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400 years**

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A special edition in celebration of the 400th anniversary of Baptist beginnings

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Street Question 8

“Why do so many African Americans attend Baptist churches?”
By Sandy D. Martin



Photo by Tony W. Cartledge. Baptist representatives gathered in the Netherlands to mark four centuries of a movement that began in Amsterdam in 1609. **Page 4**

Media Shelf

Dwight Moody reviews the official history of Southern Seminary.

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Baptists celebrate 400 years

AMSTERDAM — As Baptist World Alliance representatives gathered July 30 to celebrate 400 years of Baptist life, former secretary general Denton Lotz told them that Baptists must continue the struggle for religious freedom or else become irrelevant.

Meeting in the rugged, three-tiered sanctuary of a Mennonite church that dates back to 1608 — a year before the first Baptist



Denton Lotz

church was founded a few blocks away — more than 350 Baptists recalled their heritage through reading scriptures, singing hymns and joining in a litany of naming and appreciating Baptist pioneers.

In an impassioned sermon, however, Lotz warned that Baptists cannot rest on the laurels of those who defended and suffered for religious liberty through the years.

He reminded participants that the first Baptists emerged, under the leadership of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, from a group of English Separatists who came to Amsterdam because they were fleeing religious persecution. Through the years, zeal for religious liberty became a hallmark Baptist legacy.

“Freedom in Christ has been the theme of Baptists for 400 years,” Lotz said, noting that the small group of 40 believers who were baptized in Amsterdam has now grown to become the world’s largest confessing church.

Religious liberty also has come a long way, Lotz said: “most civilized and democratic governments recognize religious freedom as an inherent right,” and a 1948 United Nations declaration on human rights affirms religious freedom and the right to conversion.

But that does not mean the struggle for religious liberty is over, Lotz said. Even in countries that allow freedom of religion, “the real enemy of religious freedom is the religion of secularism” that is willing to accept private religious practice, but limit the public expression of faith.

Lotz charged the media in particular as having a secular mentality that excludes



CONFESSING COUSINS: Participants in a 400th anniversary celebration of Baptist beginnings gather in the three-tiered sanctuary of the Singelkerk, a Dutch Mennonite congregation dating to 1608. Early Baptists had much in common with Mennonites, and may have worshiped in the building. The current building dates to 1639 and was built as a “hidden church,” constructed between two rows of houses and entered through a small passage next door to a brewery.

religious expression and denies religion a fair hearing. Baptists must challenge “the new dark age” in which “the hatred of religion and Christianity” threatens to marginalize faith in society, he said.

Baptists must also avoid being lulled to sleep and allowing the mission of Christ to devolve into the maintenance of an institution, Lotz insisted. “Where are Baptists going?” he asked. “On mission, or just

maintaining?”

Lotz called for Baptists to be committed to evangelism, united in heart and spirit, and to go forth “proclaiming the liberty that comes from Christ.”

Following the service, participants toured several historical sites, including the address on Bakkersstraat (Baker’s Street) where the bakery in which the first Baptist church was organized once stood. **BT**

North American Baptist Fellowship welcomes Bullard, highlights ministries

EDE, THE NETHERLANDS — George Bullard, a frequent consultant to denominational entities and strategic coordinator for the Columbia Partnership, became General Secretary of the North American Baptist Fellowship (NABF) on August 1.

The position has been vacant since January, when Alan Stanford, who had held the position for eight years, announced his resignation. The NABF executive committee tapped Bullard for the position during a meeting in June, but delayed making a public announcement until the BWA's annual gathering in July in Ede.

The NABF is one of six global regions affiliated with the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). Each region's general secretary also serves as a "regional secretary" within the BWA, representing his or her area as a non-voting member of the General Council.

NABF president David Goatley, executive secretary-treasurer of the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Missionary Convention, affirmed Bullard's election. "He brings years of experience, insight and the capacity to help us to function more effectively in the 21st century," Goatley said.

Bullard told *Baptists Today* that the role "aligns with my passion for the Baptist World Alliance, my passion for the vitality of denominational organizations, and my desire to help Baptist organizations reach their full kingdom potential."

When presented to the NABF fellowship meeting July 29, Bullard noted that previous NABF general secretaries have also been on staff with BWA, and had access to BWA's office staff and resources for assistance. The NABF now needs "to become more autonomous and stand on its own feet," Bullard said. That includes a need to increase the organization's budget more than twofold, to about \$40,000 per year, he said.

NABF should focus on ministries that are "expressing surrender and significance in the Kingdom of God," Bullard said. "We want to be catalytic in lifting up Baptist organizations in North America, not just to build an organization that we have to feed."

NABF president David Goatley (left) chats with George Bullard, who assumes a new role with the BWA regional group.



During the same meeting, participants learned about a theological colloquium involving NABF and Italian Baptists, and heard reports from four ministers affiliated with NABF member bodies.

In October, 27 NABF scholars and an equal number from Italy will gather for the Rome Theological Colloquium. NABF members will scatter to various towns and Baptist churches for weekend visits, and then congregate in Rome for five days of half-day seminars and visits to archaeological sites. This year's colloquium will focus on "Mission in a Secularized Society," and participants will visit sites related to the Apostle Paul.

Participants heard from four representative ministries. Yutaka Takarada, president of an organization of Japanese Baptist churches in America, talked about his work as a pastor in north Dallas, and the difficulties of reaching Japanese people with the gospel.

Naomi Tyler Lloyd, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in the Bronx, spoke of the challenges she faces in leading a multi-generational church to accept change in order to reach people.

Jeremy Bell, executive minister of the Baptist Union of Western Canada, said 67 percent of Canadians claim to believe in Christ, but just three percent are Baptist.

There are many obstacles in reaching Canada's multi-ethnic, multi-cultural population, but people in Canada are beginning to "feel the cry of new life," he said.

Anthony Jones, pastor of United Cornerstone Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., noted that his city has 750 churches to serve a population of 225,000, and bemoaned ministries that are "more competitive than compassionate." A crack house on the corner "takes in more money in a week than we do in a month," Jones said, but the church perseveres.

Rick Lazor of Hawaii, who chairs the local arrangements committee for the BWA World Congress to be held in Honolulu next July 28-Aug. 1, appealed for stateside Americans to help promote and facilitate the meeting. Volunteers are needed to assist with children's and youth ministries, counseling, data entry, hospitality, worship and music, choirs, merchandising, ushering, transportation and other areas.

Organizers are working to book hotel rooms and dormitory space at affordable prices, Lazor said, noting that more information and volunteer application forms are available at www.BWAcongress2010.org.

The NABF consists of more than 30 conventions and denominational organizations representing about 18 million Baptists in the United States and Canada. **BT**

Quotation “remarks”

“I’m not a betting Baptist, but if I were, I would put money on the table that 50 years from now, Southern Baptists will look at women and the role of women the way we now look at slavery.”

—Southern Baptist pastor Wade Burleson of Enid, Okla., in a National Public Radio report on the SBC’s emphasis on male authority in church and home

“One goal is always musical excellence, but we are kidding ourselves if we think that we can impress God with a certain style of music or how wonderful we sound.”

—Ryan Forbes, pastor of music and worship at First Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga. (Baptist Heritage)

“I don’t think the kids have changed that much, but the toys they play with certainly have.”

—Richard King, 60, who has spent nearly 40 years in youth ministry with the last 25 at Mountain Park First Baptist Church east of Atlanta (The Christian Index)

“Certainly, our freedoms allow anyone to purchase a billboard and put almost any statement on it. But putting intentional mischaracterizations, half-truths, and outright fabrications on display is patently irresponsible, undermining the very faith the billboard backers claim.”

—Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty executive director Brent Walker, responding to billboards in Florida calling for “Christian governance” (Tampa Tribune)

“I am now 90 years of age, and my health and strength will not allow me to travel. Yet, I am with you in spirit and encouragement as you meet.”

—Billy Graham, in a July 24 letter to Baptist World Alliance leaders gathered in the Netherlands to mark the 400th anniversary of the Baptist movement (BWA)

“We want to make sure every person in Texas has an opportunity to respond to the gospel of Christ, regardless of their ethnicity, language or socioeconomic status.”

—Executive Director Randel Everett on the Baptist General Convention of Texas effort to spread the gospel statewide, beginning with the distribution of 250,000 CDs with scripture passages and Christian testimonies in El Paso (ABP)



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editorial

Faith, fear mongering and the American future

John Pierce

Nothing shuts down Christian compassion like fear — especially when constructed by the hysteria of evangelical voices naming every cultural shift or partisan political move with which they disagree as a threat to their faith.

In his July 30 editorial in the Georgia Baptist Convention newspaper, *The Christian Index*, editor Gerald Harris compares current U.S. political activities (with which he disagrees) with the ancient and public Roman slaughter of Christians.

His is the predictable rant against homosexual rights and religious diversity. He warns that hate-crime legislation could “leave Christian ministers open to prosecution.” He suggests that Nero’s gruesome destruction of Christians “is not vastly different from what is happening in our culture today.”

Also, he is disturbed that President Obama did not invite Shirley Dobson and other Religious Right leaders to hold a sectarian worship service at the White House on the National Day of Prayer this year — and that the president has publicly acknowledged the nation’s commitment to religious liberty rather than describe the U.S. as a “Christian nation” in some formal way.

“Each time the president minimizes or dismisses Christianity as a tertiary matter we simply adjust our seats in the Circus

Maximus and idly observe the events with mild outrage or bored disinterest, but doing little to affect any change,” Harris proclaimed.

Harris paints an emotional, frightful picture of an all-out subversive attack on Christianity that needs our strongest push-back. Evangelicals must rally soon, he said, “because many of our Christian structures and principles are being dismantled before our very eyes.”

But to borrow a good line from Jed Clampett: “I just can’t swaller that story.”

It is hysteria based on false expectations and errant conclusions. And it puts evangelical Christians on the defensive — bringing out the very worst, rather than the best, in Christian behavior.

Constitutional guarantees assure Americans of religious liberty. The greatest threat to our Baptist-influenced American treasure of religious freedom is not legislation designed to protect vulnerable citizens, but fearful Christian leaders seeking government endorsement of their particular brand of faith.

To compare partisan politics with which one disagrees to religious persecution

is an insult to those in past times and in current situations around the world who actually suffer deeply for their faith convictions. Making such a comparison is dishonest, misleading and shameful.

And the President of the United States is not our national chaplain. His job description calls for multiple functions — none of which includes advocating for a particular religious expression.

With a 400-year history filled with persecution, how can so many Baptist leaders today be so uncomfortable with religious liberty for each and every person?

Ultimately, these emotional rants and calls to arms are rooted in a fear of change. They are a tragic attempt to hang on to a time and place — like 1950s and ’60s Americana — that felt comfortable and secure to some, but exist no more.

Tragically, that sense of loss creates a widespread fear of a changing sociological landscape filled with new opportunities for churches willing to live in the present tense. But, through the lens of fear, immigrants and persons of different cultures and faith traditions are seen only as threats or targets in need of assimilation into “our way” of life.

To assume a bunker mentality when no one is actually firing at you is a sad and weak position. And if the predominance of Christianity is at risk in our nation, do we really want our elected leaders to carry our banner?

The obligation to advance the faith rests with Christians and congregations. We have been spoiled by the unprecedented freedom of religious expression enjoyed here.

Unlike us, many Christians of the world know that Christianity rarely functions well from a position of power. And they understand well that vibrant, authentic faith depends on something much more personal, significant and risky than government legislation and ceremonies.

Tone down the alarm a bit. Playing the victim is a poor choice of games for American evangelicals. **BT**



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'STREET QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISTS'

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

'Why do so many African Americans attend Baptist churches?'

This is a good question since statistics tell us a majority of religious African Americans are members of black Baptist denominations. That has certainly been the case historically.

Even with the popularity of so-called non-denominational churches, I suspect that today most black worshippers still attend Baptist churches. Visually and by anecdote, one observing the number of churches in communities with large African-American presence and conversations with religious blacks or those of religious background certainly affirm a strong perception of the popularity of the Baptist tradition among African Americans.

The major black Baptist conventions are National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.; the National Baptist Convention of America; the Progressive National Baptist Convention; and the National Baptist Missionary Convention.

Additionally, there are smaller or lesser-known Baptist groups, such as Free Will and Primitive Baptists. Of course we must hasten to point out that blacks can be found in practically all religious groupings.

Significant numbers are present in majority black and majority non-black organizations, such as the Methodists, Presbyterians, Holiness, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ, United Church of Christ, and smaller percentages in groups such as Mennonites, Mormons, and in non-Christian groups of Muslims, Jews and Buddhists, among others.

We can separate the appeal of Baptist churches for African Americans into two broad categories. First, Baptist churches have attracted great numbers of blacks because of history and custom. Second, there are enduring principles and practices of Baptists that continue to attract blacks.

Regarding history and custom, I mean the frank observation that blacks, like other

people, are attracted to various religious traditions because of the affiliations of parents, ancestors, friends and others who have been influential in their religious lives.

Many blacks, like many whites, are Baptists because a great number of people who came before them were Baptists. In other words, it has become a tradition, by history and custom, for many people, including African Americans, to affiliate with Baptists.

