity School, has a scholar's mind, a pastor's heart and a writer's pen. His ability to provide solid biblical scholarship with practical applications of faith has long been appreciated.

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