But of course this begs another question: What is it about the Baptist tradition that has fashioned this history and custom among so many blacks to become Baptists?

First, the evangelical message, style and practices of Baptists proved attractive for many African Americans, like others. We must be aware that the Baptist tradition among blacks is an old one, going back to the 17th century and really taking off in the 18th century.

It is important to recall that during these centuries most African Americans lived enslaved in what we know today as the American South, a region where slavery was most pervasive and lasted longest. Hence, the overwhelming vast majority of African Americans embraced Christianity in a climate

of racial prejudice and lifelong chattel slavery, with the two inseparably connected.

It should not be surprising that the types of religion that would most easily appeal to an oppressed, racially suppressed people of African descent would be ones that had affinities with the people's African backgrounds and ones that gave them meaning, hope, identity and integrity in an environment of slavery that essentially sought to work against these goals in the lives of the enslaved.

The revivals and evangelicalism brought to all people, including enslaved Africans, a direct, close experience with the Divine (much as Africans had been accustomed) and preaching by aggressive clergy and bold witnessing by other Christians of a dynamic message that God looks beyond all externals, even race and slavery, to love and accept everyone.

Particularly important for blacks, there were even white evangelical preachers and lay leaders who condemned slavery and called for the emancipation of the enslaved.

Perhaps also of some importance, Baptist evangelicals practiced water baptism by immersion, which may have served as a means to an easier transition of some Africans from their traditional religions (where the presence of deities and spirits in waters was an important part of their religions) to Christianity.

Like others, many blacks were drawn to the Baptists because of certain basic principles and practices of those churches. Congregational autonomy and governance was a treasured aspect of the Baptist experience.

Black Baptists also valued the freedom of a local assembly to decide for themselves who



Sandy Dwayne Martin teaches history of Christianity and American and African-American religious history at the University of Georgia.

would be their leaders and which laws would govern their internal affairs without any outside body having the right to nullify those decisions. This autonomy would be felt more keenly after the coming of freedom, but even during slavery when black churches often had white pastors or “overseers,” the people still had a certain amount of freedom in the local congregation.

The exercise of this freedom was significant in a climate of slavery and societal racism where blacks were often denied many other freedoms. The ease with which Baptists could form congregations compared with their counterparts in more episcopal types of denominations certainly contributed to the proliferation of congregations.

For blacks this would manifest itself more profoundly with the coming of the Civil War and its aftermath. Yet it should be noted that the earliest independent (or at least relatively autonomous) black Christian congregations, such as Silver Bluff Baptist Church, First African Baptist Church, and First Bryan Baptist Church, were established

in the South in the latter half of the 18th century and had among their membership enslaved persons.

Of course we must not overlook the evangelical and Baptist belief that God calls people into the ministry and that such callings should not be compromised by a burdensome insistence on educational qualifications and other such requirements.

Understandably, enslaved people prior to the Civil War and poor people afterwards would find it easier than in some other denominations to become clergy and other leaders and in doing so to promote the growth of Baptist churches.

Black Baptists in the South before the Civil War affiliated with white-controlled associations and national denominations — and in terms of national denominations so did most black Methodists even in the North. With the coming of the Civil War and freedom, black Christians, including Baptists, proceeded to form their own independent groups — local, state, regional and national.

Indeed, some Methodists apparently became Baptists, but probably the reverse is true as well. Between 1861 and 1895, black Baptists guarded congregational autonomy so closely that it was with considerable difficulty that they finally in 1895 formed the first permanent, large national black Baptist organization.

These have been some of the historical and customary reasons why so many blacks have affiliated with Baptist churches: their evangelical character, the message of freedom and hope, congregational autonomy and freedom, and the comparable ease in securing clerical and other types of leadership. While not meant to be exhaustive, this list does provide some important reasons why many blacks became and remained Baptists.

I believe that those same principles and practices continue to be influential in maintaining Baptist identity among many African Americans today. Whether this strong affiliation will continue and what roles these historical reasons will play require more extended discussion. **BT**



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BWA moves forward despite challenges

By Robert Dilday
Religious Herald

EDE, Netherlands (ABP) — Despite a challenging financial outlook, Baptist World Alliance leaders have moved ahead with the election of a new division director, welcomed two additional member bodies, and called for new initiatives in both intra-Baptist relations and Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Holding its annual meeting July 27-Aug. 1 in Ede, Netherlands, the BWA General Council also observed the 400th anniversary of the Baptist movement, which began in 1609 in nearby Amsterdam.

The council — governing body of the 37 million-member worldwide umbrella group for Baptists — also streamlined its operating procedures, nominated a new president for a five-year term beginning in 2010 and unveiled plans for its 20th Baptist World Congress, to be held next year in Hawaii.

About 360 council members, representing more than 50 countries, adopted a budget for 2010 of \$2,348,365 — the same amount as a revised 2009 budget, which had been reduced by about 25 percent earlier this year.

“This has been a very difficult year for the BWA,” said Ellen Teague, director of finance and administration, in introducing the budget July 31. The worldwide economic recession has had a highly negative impact on BWA’s investments — which have lost about \$1.5 million of their value, she said.

The situation could have been even worse, she noted, but contributions to the organization were only slightly lower last year than the previous one.

“It’s remarkable to me that our donors have continued to support us even in times of personal difficulty,” Teague added.

“We felt it was unrealistic to expect increased revenue in 2010,” she said. “We took the reduced 2009 budget and used the same figures for 2010. This represents a

zero increase in our budget for next year.”

BWA president David Coffey, whose term expires at the 2010 World Congress, encouraged members of member bodies’ more than 159,000 congregations to collect a “thank offering” to be presented when the BWA World Congress meets July 28-Aug. 1 in Honolulu.

In addition to providing much-needed financial assistance, the offering “will enable thousands of Baptists who are not

“All monies will be placed in a reserve fund to preserve the core mission of the Baptist World Alliance in times of economic instability and to provide seed money for new initiatives.”

In his report to the council, Callam also called for increased dialogue among Baptists and between Christians and Muslims.

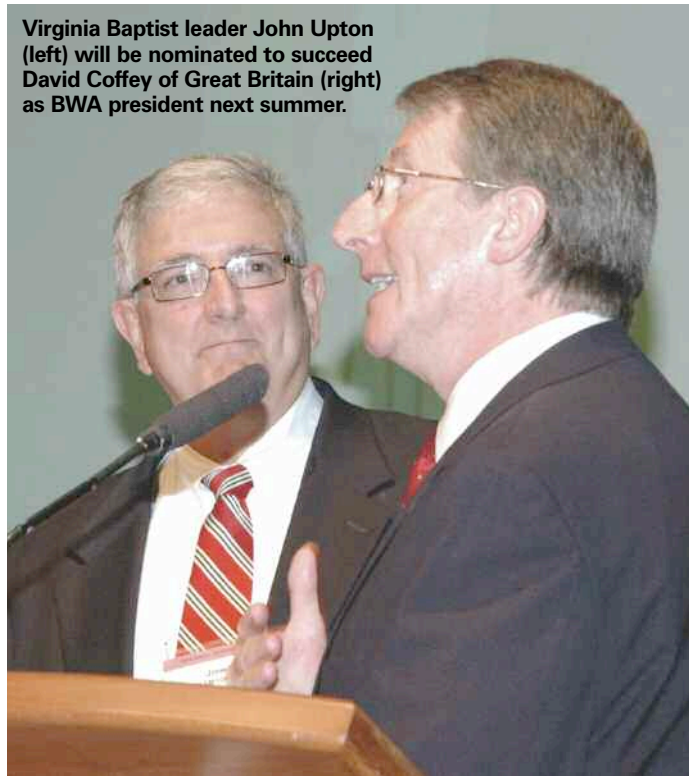
A “Christian multicultural hermeneutic” is necessary for Baptists around the world to “understand the various cultures of participants in the BWA,” Callam asserted. “This speaks to how we understand each other and how we communicate with each other.”

Callam noted BWA’s continuing engagement with “A Common Word Between Us and You,” a letter addressed to Christian leaders in 2007 by more than 130 Muslim scholars and religious and secular leaders. BWA representatives responded earlier this year with a document of their own.

“We have encouraged Baptist bodies to open conversations with Muslims in their neighborhood,” said Callam. “We wonder if there is a need to establish a mechanism at the global level to give expression to local dialogues.”

Callam said he hoped both initiatives would be considered by the

Virginia Baptist leader John Upton (left) will be nominated to succeed David Coffey of Great Britain (right) as BWA president next summer.



in Hawaii to feel a part of the celebration,” said Coffey.

Despite the grim financial forecast, BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said he has “found unquestioned reasons to be encouraged.”

“We cannot find adequate words to give expression to our thankfulness,” he said. “Baptists of the world do have financial weaknesses, but God has truly blessed us.”

To ensure the BWA’s financial future, Callam announced a six-year fundraising effort — the BWA 400 Legacy Fund. The fund, whose inauguration marks Baptists’ 400th anniversary, will solicit contributions from individuals and organizations “in multiples of four, 40, 400 or 4,000 units in the currency of their own nation,” he said.

General Council’s executive committee, which then could make recommendations for the council’s approval.

Raimundo Cesar Barreto Jr., a 42-year-old Brazilian pastor, was elected the first director of the BWA’s division of freedom and justice, which was created in 2008 to promote respect for human rights and religious liberty.

Two new unions admitted by the General Council bring BWA’s total number of member bodies to 216. The Argentine Baptist Association and the Uganda Baptist Convention were accepted by unanimous vote. The Argentine association was formed in 2005 and includes 40 churches with about 5,000 members. The Uganda convention, organized in 2000, has more than 21,000 members in 366 churches.

Both organizations were formed following disagreements with older Baptist bodies in their respective countries, but Alistair Brown of Chicago, chair of the membership committee that recommended the two, said the conflicts have been resolved and that both older conventions recommended acceptance.

Constitutional and bylaw amendments adopted by the General Council will give broader responsibilities to its executive committee and make it “more deliberative.” The changes reduced the committee’s membership from more than 60 to 25 and dropped the number of vice presidents from 19 to 12 — two nominated from each of the BWA’s six regions.

For the first time, one of the vice presidents will be designated first vice president. Except for the first vice president, none of the vice presidents will sit on the executive committee.

Program committees will no longer have governance functions, but will serve as advisory panels to BWA directors. In addition, a new nominations committee will replace the officers search committee and will propose names for the president and vice presidents and members of committees

and commissions — the BWA’s primary forum for considering theological, historical and ethical issues.

John Upton, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, was nominated by the council to be president of the BWA. If elected at the World Congress in Hawaii, Upton will serve a five-year term to end in 2015.

Upton, who also chairs the Baptist World Congress program committee, announced a slate of speakers for the 2010 event, whose theme will be “Hear the Spirit.”

In addition to outgoing BWA president David Coffey, speakers will include Karl Johnson, general secretary of the Jamaica Baptist Union; Paul Msiza, president of the All Africa Baptist Fellowship and general secretary of the Baptist Convention of South Africa; Alongla Aier, a founder and professor at the Oriental Theological Seminary in the Indian state of Nagaland; and Lance Watson, senior pastor of St. Paul’s Baptist Church in Richmond, Va.

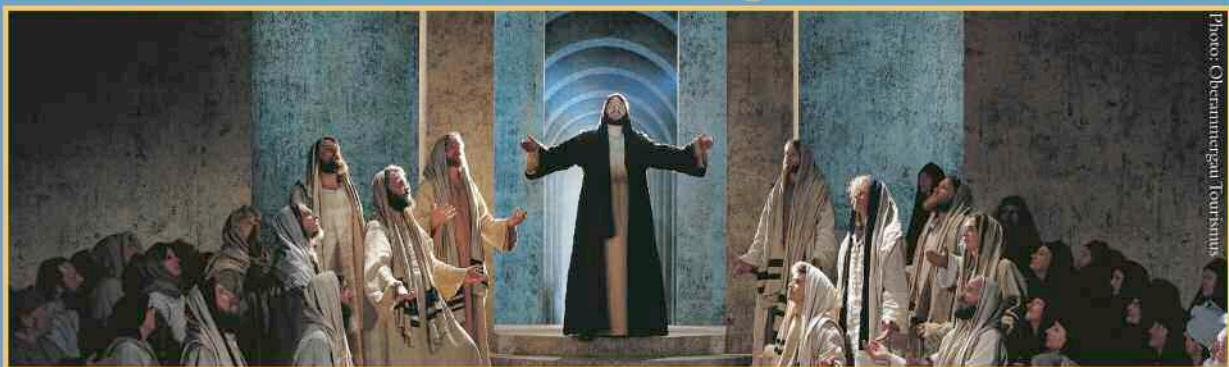
Upton said he anticipates as many as 10,000 participants from more than 100 countries to attend the congress. **BT**

Baptist beginnings



Visitors gather along Bakkerstraat (Baker Street) in Amsterdam where historians trace the Baptist movement to a congregation established by English dissenters in 1609, led by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys. Photo by Tony W. Cartledge.

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Baptists challenged to overcome racial barriers

By Marv Knox
Baptist Standard

NORMAN, Okla. (ABP) — A documentary and panel discussion on racism highlighted the opening of the Midwest regional meeting of the New Baptist Covenant Aug. 6-7 in Norman, Okla., that brought together African-Americans, Anglos, Hispanic-Americans and Native Americans from across the Midwest and Southwest.

“Racism is the bone stuck in Baptists’ throat,” said Robert Parham of the Baptist Center for Ethics, who produced the documentary *Beneath the Skin: Baptists and Racism*.

“The Stone Age did not end because we ran out of stones, but ... because we found a better way,” Parham said. “The age of racism will not end among Baptists because we ran out of racists, but because we found a better way.”

After viewing the documentary, New Baptist Covenant participants heard a multi-racial panel discussion regarding the implications of racism.

“We’re not a post-racial America; we’re still very much in the struggle,” noted Javier Elizondo, executive vice president and provost of Baptist University of the Americas in San Antonio, Texas. He said people must approach racism in humility, acknowledging their own limitations.

Fitz Hill, president of the predominantly African-American Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock, Ark., called for truth as an antidote to the false impressions that fuel racism.

Hill cited criticism he received when he was one of the few black head coaches of NCAA Division I college football teams. A booster told him his poor record indicated he had “too many black assistant coaches.” He countered that his record was better than his two white predecessors and asked if the booster ever complained that those coaches had “too many white assistant coaches.”

Tim Eaton, president of Hillsdale Freewill Baptist College in Moore, Okla.,

noted that Freewill Baptists opposed slavery as early as colonial America and refused membership to slave owners. Also, Freewill Baptist colleges were among the first U.S. schools to admit people of all races.

“I’m proud of our history, but history means very little to those who are around you,” Eaton said, noting that Hillsdale students are required to participate in multi-ethnic community-service projects in order to interact with people who are “very different” from themselves.

Laura Cadena, director of communications for Mercy Street, a multi-racial ministry in Dallas, said her younger generation often claims that racism does not exist. However, she told of encountering racism when she moved to the Southeast for a couple of years where “anti-immigration has become anti-Hispanic.”

Personal encounters provide the antidote to racial stereotyping, claimed Kim Henry, wife of Oklahoma Gov. Brad Henry. Her encounter happened during a mission trip to Ghana, where malnutrition and malaria claim the lives of 50 percent of children before they reach their fifth birthday.

“I wish my parents were alive to see Baptists come together to discuss racism,” said Dwight McKissic, pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, and a current advocate for racial equality in the Southern Baptist Convention.

McKissic said the SBC apologized for the “sin of racism” in 1995. But years later, when he visited the headquarters of the SBC Executive Committee and asked to meet with the highest-ranking African-American staff member, he was told that person was the head janitor.

“It’s impossible to ask a question in the SBC without having to go to a white person to get the answer,” McKissic said.

J.C. Watts, a former four-term U.S. congressman from Oklahoma, said in a separate address that the answer for racism is unconditional love: “Man’s love is often exclusive, but God’s love is unconditional. God’s love is inclusive. God loves us all — red, brown, black and white. **BT**”

Ethical guidelines embraced in Britain for Muslim, Christian outreach

By Robert Parham
EthicsDaily.com

British Christians and Muslims have tackled a thorny theological problem for both faiths — how to be faithful to the missionary impulse in one's own tradition while respecting the other tradition.

The Christian Muslim Forum developed 10 points for Christians and Muslims who want to share their faiths with integrity. Launched in January 2006, the Forum builds on an initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Forum leaders represent different Christian bodies in the United Kingdom, including the Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Baptists. The Baptist leader is Nicholas Wood, who teaches at Regent's Park College at the University of Oxford.

The British Muslim leaders represent the diversity within Islam — Sunni, Shia, Sufi, Deobandi and Barelwi traditions.

Published in late June 2009, the Forum statement on witnessing began: "As members of the Christian Muslim Forum, we are deeply committed to our own faiths (Christianity and Islam) and wish to bear faithful witness to them."

"[W]e are committed to working together for the common good. We recognize that both communities actively invite others to share their faith and acknowledge that all faiths have the same right to share their faith with others," said the document. "There are diverse attitudes and approaches amongst us which can be controversial and raise questions. This paper is not a theology of Christian evangelism or mission or Da'wah (invitation to Islam); rather it offers guidelines for good practice."

These guidelines, available in both English and Arabic, contain 10 points for Christians and Muslims who want to share their faiths with integrity:

"We bear witness to and proclaim our faith not only through words, but through our attitudes, actions and lifestyles."

"We cannot convert people; only God can do that. In our language and methods we should recognize that people's choice of faith

An invitation to convert should never be linked with financial, material or other inducements. It should be a decision of the heart and mind alone.



is primarily a matter between themselves and God."

"Sharing our faith should never be coercive; this is especially important when working with children, young people and vulnerable adults. Everyone should have the choice to accept or reject the message we proclaim and we will accept people's choices without resentment."

"Whilst we might care for people in need or who are facing personal crises, we should never manipulate these situations in order to gain a convert."

"An invitation to convert should never be linked with financial, material or other inducements. It should be a decision of the heart and mind alone."

"We will speak of our faith without demeaning or ridiculing the faiths of others."

"We will speak clearly and honestly about our faith, even when that is uncomfortable or controversial."

"We will be honest about our motivations for activities, and we will inform people when events will include the sharing of faith."

"Whilst recognizing that either community will naturally rejoice with and support those who have chosen to join them, we will be sensitive to the loss that others may feel."

"Whilst we may feel hurt when someone we know and love chooses to leave our faith, we will respect their decision and will not force them to stay or harass them afterwards."

When the statement was published, Christian and Muslim leaders spoke supportively of it.

Andrew Smith, a leader of Scripture

Union, a non-denominational, evangelistic society, said that the group's "concern is to help your average Muslim or Christian who isn't undertaking academic study but does want to share their faith with those around them. So we've deliberately kept it easy to read for anyone."

Steve Bell, national director for Interserve, an interdenominational mission agency working in Asia, Europe and the Arab world, said: "By our behavior we earn the right to speak. Witness with integrity is surely as much about how we say what we say and how we do what we do. I particularly like the transparency being espoused here."

Noting the stereotypes about Christian evangelism and the charges of deception, Bell said that the statement offered an alternative approach "where the invitation is not to convert to 'Christianity' but to Christ, not to join the church but to gain access to the Kingdom of God, not to become a 'Christian' but to discover the blessings offered by Jesus Christ. The way is prepared for an invitation to become an 'eastern follower' of Christ."

While Shamshad Khan, director of the Islamic Presentation Centre in Birmingham, expressed his wholehearted support for the initiative, he did question the final point. He suggested that it should either be left off the list or amended to reflect the Muslim attitude toward conversion to Christianity.

He proposed the following language: "Whilst we may feel hurt when someone we know and love chooses to leave our faith, whereas we may discuss at length the matter with them, we will not force them to stay or harass them afterwards." **BT**

Baptist newspaper apologizes for misusing governor's signature

OKLAHOMA CITY (ABP) — A Baptist newspaper in Oklahoma has apologized for publishing a graphic illustration digitally edited to make it appear a controversial proclamation declaring America a Christian nation was endorsed by the state's Baptist governor.

The Baptist Messenger, official news journal for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, covered a July 2 rally at the State Capitol promoting the "Oklahoma Citizen's Proclamation for Morality." The driving force behind the document is Sally Kern, a state legislator best known for commenting that homosexuality is a greater threat to America than terrorism.

The newspaper published the report in its July 16 issue, alongside artwork carrying the full text of the proclamation appearing on official state letterhead and signed by Gov. Brad Henry and Secretary of State Susan Savage.

Problem is, Henry — an ordained deacon and Sunday school teacher at First Baptist Church in Shawnee, Okla. — did not endorse the proclamation, which has been at the center of a controversy about separation of church and state.

Baptist officials said a graphic artist superimposed the statement over the actual text of a real proclamation signed by Henry and Savage on July 2 without noticing the signatures and official governor's seal. Media reports said the newspaper apologized to the governor's office. Kern told the *Daily Oklahoman* she was the first to alert the newspaper about the error, which she saw when her husband, a Baptist pastor, took a copy home.

Doug Baker, who took over as editor of the *Baptist Messenger* on Aug. 1, said it was an artwork procedure and a mistake. He said the paper's staff apologized and it would not happen again. **BT**

Hypocrisy not biggest obstacle to evangelism, says researcher

By Bob Allen

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) — People who don't attend church are not too bothered by what they view as hypocrisy in the church, but there are some things they don't like about Christians, says the head of the Southern Baptist Convention's publishing arm.

Thom Rainer, president of LifeWay Christian Resources, has been researching the "formerly unchurched" — men and women who have been Christians for less than a year — for nearly a decade. He says the results are surprising.

Contrary to popular belief, Rainer says, non-Christians by and large are not turned off by the church, preaching or Sunday school and are quite responsive to direct one-on-one evangelism.

But there are some things non-churchgoers don't like about Christians, Rainer says in a recent blog:

- Christians who treat other Christians poorly. "The unchurched don't expect us Christians to be perfect, but they can't understand why we treat each other without dignity and respect."
- Holier-than-thou attitudes. "The unchurched know that Christians will make mistakes, and



Thom Rainer

they often have a forgiving attitude when we mess up. But they are repulsed when Christians act in superior ways to them."

- Christians who talk more than they listen. "Many of the unchurched, at some point, have a perception that a Christian is a person who can offer a sympathetic and compassionate ear. Unfortunately, many of the unchurched thought Christians were too busy talking to listen to them."
- Christians who don't go to church. "The unchurched saw the disconnect between belief and practice in the lives of Christians who did not or who rarely attended church."

Rainer's original research was published in a 2008 book titled *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, but he has continued to follow those groups since.

Rainer says that contrary to the stereotype that hypocrisy is the main obstacle to evangelism, non-churchgoers are really not too bothered by some hypocrisy with Christians.

"They are well aware that any human will stumble at times," he says. "But these lost men and women want to know that Christians will treat each other well. They want to see humility in our lives. They want to know that we will take the time to listen, and even take more time to really be involved in their lives. And they want to know that we love our churches." **BT**

ABC celebrates resettlement of 100,000 refugees

PASADENA, Calif. (ABNS)—At the American Baptist Churches USA 2009 Biennial, June 26-28, American Baptists celebrated the resettlement of more than 100,000 refugees through National Ministries' Direct Human Services office since the cooperative effort with Church World Service began after World War II.

The celebration, during National Ministries' Biennial luncheon, included testimony from Htoo May, a Karen refugee resettled in Omaha, Neb., who gave thanks for help she received after years in a refugee camp following displacement from her home.

A litany led by Pastor Ronald Charles of



Chin Baptist Church, West Allis, Wis., reminded participants: "In providing for the poor, the hungry, the sick and the homeless, God's people have ministered to them as unto Jesus. In caring for these refugees, we have entertained angels." **BT**

Heaven? Sure. Hell? Not so much.

By Greg Garrison

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (RNS) — Just when it seemed to have cooled off, the topic of hell is back on the front burner — at least for pastors learning to preach about a topic most Americans would rather not talk about.

Only 59 percent of Americans believe in hell, compared with 74 percent who believe in heaven, according to the recent surveys from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

“I think it’s such a difficult and important biblical topic,” said Kurt Selles, director of the Global Center at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School. “There’s a big change that’s taken place as far as evangelicals not wanting to be as exclusive.”

At the recent annual Beeson Pastors School, Selles led two workshops to discuss “Whatever happened to hell?” He asked how many of the pastors had ever preached a sermon on hell. Nobody had, he said.

“I think it’s something people want to avoid,” he said. “I understand why. It’s a difficult topic.”

Fred Johns, pastor of Brookview Wesleyan Church in Irondale, Ala., said after a workshop discussion of hell that pastors do shy away from the topic of everlasting damnation.

“It’s out of fear we’ll not appear relevant,” he said. “It’s pressure from the culture to not speak anything negative. I think we’ve begun to deny hell. There’s an assumption that everybody’s going to make it to heaven somehow.”

The soft sell on hell reflects an increasingly market-conscious approach, Selles said.

“When you’re trying to market Jesus, sometimes there’s a tendency to mute traditional Christian symbols,” he said. “Difficult doctrines are left by the wayside. Hell is a morally repugnant doctrine. People wonder why God would send people to eternal punishment.”

Speakers said the seriousness of Jesus dying for man’s sins relates to the gravity of salvation vs. damnation, according to Johns.

“If you don’t mention God’s judgment, you are missing a big part of the Christian gospel,” Selles said. “Without wrath, there’s no grace.”

Pope John Paul II stirred up a debate in 1999 by describing hell as “the state of those who freely and definitely separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy.”



Although the pope was reflecting official Roman Catholic teaching, some U.S. evangelicals expressed misgivings about the implication that hell is an abstract separation from God rather than a literal lake of fire as described in the Book of Revelation.

The pope’s comments on hell stirred up the ancient debate about whether hell is a real place of burning fire or a state of mind reflecting a dark, cold emptiness and distance from God.

Evangelical Christians have traditionally offered a sterner view of salvation and damnation. A Southern Baptist home missions study in 1993 estimated that 70 percent of all Americans are going to hell, based on projected numbers of those who have not had a born-again experience.

Human ideas about hell were still in ferment as the Bible was being written. The theological concept of hell has a rich cultural heritage, according to historian Alan Bernstein, author of *The Formation of Hell*.

The ancient Hebrews focused on the afterlife following their Babylonian captivity, when they experienced the torment of ungodly enemies who seemed to have an unjustifiably good life on Earth. During the Babylonian exile, Jews were exposed to Zoroastrianism, which asserts there is an eternal struggle between good and evil, with good triumphing in the end.

The Hebrew concept of “Sheol” — the realm of the dead — may also have been influenced by the Greek mythology of Tartarus, a place of everlasting punishment for the Titans, a race of gods defeated by Zeus, Bernstein writes.

From about 300 B.C. to 300 A.D., those influences combined with Hebrew speculation

about an eventual comeuppance to the worldly wicked.

In translating the Bible from Hebrew to Greek, the Greeks used the terms Tartarus, Hades and Gehenna. In Greek thought, Hades is not a place of punishment; it’s where the dead are separated from the living.

The term Gehenna referred to a ravine outside Jerusalem that was used as a garbage dump. It had once been a place of child sacrifice and became a symbol of pain and suffering, Selles said. As a garbage dump, it was probably often a place of fire as trash was burned, emphasizing the symbolism of the flames of eternal damnation, he said.

Jesus never soft-pedaled the concept of hell, Selles said. “It’s not metaphorical in Jesus’ mind; it’s a real place,” he said.

In 410 A.D., St. Augustine defined four states of afterlife: those so good they go to heaven; those so bad they go to hell; those who deserve some relief in their eternal torment; and those who deserve to be lifted out of torment after repenting for their sins. That set the stage for the doctrine of purgatory in 1237 A.D.

The Bible contains a litany of colorful images of hell as both fire and darkness, as in the Gospel of Matthew, which refers to “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” and “the outer darkness” where “men will weep and gnash their teeth.”

Either way, Selles said, pretending that hell doesn’t exist, or trying to preach around it, short-circuits the Bible.

“This is a doctrine, a teaching, that’s being neglected in churches,” Selles said. “It needs to be preached. It’s part of the Gospel.” **BT**

—Greg Garrison writes for
The Birmingham News.

guest commentary

Truly valuing freedom of conscience

David Gushee

Moderate Baptists have distinguished themselves from their more conservative and fundamentalist brothers and sisters for a generation through their elevation of freedom of conscience to a near-absolute good.

While the conservatives who came to dominate the Southern Baptist Convention increasingly focused on defining and requiring (their particular version of) doctrinal orthodoxy, moderate Baptists proclaimed that freedom of individual conscience before God is a more distinctive Baptist principle than doctrinal conservatism.

Next-generation Baptists have sometimes raised questions about this relentless focus on freedom. Even those generally sympathetic to the moderate side have asked searching questions about the adequacy of freedom alone as the highest principle of moderate Baptist life, and have proposed other models for what ought to be central to Baptist identity.

These questions about freedom do not go away; indeed, they should not go away. But today I want to say a word on behalf of a very rigorous understanding of freedom of conscience in Christian life and our institutions. It is indeed a sacred value and one that easily disappears if not protected vigilantly.

Freedom of conscience in a Christian context means that each individual who has

committed to follow Jesus Christ is understood to be answerable fundamentally to Christ himself. Freedom is not mere personal autonomy — nor is it license to believe, say or do just anything.

But when a Christian community values freedom of conscience, it recognizes that the individual alone will give account of herself before God on Judgment Day. It recognizes that the community must protect the space in which each individual Christian can determine what pattern of belief and action is required of him by his Lord.

To value freedom of conscience in this sense strengthens rather than weakens commitment to the Lordship of Christ. It is precisely because Christ is Lord, and precisely because the believer stands in a living relationship with a living God, that freedom of individual conscience must be protected. The community dare not stand as an obstacle to the believer's obligation to follow Jesus as faithfully as he or she knows how.

Most Christian communities have interpretive traditions that are broadly agreed upon in the community and that guide the exercise of individual conscience. Baptists have long agreed, for example, on the high role of Scripture and the only secondary role of church tradition. These interpretive traditions help hold faith communities together and set parameters that can help order the religious life of individuals.

But such parameters, while helpful, cannot resolve every issue. They cannot prevent sharp differences of opinion on a wide range of issues that arise in Christian thought and practice.

Some Christian communities respond to these often-quite-uncomfortable differences by trying to come up with an expansive set of standards for orthodoxy and orthopraxy. But these often end up tyrannizing individual

responsibility before God.

I would even dare to suggest that these standards can at times make it impossible for Christian communities to hear any new word from God's Spirit at all. For there are many examples of times in which God's transforming word was first heard by scattered Christian outliers and rejected by the community as a whole until somehow it finally broke through — with the path usually littered by the scarred bodies of the original outliers who received the word ahead of others.

Think about the way racism infected Christian doctrine in the years leading up to the Civil Rights Movement. In many contexts, racism was viewed as a theological truth and segregation as a Christian moral requirement. Congregational or even university or seminary settings in which Christian leaders could challenge this misguided racist orthodoxy without fear of losing their jobs were rare.

God couldn't be permitted to speak a new theological or moral word. It was too dangerous to the status quo.

The same thing happened 20 years later in relation to the role of women in Christian communities and families. I was among those who had to leave Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the mid-1990s because my understanding did not match with the new orthodoxy, which changed overnight.

I am grateful currently to be in a congregation and a university in which expansive understandings of freedom of conscience before God are embraced. I am free to follow my conscience where it leads.

I may misunderstand what Christ requires of me, but the space for me to do so is protected. This is a rare, precious and fragile gift. I hope no one takes it for granted. **BT**

—*David Gushee is distinguished university professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University. This column is provided by Associated Baptist Press.*



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BaptistLife.com

guest commentary

Is blaming men for inequitable treatment of women good theology?

By Robert Parham

Blaming “male interpretations of religious texts” for the lack of women’s equal rights is flawed theology, at least within the context of Baptists of the South.

Yes, the Southern Baptist Convention did adopt a faith statement in 2000 that said, “[T]he office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.” Only two of the 15 members of the drafting committee were women.

And yes, the SBC did approve a family statement in 1998 that assigned the husband the role of bread-winner and the wife the role of homemaker. The actual language said that the wife had the “God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.”

The family committee chair said, “Every line is deeply rooted in the clear teaching of Scripture.” Only two of the seven members of this committee were women.

And yes, the SBC did pass a resolution in 1984 that said women were the first in sin. Citing the Apostle Paul, the resolution said that “he excludes women from pastoral leadership ... to preserve a submission God requires because the man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall.”

These historic facts disclose a male-dominated religious organization that has interpreted the Bible to keep women in the home and out of church leadership roles. No wonder folk blame male-dominated houses of faith and male control of sacred texts for the plight of women.

Jimmy Carter and the global elders issued a statement in early July that said: “The justification of discrimination against women and girls on grounds of religion or

tradition, as if it were prescribed by a Higher Authority, is unacceptable.”

They challenged current leaders with their call for them “to set an example and change all discriminatory practices within their own religions and traditions.”

Writing in the *Observer*, a British newspaper, Carter noted that he had been a “practicing Christian all my life and a deacon and Bible teacher for many years. My faith is a source of strength and comfort to me, as religious beliefs are to hundreds of millions of people around the world.”

He said, “[M]y decision to sever my ties with the Southern Baptist Convention, after six decades, was painful and difficult. It was, however, an unavoidable decision when the convention’s leaders, quoting a few carefully selected Bible verses and claiming that Eve was created second to Adam and was responsible for original sin, ordained that women must be ‘subservient’ to their husbands and prohibited from serving as deacons, pastors or chaplains in the military service.”

While Carter and the global elders did not place all the blame for the inequitable condition of women at the feet of men who interpret religious texts, they came close, maybe too close. Others have bluntly blamed men.

Within the Baptist tradition, such blame is theologically misguided.

From a theological perspective, “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” That is, the cause of injustice is shared both by omission and commission, by what folk leave undone and by what they

do wrongly.

Many male preachers don’t agree with the SBC’s position on women, but they have remained silent. They have acquiesced to the discrimination with which they disagree.

These men interpret the Bible correctly but lack the courage to challenge the power structure. They deserve some of the blame for the treatment of women.

A similar point could be made about Baptist women, especially those who are well educated, hold professional positions and are theologically discerning. They keep afloat with their tithes and offerings the very denomination that says they are theologically and vocationally subservient to their husbands, brothers and fathers.

Without these Baptist women — those who teach the children, serve on committees, go on mission trips, sing in the choir, care for the sick and look after the elderly — the Baptist church would wither.

What makes the Baptist situation different from other faith expressions is that every member has the right and responsibility to interpret the Bible freely. No hierarchal authority dictates to a Baptist how to read the Bible.

Imagine what would happen if rank-and-file Baptist women launched a religious disobedience movement in the local church. If they said no more offerings and no more volunteer hours, the preachers with power would have a lightning-strike revelation about the full equality of women. **BT**

—Robert Parham is executive editor of *EthicsDaily.com* and executive director of its parent organization, the Baptist Center for Ethics. A shorter version of this editorial appeared on the Washington Post’s “On Faith” Web page. Used by permission.



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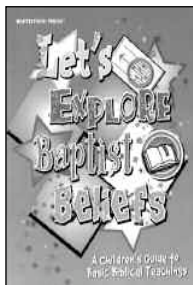
Teaching Baptist distinctives to children

For many Baptist churches, the days of BYPU (Baptist Young Peoples Union), Training Union and other programs dedicated to teaching Baptist heritage to children and youth are gone. In this post-denominational age, some churches have forgone the teaching of Baptist heritage altogether.

But teaching children Baptist heritage is important. Helping children discover who we are and why we are as we are is crucial for maintaining institutions with the “Baptist” name. More importantly, passing on Baptist heritage continues the ideals and practices we Baptists believe are the best ways to respect and dignify all of God’s children and to be the church, representing God in the world. So how can churches reclaim the practice of teaching children Baptist heritage?

One of the most helpful resources I have found for teaching Baptist distinctives to children is *Let’s Explore Baptist Beliefs*, published by BaptistWay Press. The student’s workbook is a slick, full-color piece that includes a session on five topics:

- God is Always in Charge (the lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture)
- Three Gifts from God: Salvation, Security and Priesthood (soul competency and the priesthood of all believers)
- Symbols that Stand for Something Important (baptism, communion and church membership)
- We Decide How to Be a Church (local church autonomy and religious freedom)
- We Work Together to Tell the World About Jesus (missions, evangelism and



cooperation with other churches and groups)

Sessions include an explanation of the featured Baptist concept, a scriptural basis, several fun learning activities and contemporary illustrations of the theme put into practice. The accompanying leader’s guide includes in-depth background as well as a helpful guide for leading the sessions.

Finding time to add another educational topic into the already limited access your church has to its children is a challenge. This resource is flexible enough to be used in several contexts. This fall, our oldest children’s Sunday school class will use it as a five-week session. Missions or discipleship groups would also be an appropriate forum.

A couple of years ago I used the resource for a Baptist Heritage Club for our children that met once a month for 30 minutes before Sunday school. I divided some of the more “packed” sessions into two meetings and supplemented the resource with other materials (see below). Each month we would meet to introduce the concept, and then I would assign “homework” to be done before the next month’s meeting. Children completed some of the learning activities included in the session, read the story of a Baptist who had lived out that month’s distinctive, and found a way to put the idea into practice. For example, when we learned about believer’s baptism, each student interviewed an older church member about his or her baptism experience. When we studied religious liberty, we met for lunch with a

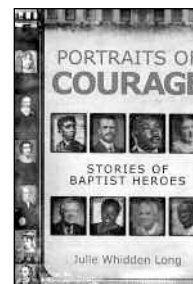


church member who had grown up as a persecuted Baptist in Puerto Rico. When the children learned about Baptist partnerships, they did Internet research about some of our church’s Baptist mission partners. They even attended church conference and had to pay attention! The class ended with a field trip to learn more about a famous Baptist at the King Center in Atlanta.



Several other resources supplemented this curriculum for our class and are helpful for teaching Baptist heritage to children:

- *We Are Baptists* (Judson Press) examines 14 different Baptist distinctives.
- *Heritage Seekers* (Baptist Heritage and Studies) explores Baptist history and themes.
- *Portraits of Courage: Stories of Baptist Heroes* (Julie Whidden Long, Baptist History and Heritage Society/Mercer University Press) tells the stories of 14 Baptist men and women who have lived out the best of our Baptist ideals.



We will never have time to teach our children all we want to pass down. But being intentional about using the opportunities we have is crucial, both for the future of our children and of our churches. As we celebrate this significant 400th anniversary of Baptists, I hope your church will take the opportunity to pass along some of our family history to the next generation. **BT**

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

2009 Formations Commentary

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

LESSONS FOR: Sunday, Oct. 11– 25, 2009

Written by John Hewett, founder and CEO of Hewett Consulting based in Charlotte, N.C., and senior minister of First Baptist Church, Monroe, N.C.



Oct. 11, 2009

What does discipleship cost?

Luke 9:57-62

Gerald Mann's classic take on the Sermon on the Mount, *Why Does Jesus Make Me Nervous?* (Word Books, 1980), opens with Wilbur Rees's tongue-in-cheek MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) "ratings system" for sermons. Rees held that ministers ought to post the appropriate rating alongside the sermon title each week, so worshippers could know what to expect.

Rees said most preachers have files filled with G-rated sermons. They're cheery and inoffensive, with titles such as "It's Nice to Be Nice," "God Bless Mothers" and "Jesus Loves the Little Children of the World." Everyone likes an encouraging, uplifting, hopeful message now and again, and the exemplary preacher is ready to stand and deliver.

PG and PG-13 sermons are a bit more daring, intended for mature ears and designed to convince the congregation that the preacher has been to college and seminary. These messages bear titles like "Privilege and Praxis" or "The Spirit and the Forms of Freedom," often include esoteric terms such as "eschatology" and "parousia," and are frequently sprinkled with Greek verbs. Listeners are frequently puzzled afterwards, which allows the preacher to adopt different and even contradictory positions, depending on the audience and the relative levels of heat.

Sermons rated R are rarely preached. They're about incendiary topics such as sex or politics or women's ordination or open baptism. These messages bear witness either to the preacher's independent source of income or that interregnum between his/her resignation and final departure.

X-rated sermons, Rees said, usually just get you fired on the spot.

Gerald Mann said the Sermon on the Mount was rated X all the way, and he's right. Jesus was not laying out some impossible ideal for his faithful followers; he was giving straight talk for Kingdom citizens: If you're going to follow me, this is what you can expect.

These few verses from Luke 9 are no less explosive. Terse Jesus, refusing to compromise his call, issues a take-it-or-leave-it summons to those with ears to hear, summed up in this simple phrase: If you don't mean it, don't come.

Lest we read this text as merely something that happened to someone else long ago, let's ask instead: Which of these three would-be disciples looks and sounds and acts like us?

Candidate One has been a bystander, a hearer. Now he proposes to become a follower, a permanent disciple. Naïve to the core, unaware of the implications of his decision, he offers the brash and flattering promise (with apologies to B.B. McKinney), "wherever you lead, I'll go." Jesus, having just sent out the Twelve prepared to perform what John Oman (*Concerning the Ministry*, John Knox Press, 1963) called the "sacrament of failure" (9:5), having just been rejected by an entire Samaritan village (9:51-56), wises the guy right up. He tells the fellow he's, well, homeless. He sleeps under the occasional bridge and grabs a bite wherever he can find it. Following this Jesus will be a pilgrimage, not a parade, with meager fare and only occasional accommodations. Don't volunteer, he says, until you're sure what you're doing. If you don't mean it, don't come.

Jesus initiates the call of Candidate Two: "You, there, come on and go with me." And

this fellow makes a perfectly reasonable request: that he be allowed to complete the burial arrangements for his father, who had no doubt died that very day. He is willing to follow Jesus, but first things first. Charles Talbert (*Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel*, Smyth & Helwys, 2002) points out that burial of the dead was the supreme religious duty of observant Jews, taking precedence over all other earthly obligations. But Jesus hadn't called this man to an earthly obligation; he had called him to a heavenly mission. Malcolm Tolbert calls our attention to the true nature of this "shocking contradiction of Jewish piety" (*Luke*, The Broadman Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, 89) in which Jesus places his call above what every good Jew knew to be the call of God. "Let the dead do that; you go shout the good news that life is here!"

Candidate Three wants, like Elisha (cf. 1 Kings 19:19-21), to go home and tell everyone goodbye before he surrenders to full-time Christian service. He cannot cut the blest ties that bind him to family and tradition and culture. To him, Jesus quotes a proverb about single-minded devotion — which is another way of saying, If you don't mean it, don't come.

This set of calls and responses is X-rated, as radical as the gospel ever gets. We are called to embody a complete and total detachment from home, comfort, property and family and a singular, unwavering devotion to Jesus. Issue *that* invitation Sunday morning, and your pastor may be tempted to stand at the back door instead. As Robert Karris puts it, "Following Jesus is not a task which is added to others like working a second job.... It is everything" (*Luke: Artist and Theologian*, quoted in Talbert, 125).

I mentioned earlier the creative minister Wilbur Rees. He also wrote this haunting little poem, "\$3.00 Worth of God" (*\$3.00 Worth of God*, Judson Press, 1971), which should tick like a timebomb in the basement of easy, part-time disciples.



Cooperative Baptist Fellowship provides these Bible study resources to church leaders through this supplement to *Baptists Today*. For more information on how CBF is "serving Christians and churches as they discover their God-given mission," visit www.thefellowship.info or call 1-800-352-8741



I would like to buy \$3 worth of God,
please, / not enough to explode my soul
or disturb my sleep / but just enough to
equal a cup of warm milk / or a snooze in
the sunshine. / I don't want enough of
God to make me love a black man / or
pick beets with a migrant. / I want
ecstasy, not transformation. / I want the
warmth of the womb, not a new birth. /
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper
sack. / I would like to buy \$3 worth of
God, please.

No. This we cannot do. If we try to get
by with a paper sack full of Jesus, we'll miss
the Kingdom. To all of us who waver or hesi-
tate or promise what we do not know, he says:
If you don't mean it, don't come.

Oct. 18, 2009

Am I my brother's or sister's keeper?

Luke 16:19-31

Luke 16 is all about money, its management,
and how believers are charged to use it to
“make friends” for the gospel. As Jesus teaches
his followers in parables, by-standing Pharisees
overhear and begin to ridicule him. These
holy men, who love money dearly, find his
theology contemptible, his position on wealth
laughable. To this sneering throng he tells the
parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Where did the Pharisees get their notion
that their wealth was proof of God's pleasure
and blessing? Why, by proof-texting the parts
of Hebrew scripture they liked! As Fred
Craddock (*Luke*, Interpretation: A Comm-
entary for Teaching and Preaching, John Knox
Press, 1990) rightly observes, these were not
godless materialists whose religion was a
sham; they were pious Jews in whose theology
God and mammon had been comfortably
joined.

And thus they would certainly have inter-
preted the ancient tale Jesus is about to tell
about two men — one rich, one poor. The
rich man is the obvious recipient of God's
favor, the beggar an object of God's wrath and
punishment. (Funny how they tend to see
their own reflections in the most pleasant
light. Funny how every time we read the
Word, we tend to cast ourselves in the best
roles, too.)

Rich man, poor man; one with every-
thing, the other with nothing. Jesus takes this
familiar story, perfect for setting up the radical
reversal of life in the Way, and slowly spins it
out, reeling them in. But before we set the
hook, take a deeper look.

Lazarus is starving, surrounded by street
dogs at the entrance to the rich man's gated
palace, his glazed eyes fixed in a stare at the
rich man's table. Servants pass, bearing ban-
quet platters of sumptuous meats, loaves of
bread, imported delicacies. All Lazarus can see,
smell and taste is a life he will never know.

The rich man sees the same things as
Lazarus — all the trappings of his wealth and
luxury: fine clothes, a lovely home, a staff of
servants, a festive table. In the same sense that
he never notices the strays in the street, what
the rich man doesn't see, what he never sees, is
... Lazarus.

Both men die. Angels carry Lazarus to
Abraham's side while the rich man descends to
fiery torment. Ablaze with thirst, seeking just
a drop of relief, the rich man finally notices
Lazarus. And does he repent for his indifferent
greed? No. He doesn't see Lazarus the
Redeemed; he still sees Lazarus the street beg-
gar, good for nothing more than to be his
gofer and fetch a drop of cool water for his
parched tongue, his messenger to warn his five
brothers not to make the same mistake he did.
Even in hell, especially in hell, all he can see is
his own reflection.

I imagine right about here the Pharisees
had had just about all the fun they could
stand.

Because this liberal from Galilee was
misreading Torah, distorting rabbinic teaching,
and insinuating that they, the Pharisees, might
actually end up in hell while some street scum
could bask in Paradise with Abraham!

Except Jesus was holding their proof-
texted traditions up to the light of God and
finding them wanting. Had they not read the
Law of Moses? ...

“When you reap the harvest of your land,
you shall not reap to the very edges of your
field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest.
You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or
gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you
shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I
am the LORD your God” (Lev. 19:9-10).

“If there is among you anyone in need, a
member of your community in any of your
towns within the land that the LORD your
God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or
tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You

should rather open your hand, willingly lend-
ing enough to meet the need, whatever it may
be. Be careful that you do not entertain a
mean thought, thinking, ‘The seventh year,
the year of remission, is near,’ and therefore
view your needy neighbor with hostility and
give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the
LORD against you, and you would incur guilt.
Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do
so, for on this account the LORD your God
will bless you in all your work and in all that
you undertake. Since there will never cease to
be some in need on the earth, I therefore com-
mand you, “Open your hand to the poor and
needy neighbor in your land” (Deut. 15:7-11).

“And surely they had not ignored Isaiah?
Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the
bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of
the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to
break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread
with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor
into your house; when you see the naked, to
cover him, and not to hide yourself from your
own flesh?” (Isa. 58:6-7).

As Craddock points out so plainly in his
commentary on Luke: “Wherever some eat
and others do not eat, there the kingdom does
not exist, quote whatever scripture you will.”

When the rich man finally comes to his
senses in Jesus' parable, it's too late for him
and his brothers. They've had all the scripture
they could memorize, but a whole library full
of holy books isn't enough when you can't see
past the text to the author. Prefiguring the
days to come, he concludes not even a resur-
rection will convince people who pray with
one hand folded, the other clapping itself on
the back.

Oct. 25, 2009

What keeps me from following Jesus?

Luke 18:18-27

Today's lesson title poses another radical ques-
tion, another incendiary response from the
Jesus who demands everything we've got.
Teachers will do well not to spiritualize this
text into a Sunday morning bromide. Context
is everything, especially with stewardship
lessons!

All the Synoptic narratives place this
story immediately after the account of people
bringing small children to Jesus, which makes
the encounter especially humiliating for a



powerful rich man. The “ruler” (*archon*) is extremely religious, a man of faith, and also a man of means. Mark also portrays him as young and impetuous (10:17-31). Was he a temporal leader, or one of the religious authorities? We don’t know. We only know he comes to Rabbi Jesus with deference and respect, unlike nearly every other religious authority in the Bible, saying, literally, “Good teacher, by doing what shall I inherit eternal life?”

Was this fellow dissatisfied with the teachings of Moses and the rabbis? Or did he just lack assurance that he would be welcomed into the world to come? We haven’t a clue. He seems to be looking for that one act of faith or benevolence or philanthropy or service that will get him in the Door. He clearly sees a causal relationship between his “doing” and his “inheriting,” sharpened by his lifelong faithfulness in keeping all the commandments.

We know his question. We hear it echoed by every seeker who wants a transactional salvation. “Just tell me what to do, and I’ll do it.” Evangelical Christianity’s traditional responses — pray this prayer, sign this tract, walk this aisle, join this church, go under this water — are deeply unsatisfying, because salvation isn’t a transaction; it’s a lifelong relationship. The Christian life is a journey, not just a beginning or a destination.

The man’s reply in verse 21 is not a boast, but an expression of continued dissatisfaction. “I’ve done all that; I wanted you to tell me something special and unique.” He’s completely sincere, and completely clueless.

Wealthy people often surround themselves with people they pay to agree with them. This enables them to believe they’re smarter and wiser than they actually are. This rich ruler is no different. He is ill prepared to hear Jesus puncture his claims to personal privilege by telling him how poor he is. His wealth and power demand a more consequential, VIP response. He reminds me of General Naaman, the Syrian, confounded and irritated by Elisha’s suggestion that he dip himself seven times in the dirty little backwater called the River Jordan.

Yet, as Mark alone mentions, Jesus loves this guy! And because he loves him, Jesus doesn’t keep listing commandments, piling on more rules and regulations. Instead, he cuts to the heart of the powerful man’s issue with faith, presenting one perfectly clear but seemingly impossible choice. “You’ve done all the usual and customary obligations? You’re searching for something special and dramatic

and unique? Okay. Here you go. Sell everything you own and give it away to the poor. You’ll be rich in heaven. Now come with me and live my life.”

Luke’s word to describe the rich man’s reaction, *perilupos*, is the same term used to portray Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane. This is not the transient disappointment of someone with only passing interest in the Way. It is the deep grief of a man pulled in two directions, forced to choose between the call to follow Jesus and a life so laden with stuff that he cannot break free. You get the sense that his grief is not limited to his inability to walk away from wealth; it includes his acknowledgement that, in gaining the whole world, he’s in danger of losing his soul.

Jesus’ response is the oft-quoted gospel proverb about the difficulty of the rich in trying to have it both ways. This is hyperbole, intended to reveal truth by exaggeration, so avoid all the neat but erroneous suggestions that the “needle’s eye” was really a little footpath for pedestrians that, if you tried really, really hard, you could squeeze a camel through. If this isn’t hyperbole, why does Jesus conclude the teaching moment by saying, “What is impossible with men is possible with God” (18:17)?

Frederick Buechner’s version, “It’s easier to get a Cadillac through a revolving door than a rich man into heaven,” makes it real in a way we can hear (*Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*, Harper, 81.)

Wealth in itself is not evil; Jesus was the recipient of the generosity of wealthy benefactors himself. But wealth presents a magnificent temptation toward evil. Reveling in temporary possessions, boosting self-esteem with stuff, measuring our worth by what we own, replacing God with earthly riches and rewards — these are the acts of un-faith that keep us far from the Kingdom. The inability, when the call of God comes, to lay it all down — that’s the soul-killer.

The Twelve, who’ve overheard this exchange, are amazed. “If this guy can’t get in, is there any chance for us?” Eugene Peterson’s lively translation, *The Message*, perfectly captures the tone and tenor of Jesus’ response: “No chance at all if you think you can pull it off by yourself. Every chance in the world if you trust God to do it.”

Bonus lesson

When is the right time to serve?

Luke 12:35-48

Last year Joe Biden sent the press corps scrambling for their reference books at every campaign stop. After dramatizing the crises sure to face the new administration, Biden would bellow to the crowds, “Gird your loins!” It was fun watching pundits speculate on where he had learned (or borrowed) such an archaic phrase. Joe, the good Irish Catholic, had no doubt been paying attention during all those years of catechism and Mass. He knew more Bible than they.

The parables in Luke 12:35-48 bristle with urgency and immediacy, each one written to followers of Jesus struggling to live in the interim between the “already” and the “not yet,” between his resurrection and his promised return.

The first parable, the story of servants waiting for the return of their master from a marriage feast (vv. 35-38), calls believers to watchfulness, vigilance and constant preparation. Believers are to gather up their ceremonial garments, tie them about their waists, and get to work, keeping their lamps burning brightly, and listening intently for the knock on the door — their call to spring into action. These servants spend not one second in vain calculations of when their master might return. No “over and under,” no office pool: they only know he’s coming, and they want to be ready. But theirs is a celebrative waiting, like children waiting for Christmas.

When the master finally arrives from the heavenly banquet, he will tie up *his* robe, give his servants the honored place at the table and serve *them*. Who wouldn’t be vigilant for such a return? If you knew Jesus were coming to your house tonight, you’d be standing at the door with the curtain pulled back, watching intently for any sign of his approach. It would be the last thing you’d ever want to miss.

The second parable is sinister, the tale of a brigand sneaking into homes at night (vv. 39-40) to steal and destroy. Luke is not suggesting that the Lord will return to do us harm; he’s using the metaphor of the thief to illustrate that Christ will return on his timetable, not ours, and we must be awake



and ready. Whether we are alive when he comes, or meet him at our own personal *eschaton*, we are to be alert and vigilant. We don't want to be anesthetized by spiritual sloth, dozing in a lazy torpor, living in exile with all the other "inactive" members who rouse themselves twice a year to see if the church remembers their names. We want to be the first to cry, "Look! There he is!"

The third parable, that of the disloyal servant (vv. 41-48), is preceded by one of the great questions in all of Scripture. Peter interrupts to ask, "Master, are you saying all this just for us, or is it for everyone?" Now, *that* sounds like the Simon we know and love. "Lord, will this fabulous banquet be a private party, for just us, or are you inviting everybody?" (Peter fully expects to be included, but isn't so sure about all these others.) By the time Luke was written and began to be circulated, the early church was already forming its new leadership structures. The third parable makes crystal clear that the gospel's gifts and obligations fall on everyone, leaders and followers, but the obligations fall especially on those holding the keys to the Kingdom.

The servant in the last story isn't just a slacker, goldbricking on gospel time. He is disloyal, violating every aspect of his master's trust. He lives, and leads, like he has all the time in the world. And, to make it as bad as it gets, he knows better.

In 1918 four American soldiers were sentenced to death for sleeping on sentry duty in the front line trenches of France. They weren't intoxicated, just tired, but the court martial made no distinction. The court concluded that sentries who neglect their duty jeopardize the lives of everyone around them.

Leaders, Jesus says, are held responsible not only for what they do, but also for what they know. Those who know what God wants, and do not do it, are far more guilty than those who err out of ignorance. As Malcolm Tolbert writes, "to be a steward over God's household is not an honor to be sought but an awesome responsibility to be discharged 'in fear and trembling'" (*Luke*, The Broadman Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, 112).

These three stories are a swift kick in the pants of Christian faith. Each calls believers to a state of mobilized readiness in the midst of a casual, laid-back world. Each offers an identical answer to the question, When is the right time to serve? NOW. **BT**

Report finds one-third of scientists believe in God

WASHINGTON (RNS) — Only a third of scientists say they believe in God, according to a new survey, and while 18 percent believe in a high power, four in 10 scientists believe in neither.

The report was released July 9 by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press in collaboration with the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Scientists were evenly split — at 48 percent each — between those who claimed a religious affiliation and those who did not.

The new statistics vary sharply with findings for the general public: 83 percent of Americans say they believe in God and 82 percent said they are affiliated with a religious tradition.

The Pew report indicated sharp divergence between scientists and the general public on issues such as evolution and climate change. While 87 percent of scientists believe humans have evolved over time, just 32 percent of Americans in general hold that belief.

A similarly large percentage of scientists

(84 percent) said the earth is warming because of human activity, while only 49 percent of the public agreed with that statement.

Also, while 93 percent of scientists favor federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, just 58 percent of the general public agreed with such research.

But despite differences between scientists and the general public, a majority of people acknowledge that science contributes to the well-being of society.

Two-thirds of people surveyed who said science conflicts with their religious beliefs nevertheless said scientists contribute "a lot" to society's well-being. A slightly higher percentage (72 percent) of people who said there were not conflicts between their beliefs and science had similar praise for scientific contributions to society.

The report was based on a random sample of the scientific association's 2,533 members, and a random survey of 2,001 U.S. adults. Each of those surveys had an overall margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. **BT**

Rev. Ike, proponent of prosperity gospel, dies at age 74

(RNS/ENI) — Frederick J. Eikerenkoetter II, an early proponent of the prosperity gospel best known as "Rev. Ike," died July 28. He was 74.

Rev. Ike was among the first in the 1970s to harness the power of television for evangelizing and was fond of saying that his church was for the "do-it-yourself ... the only savior in this philosophy is God in you."

He was a proponent of the belief that came to be known as the prosperity gospel, which holds that Christians should feel no guilt over obtaining riches. Rather, he argued, they should embrace prosperity as a divine gift.

A self-help element was an important part of the flamboyant preacher's ministry, and his church, based in a converted movie house in upper Manhattan, took the name United Church Science of Living Institute.

The requirements of advertising his church from a movie marquee forced Eikerenkoetter to abbreviate his name to "Rev. Ike."

Born in Ridgeland, S.C., the son of a school teacher and a Dutch-Indonesian Baptist minister, Rev. Ike was criticized by fellow African-American pastors who said his ministry ignored long-standing social and racial problems.

Others called him a con man who became wealthy at the expense of his followers.

A stroke in 2007 removed Rev. Ike from the spotlight. In announcing his death, a family Web site suggested supporters visit YouTube to see a video of him preaching. In one of the videos, apparently decades old, the minister exhorts his followers to think positively. "Anything that you can honestly think and feel that you deserve," he said, "must come to you." **BT**

in the know

Keeping up with people, places, and events

PEOPLE

Robert Broome, a Baptist peace activist, died July 11 after a long battle with cancer. Broome is credited with the idea for publishing a journal on peace issues written from a Baptist perspective. The *Baptist Peacemaker* is now in its 29th year and published by the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

Robert C. Campbell died July 27 in California at age 85. He was general secretary for American Baptists from 1972-1987.

Travis Crocker is minister of students at First Baptist Church of Anderson, S.C.

Greg Dover is associate pastor of Earle Street Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C.

William (Bill) Ellis is the 19th president of Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas, where he has served as provost and CEO since 2001. He and his wife Diana, professor of voice and opera at McMurry University, are members of Lytle South Baptist Church in Abilene.

William (Bill) E. Gardner Jr., minister of music at Bull Street Baptist Church in Savannah, Ga., since 1972, retired Aug. 1.

Charles Edwin Hancock, who served as director of personnel development for the former Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and as a teacher at Golden Gate Seminary, died in August.

Joy Heaton is pastor of Westhampton Baptist Church in Richmond, Va.

Maggie Lee Henson, 12, died Aug. 2 from injuries suffered three weeks earlier in a church bus accident. Her father, John Henson, is associate pastor at First Baptist Church in Shreveport, La. The church group was en route to a Passport youth camp in Macon, Ga., when the bus blew a tire and overturned several times in Mississippi. Another youth, 14-year-old Brandon Ugarte, died immediately following the accident.

William Leathers III has retired after 14 years as pastor of First Baptist Church of Hickory, N.C.

Brett Patterson is pastor of First Baptist Church in Lake View, S.C.

Bill Wilson has been named president of the Center for Congregational Health based in Winston-Salem, N.C., coming from the pastorate of the First Baptist Church of Dalton, Ga. **BT**

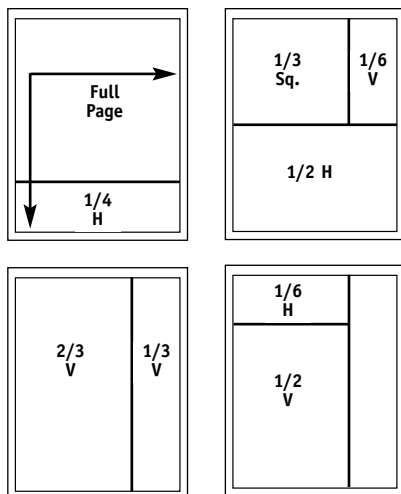
College Avenue Baptist Church, located in the foothills of North Carolina, is seeking a full-time **senior pastor**. College Avenue is a caring, loving church with active ministries for all ages. We will be celebrating our 100th anniversary in 2010. Please mail your résumé and doctrinal statement by Sept. 30 to: Pastor Search Committee, College Avenue Baptist Church, 1201 College Ave. SW, Lenoir, NC 28645.

Rock Falls Baptist Church, located northeast of Kansas City, Mo., and near Orrick, Mo., is prayerfully seeking a full-time or bi-vocational **pastor**. The church has a membership of approximately 370 with an average attendance of 80 for a Sunday service. If interested, please send your résumé to: wrightexcels@att.net or Pastor Search Committee, c/o Donna Wright, P.O. Box 584, Excelsior Springs, MO. 64024.

First Baptist Church of Pageland, S.C., is seeking a full-time **minister to youth and children**. Compensation package includes salary, housing allowance, insurance and annuity. Please send résumés to: jddale@fbcpageland.com or Minister to Youth and Children's Search Committee, First Baptist Church, P.O. Box 126, Pageland, SC 29728.

Morningside Baptist Church, Spartanburg, S.C., is seeking an **associate pastor to children**. Candidates must have the ability to coordinate a comprehensive children's program. Appropriate college and seminary degrees are required. Morningside is a congregation of 1800+ members and has a ministerial team of six other ministers. Morningside affirms women in ministry and worships in a traditional form. Send résumés to: mikehensley@bellsouth.net or Associate Pastor to Children Search, Committee, c/o Mike Hensley, Morningside Baptist Church, 897 S. Pine St., Spartanburg, S.C. 29302.

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the media shelf

A review by Dwight A. Moody

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1859-2009

By Gregory A. Wills
Oxford University Press, 2009

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the flagship institution of the Southern Baptist Convention, was founded in South Carolina in 1859 and relocated to Louisville, Ky., in 1877. This year, the seminary is commemorating its sesquicentennial with special events, including a conference on the role of the school in American Christianity, construction of a new \$5 million Welcome Center, and a grand celebration held in conjunction with the annual SBC meeting.



Dwight Moody

In addition, Oxford University Press has published this large, impressive history of the school, written by

Gregory Wills, professor of church history at the seminary. The 546 pages of this meticulously researched, well-written and highly readable tome can be summarized in the following story of exactly (and appropriately) 150 words:

“Once upon a time there lived a wise and godly man. With his trusted assistant he planted a garden. Around it they built a sturdy stone wall. The garden bloomed with everything that was true and lovely. But evil men, disguised as friends, came into the garden. They brought into the garden plants with thorns, bushes with foul odors, and trees that bore rotten fruit. They allowed weeds to overtake the garden and the wall to fall into disrepair. This made the planter very sad. One day a mighty storm swept through the countryside. Wind and rain pounded the garden. In the midst of the storm there appeared a new gardener who, like the planter, was wise and godly. He drove out the wicked men, uprooted the foreign plants, and rebuilt the wall. Once again, the garden was a place of beauty and peace. And all lived happily ever after.”

The planter, of course, is James Petigru Boyce, the wealthy and able minister from

South Carolina who founded Southern Seminary. John Broadus is his trusted assistant. They were the first two of the nine presidents who have served the school.

The new gardener is, of course, Albert Mohler, the current president of the Seminary, whose tenure is aptly described with the very last sentence of the book: “Under Mohler’s leadership, Southern Seminary was once again Boyce’s seminary.”

In between these two righteous men are six presidents who fell short of the glory of Boyce, Broadus and Mohler. President William Whitsitt’s offense was “betrayal of denominational trust,” but Wills neglects Whitsitt’s stand for historical accuracy against denominational prejudice.

President E.Y. Mullins “led Southern Baptists away from traditional orthodoxy” by which Wills means the five-point Calvinism of Boyce. President John R. Sampey was unable “to deal effectively with growing suspicions of the faculty’s unsoundness” by which he meant the complaints of Baptist fundamentalists.

President Ellis Fuller adjusted hiring criteria “to allow the conclusions of historical-critical scholarship” which Wills takes to be a bad thing. President Duke McCall operated with a “realist policy because the beliefs and aims of the seminary faculty differed in significant ways from those of Southern Baptists generally,” but Wills fails to note that the seminary, even in its high Calvinism days, had always been out of step with grass-roots Baptists.

President Roy Honeycutt “resisted the control by the popular majority [of those attending the annual conventions] and when resistance failed, he obstructed.”

When I total the tenures of these failed leaders and add the silent years of the Civil War and the sullied years of Crawford Toy, I find that for fully three-quarters of the history now being celebrated, or exactly 137 years, Southern Seminary is contaminated by

that cluster of ideological diseases known as Arminianism, modernism and liberalism.

That leaves only 37 years of theological righteousness. Such, it seems, is Wills’ assessment of the administrators, scholars, students, benefactors and trustees who built the school into the world-class theological university with multiple schools and degrees that it became during the 20th century.

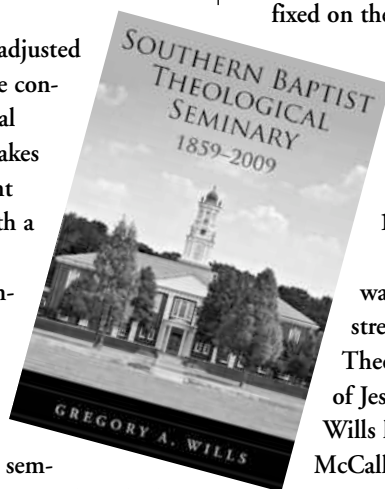
This consistent and not-so-subtle denigration of so much institutional history stands in stark contrast to the words spoken by the only living former president, Duke K. McCall at the sesquicentennial celebration held in Alumni Chapel on June 24, 2009. A few minutes after Wills was recognized as the author of this important book, McCall was honored with gifts, ovations and the naming of the newly constructed Sesquicentennial Pavilion in his honor.

In his remarks, McCall affirmed the providential leadership of God throughout the history of the seminary including the current leadership. All “have had their hearts fixed on the kingdom of God,” he said. In “a spirit of gratitude and pride and history,” he called upon all alumni, in spite of theological disagreements, “to rally around her as a present on her 150th birthday.”

This, McCall said, is a way of adding “an ounce of new strength to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary” in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord! If only Wills had as generous a spirit as McCall.

Needless to say, Wills’ treatment of a long and illustrious history of a great institution is both troubling and disappointing. By framing the history in a theological way, Wills is forced to omit or ignore so much of what was good, and beautiful, and memorable; it did not bear upon his pre-determined thesis. Many people will share my sadness at this treatment of the school that has meant so much to so many.

Most of the space in this sesquicentennial history is given to detailed accounts of controversies, heresies and troubles: the



forced resignations of Crawford Toy in 1879 and William Whitsitt in 1898, the evolution controversy of the 1920s and the historical-critical controversy of the 1940s, the dismissal of 13 professors in 1959, the apostasy issue with Dale Moody and the infallibility issue with Bill Hull in the 1970s and 1980s, and finally the inerrancy battle beginning in 1973 and culminating in the election of Albert Mohler.

These are presented in some detail, with great accuracy of detail, often drawing upon what appears to be new sources, especially personal letters. But even these treatments are problematic.

Take the Whitsitt matter, for instance. Just a few months ago a major biography of Whitsitt was published, *W.H. Whitsitt: The Man and the Controversy* (2009). Author James H. Slatton, had access to restricted Whitsitt materials unavailable to Wills.

Not surprisingly, Slatton's portrait of Whitsitt is strikingly different from that offered by Wills. Slatton uses the material to give a never-before-seen inside look at the way the seminary faculty felt about many things, including President James Petigru Boyce; it was not always as positive as the institutional hagiography, so dependent upon the biography of Boyce by Broadus.

Wills turns the table on Whitsitt, using limited access to these frank observations to demonstrate the unsavory character of Whitsitt himself rather than to shed new light on the culture of the fledgling seminary. In other words, Boyce escapes unscathed and Whitsitt emerges even more damaged than before: according to Wills, that is.

Dale Moody is another example of skewed presentation. Moody earned two degrees at Southern Baptist Seminary and taught there as a world-renown theologian for almost four decades. He was a popular preacher and teacher; for years, students lined

up early to register for his classes. He was influential in the international dialogue on Christian doctrine, in both the Baptist World Alliance and the World Council of Churches. His book *The Word of Truth* (1981) is one of the major contributions to the Baptist theological tradition.

For many students, Moody was a man of wisdom, kindness and generosity, as well as wide learning. Yet, the only part of his long and rich gospel ministry that Wills deems worthy of attention is his teaching on apostasy and the disturbance that caused in some quarters of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Moody, whom Wills never met, is presented as one of the great villains of the school. This is arrogant and unrighteous. Wills has a great gift of looking past roses to point out thorns.

Wills' attention to the various controversies that have touched the seminary from time to time prevents him from describing many things that would have made this volume a more useful survey of a century and a half of institutional life. He could have, for instance, given attention to the seminary students.

Wills ignores what is commonly known as social history: the changing demographics of the student body and their social and spiritual life. Campus worship is never mentioned unless it happens to occur as part of a controversy. The contributions of seminary musicians and actors are ignored. Faculty publishing unrelated to controversy is overlooked (except for Broadus' book on preaching and Robertson's book on Greek). It is as if life does not matter, only ideas.

Largely absent from this history is any attention to the campus itself. Surely one prominent element of the sesquicentennial celebration is the impressive and pleasant campus of the seminary. Wills does mention Mullins' decision to relocate to the Lexington

Road property and even names the New York architect, but the bulk of the treatment centers on the financial aspects. Missing is any reference to the campus as a whole and the many historic buildings.

He fails even to describe the building of Boyce Centennial Library as part of the centennial celebration in 1959. Many specialty spaces fondly remembered by faculty and students are ignored: the Billy Graham Room, the archaeological museum, the prayer rooms, the gardens, the Levering Gymnasium, Alumni Chapel, the Josephus Bowl, Seminary Village, and the many on-campus rooms for singles, couples and families. Surely, some of the most fascinating and historic properties of the seminary are the three burial plots at Cave Hill cemetery, but Wills makes no mention of these.

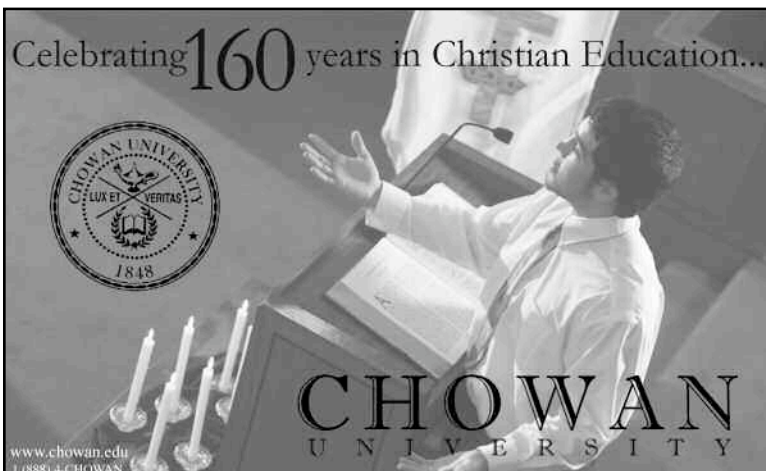
Wills describes the actions of Boyce and Broadus during the Civil War, and this is good; but how was the seminary affected by World War I and II, the flood of 1937 and the tornado of 1974? Wills is silent. Were there no heroic responses to any of these crises, or is heroism limited to resisting the influence of Arminians, heretics and liberals?

Other important elements of institutional life receive only a line or two. The seminary's prominent place in the local community, the wider world of Baptists, and in the even larger arena of Christian ecumenical relations is devalued, as are 150 years of service by seminary students in regional congregations. Everything related to women is inconsequential: their role as wives, students, scholars, employees, donors and advocates; this is decidedly a man's book.

Only two women make the index, both are professors terminated by Mohler. This is a sad and sexist read of a noble tradition.

To read this book, a stranger would never know of the wonderful friendships, delightful conversations and rooms full of

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laughter that made seminary life for many a truly joyous time. All Wills gives us is conflict. He describes a depressed and dysfunctional place but at the same time tells us that its leaders and scholars turned down repeated offers from other institutions. Apparently Wills is not aware of this puzzling inconsistency in his portrait of the school.

The eight years I spent on campus (1974-1982) are described in the chapters titled "Losing Trust" and "Declaring Holy War." These chapter titles successfully suppress the happy experience of so many of us — students, faculty and administrators.

Like generations before us, we have fond memories of our days at Southern Seminary: pleasure and happiness, exploration and discovery, mission and ministry, prayer and praise, and yes, even lean times and hard work.

In the current issue of *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, Timothy George writes warmly of his experience at the school during this same period. But Wills was never a student at the school, so all he knows is a redacted version of what it was like. How sad.

One sweet and splendid gift of God that has no place in this portrait of Southern Seminary is joy. Surely Wills himself finds great pleasure in his work on the historic campus; does he assume that those who preceded him did not?

He gives no hint that anybody else found any delight in serving the Lord through the seminary. This predictable omission, of course, confirms the stereotypical image of the stern Calvinist, bent on conformity to a creed but at wits end when confronted with pleasure.

In the end, all Wills sees in the fascinating and multi-faceted history of Southern Seminary is controversy; he is fixated on culprits; he is obsessed with blame. Yes, his

descriptions of these are detailed and interesting, though often in a voyeuristic sort of way. It is his selection of which facts to report and his interpretation of those facts that are troubling.

Throughout the book Wills juxtaposes conservative and progressive, orthodox and liberal, denominational control and individual ambition. In fact, one theme that runs through his interpretation of institutional history is the tension between freedom and authority. Wills consistently explains how the various controversies arise from a disregard for authority: founding authority, creedal authority, presidential authority, and always, convention authority.

This exaltation of convention authority or convention control raises foundational issues of which Wills seems oblivious. Do conventions control institutions? He writes in one place that "Kentucky Baptists control Campbellsville University." I wonder how the president, trustees and faculty at that institution feel about this assertion of control?

Is there not a difference between, on the one hand, a convention controlling an institution and, on the other, an institution serving a convention? Does not an institution exist along side of a convention, fulfilling its mission to lead and to serve? Is not the convention as dependent upon the institution as the institution is upon the convention? Is it not a partnership? Is not an institution the repository of the intellectual capital of a tradition, and because of that, does it not have the responsibility to understand, articulate, and critique the tradition? If the scholars of our institutions are not free to critique our own tradition, to whom is this task assigned?

William Whitsitt, one of the chief villains in Wills' narrative, illustrates the role of faithful scholars helping a tradition grapple with its shadow side. He was professor of history at the seminary in the 19th century

and in 1895 was elected president. He was dismissed for advocating a version of Baptist history at odds with his constituency, especially those known as Landmarkers.

Today, all scholars including those teaching at Southern Seminary teach the version of Baptist history advocated by Whitsitt. Most historians use Whitsitt as a case study in how a denominational scholar can critique a denominational tradition. Wills fails even to suggest such a positive outcome; it would, of course, disturb his grand theological framework.

Ironies abound in this history of Southern Seminary. Wills seems oblivious to the wine-loving, slave-owning, Confederate-sympathizing founder of Southern Seminary; all that matters is that Boyce was a Calvinist.

The seminary's complicity in a slave economy — all the founding professors were slave owners — never suggests to Wills that some things about the institutional founders should be repudiated. Indeed, when Wills describes the campus visit, many years later, of the great Martin Luther King Jr., it is presented as a troubling thing and a slap in the face of Southern Baptists rather than a courageous repudiation of the racist heritage of the seminary.

Second, Wills holds together as the two great values of the Seminary, a commitment to Calvinism and the submission to convention control: Calvin reigns and the people rule.

But from the very beginning to this very day, Southern Baptists have not been five-point Calvinists. Even Boyce himself complained 150 years ago that all his students were "rank Arminians." Most Southern Baptists today are one-point Calvinists.

In other words, the eras of Southern Seminary that Wills extols as the paradigm of faithfulness (1859-1891 and 1995-2009) are precisely those times when the school advanced a theological vision out of step with

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the majority of its constituencies!

Oxford University Press rarely publishes institutional histories, a fact noted by President Mohler at the Sesquicentennial Celebration in Alumni Chapel. Their collaboration with this book is a testimony to the history and stature of the seminary, a position largely attained by the 20th century institutional leaders and scholars that led the school in its long century of wilderness wanderings.

This leaves Wills apparently ungrateful for the opportunity afforded by those who have gone before him. I am reminded of the warning given to the Hebrew people about entering the Promised Land: "I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build. You live in them and you eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant."

So when Wills concludes the book by saying the school is once again the school of Boyce, what exactly does he mean? He cannot refer to its substantial and beautiful campus, its magnificent and well-managed library, its many and varied schools and programs, its international reputation or its diverse (and dispersed!) student body.

In all of these ways, Southern Seminary

is a school shaped not by Boyce but by his supposedly less-than-orthodox successors. Wills refers, he says in the final chapter, to "the recovery of evangelical orthodoxy," the repudiation of "Arminianism and false teaching," the "overthrow of liberalism," the "defense of inerrancy," and the return of the school to "denominational control."

There will be many, including me, who challenge whether these descriptions do justice to the many learned and godly men and women who labored at Southern Seminary or whether they constitute an illegitimate and erroneous assessment of all that was good and grand during a century at Southern Seminary.

There is no subtitle to this new history of a school beloved by so many, including me; it is a campus I still visit on a regular basis. So I offer this addition to the title as a way of summarizing my reading of this learned, useful but ultimately unsatisfying history of my alma mater: *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1859-2009: Creation, Fall & Redemption.* **BT**

—Dwight A. Moody, executive director of the Academy of Preachers, received his M.Div. and Ph.D. degrees from Southern Seminary.

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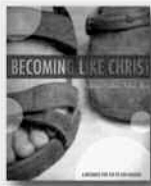
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the lighter side

All in the Baptist family

By Brett Younger

It isn't easy being Baptist. I've asked non-Baptist ministers to preach at our church about 10 times. The conversation goes something like this:

"You want a Methodist/Disciple/Presbyterian/fill-in-the-blank to preach at a Baptist church?"

"Yes, that's why I asked you."

"I've never preached at a Baptist church. Can I borrow your overalls?"

While many Baptist churches are filled with intelligent, sophisticated people like you and me, Baptists as a group don't have the most cultured reputation. I'd like to complain, but it's hard for even lifelong Baptists to know how to categorize us. Baptists are a mixed bag.

Politically speaking, we're all over the map. Jesse Helms was a Baptist, but so is Jesse Jackson. Tom DeLay is a Baptist, as is Al Gore. If that's not confusing enough, two of four Baptist presidents (Warren Harding and Bill Clinton) had scandals that embarrassed the WMU, but the other two (Jimmy Carter and Harry Truman) would make fine presidents of the Brotherhood.

Contrary to some opinions, Baptists not only read, but also

write. John Bunyan (*Pilgrim's Progress*), Oswald Chambers (*My Utmost for His Highest*), Will Campbell (*Brother to a Dragonfly*) and John Grisham (*A Time to Kill* — not a particularly Baptist book, but it sold pretty well) are Baptists.

Preacherwise, you can pick and choose who you're proud to say is a Baptist: Martin Luther King Jr., Billy Graham, Walter Rauschenbusch, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Rick Warren, Charles Haddon Spurgeon and Jerry Falwell. (Picture those seven sharing a table at the prayer breakfast.)

Johnny Cash was a Baptist — enough to put to rest the idea that Baptists are dull. If there's a Baptist choir in heaven, it will be amazing: Aretha Franklin, Diana Ross, Whitney Houston, Donna Summer, Mahalia Jackson, Bill Haley, Buddy Holly, Otis Redding, Al Green, Chuck Berry, George Jones, Roy Orbison, Hank Williams Sr., (I'm guessing Hank Jr. doesn't make it to church most Sundays, but I could be wrong) and Gladys Knight (no word on how many Pips are Baptists). Louis Armstrong can play the trumpet, Glen Campbell the guitar, and

my church's own Van Cliburn the piano.

Baptists may be better musicians than athletes, but Joe Frazier, Jim Brown, Reggie White, Payne Stewart and Maury Wills were all Baptists.

Queen Latifah is a Baptist (try picturing her as G.A. Queen Latifah with scepter). Baptist parents can decide if they want to tell their children that Jessica Simpson is a Baptist. Harry Longbaugh, *The Sundance Kid*, was a Baptist. (I realize he was a bank robber, but isn't it encouraging that Robert Redford played a Baptist?)

Ava Gardner was a Baptist, but Howard Hughes wasn't. Sometimes I wish more Baptists were rich like Baptist John D. Rockefeller.

Chuck Norris could have starred in *Walker, Texas Baptist*. You can argue that DeForest Kelley, Dr. "Bones" McCoy on *Star Trek*, is the best-known Baptist of the 25th century. I like to think that the Baptist in Kevin Costner is responsible for *Field of Dreams*, and that during *Waterworld* he wasn't going to church much. Kevin was directed by a Baptist, Ron Shelton, in *Bull Durham*, a movie my Baptist mother would not want me to see.

Imagine throwing a "Baptists Only" party and having this crowd show up: Pat Robertson, Bill Moyers, Sam Rayburn, Trent Lott, Anita Bryant, Clarence Thomas, Marian Wright Edelman, Marian Anderson, Gene Autry, Kris Kristofferson and Eddie Murphy.

Some historians claim that Czar Alexander I of Russia was secretly a Baptist. If he was and didn't want people to know, it's understandable. Our family is hard to explain. **BT**

EDITOR'S NOTE: Brett Younger, former pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, is now preaching professor at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology. This column that appeared in the January 2006 issue of Baptists Today is being reprinted as part a commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the Baptist movement.



Illustration by Scott Brooks

Sherman: Journal ensures multiple viewpoints

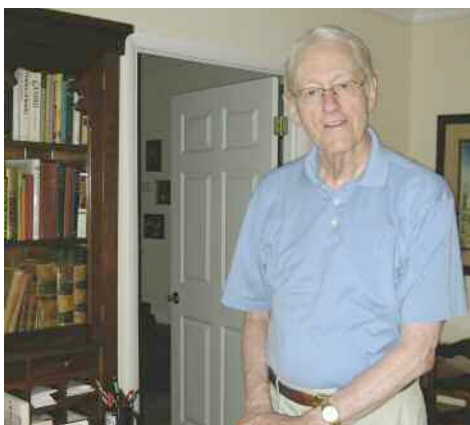
Cecil E. Sherman has been a respected leader in Baptist life before and since the term “moderate Baptist” was coined in the early 1980s.

His unwavering belief in historic Baptist principles kept him at the forefront of denominational politics for almost two decades. When moderate Baptists formed the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in 1992, they selected Sherman as the first coordinator.

In his recent book, *By My Own Reckoning* (Smyth & Helwys), Sherman details the political controversy from his inside perspective, explaining why it was so important to fight, often in the face of significant odds, for control of the Southern Baptist Convention.

During a conversation at his Richmond home, he shared why he feels it is still important that Baptists remember the struggle, the events and the reasons the split occurred.

“Some people don’t want to learn this history,” he said casually. “That is a dark chapter in our past, so they say, ‘Let it go.’ But, I think that’s a mistake. If you don’t know why we separated from the SBC, you are going to have some disconnect and disjointed ideas of who we are and where we ought to go. We are not the same as we were then, but we are connected to who we were



then. We need to remember and appreciate our history.”

The native Texan accepts that the Baptist ideal of freedom is hard to keep. He says it is easier “to insist on uniformity and to yell about the situation” than to insist on freedom and practice it.

“Part of our Baptist freedom is letting someone say something you don’t want said or say something even when you don’t agree with it,” he said.

In an earnest tone, Sherman pointed out: “I am not separated from the SBC because I am ‘liberal’ — although they would be glad to tell you I am. I am separated because I don’t like people silencing arguments that need to be heard.”

Sherman remembers clearly the changes to the SBC in the 1980s when “one institution at a time, one seminary at a time, a mission board at a time, and finally the Executive Committee and the Sunday School

Board, as it was called then, came under the control of the people who were taking over the SBC.”

“Their attitude was to spin the news ... There were things they wanted talked about, and there were things they didn’t want talked about. And when you have that agenda, you don’t get the news. You get the news they want to tell you.”

Such restrictions led to the founding of *SBC Today* (now *Baptists Today*) in 1983. Realizing the importance of having a publication committed to covering Baptist life without stricture from the denomination, Sherman and others assisted founding editor Walker Knight in raising funds to launch the autonomous news journal.

“Walker was a fair, curious, knowledgeable guy who wasn’t after the spin,” said the former pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., and Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. “He was after the news.”

Through the years, *Baptists Today* has remained an independent presence that makes comment on Baptist life, said Sherman.

“There needs to be a voice for all sides,” he said. Sherman sees *Baptists Today* as being that needed voice.

“It is important to keep both sides informed and honest ...” he said, “and, somebody who can comment on our identity, the direction we ought to be moving and the things we ought to be doing is needed.” **BT**

Baptists Today is now conducting a capital campaign to provide both operating funds and a strong endowment to secure the autonomous news journal’s future. Various giving designations are available including several naming opportunities. For information on making a gift to *Baptists Today* or including the news journal in your estate planning, contact Keithen M. Tucker, Development and Marketing Director, at (478) 330-5613 or ktucker@baptiststoday.org.

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A family tradition

ABC President Mary Armacost Hulst builds bridges

DENVER — Entering the home stretch of a two-year term as president of American Baptist Churches USA, Mary Armacost Hulst, pastor emeritus of Denver's Calvary Baptist Church, is carrying on a family tradition of leadership.

Her father, George Armacost, was president of Baptist-related University of the Redlands in California for 25 years. Her mother, Verda, served as president of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, now known as International Ministries.

Mary and her brother, Peter, who served as ABC president in 1973-1974, are the only siblings to have shared that title. Peter was president of three colleges during a distinguished career in education.

"It's an amazing bunch of brothers I have — and two remarkable parents," said Mary in reflecting on her family.

Another brother, Michael, spent 24 years in government roles in the Philippines and Japan before serving as president of the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. And brother Samuel was national president of Bank of America in the 1980s.

So the title of president seems to go well with the Armacost family.

As ABC president (2008-2009), Mary has given leadership to the historic denominational group during a time of ongoing transition. At yearend she will pass the title to Frank Christine Jr., a layman in Second Baptist Church of Los Angeles — but then will assume the role of past president for two more years.

Hulst presided over the recent ABC Biennial in Pasadena, Calif., where delegates came up short of the two-thirds majority needed to pass a major restructuring plan. She didn't take it personally.

"I have been traveling enough to know

that some of the issues that were raised at Biennial have been surfacing for the last year ..." she said. "We have heard the concerns and will go back and figure out the ways we need to address those."

Hulst cited factors she believes kept the proposal from being fully embraced including a new way to handle public witness statements and the increased autonomy for National Ministries and International Ministries.

"We have to go back to work ... (but) I've said a couple of times that I look at that vote as an opportunity to kind of lean into our vision. I think there are things we can still do that are very important in what we proposed."

For one, Hulst sees broad support for making the Biennial look more like a missions summit.

"We will be much more grounded in mission than in some of the legislative discussions that have sometimes taken so much energy and time in our Biennials," she explained. "That doesn't mean there won't still be those opportunities for discussion."

ABC leaders will reconsider the proposal regarding policy statements, she said.

"To be authentically Baptist, there has to be a place for the body to discuss issues that are so important. We have as a Baptist family spoken out on very important issues — civil rights being a huge one of those. We've got to maintain those kinds of opportunities. One of the reasons for (the proposed) change was so we wouldn't have public witness statements, or policy statements as they've been called, that pass by such a narrow majority. They don't seem to represent everybody."

Concerning National Ministries and International Ministries, Hulst said the boards had not developed new

bylaws by the Biennial and some delegates were looking for stronger assurance that the program boards would remain tied to the ABC structure.

"Both of the program boards had agreed to language that would have protected their being connected to the family. I think the delegates simply wanted that guaranteed. I think that was significant."

While commending the team that handled communication of the proposal, Hulst thinks more needs to be done to assure that delegates are well informed.

"I think we have lots of delegates at Biennial who don't rely on technology in the same way. So we have them coming without having completely read everything that is on the CDs that were sent to the pastor of the church. So there was confusion about some of the issues on which they were voting. We'll work on that."

While homosexuality was tied to concerns raised over the proposed changes to adopting and rescinding public witness statements, Hulst believes American Baptists are seeking to avoid further rifts over this controversial issue.

"As I have traveled I have felt that the storm has passed for the denomination, but I know



there are squalls here and there. I think, though, there has been recognition of the deep wounds created by the issue and the departure of the Pacific Southwest Region from ABC and the need now for time and space to heal.”

She added: “I’m not naïve. I know there is tension in some places and a need on the part of the welcoming and affirming churches to sense that there is justice in recognition of who they are and who they have chosen to be. But I do believe the storm has essentially passed because — not that the issue has been solved everywhere — the denomination may have seen how divisive and how hurtful it could be. And, because we are congregational, it was appropriate to recognize local church autonomy.”

The emphasis on freedom that Baptists embrace also makes denominational process more challenging, she admits. But the higher calling she senses is to service.

“We are not called to agree with each other but to love each other. I want to hold out for doing that in better ways. Our brand image is ‘serving as the hands and feet of Christ’ ... that’s something around which we all can gather. It doesn’t cause arguments and division, but living that out is really our call. We can do that with enthusiasm and still have our disagreements.”

Hulst said her local church commitments kept her attention off denominational politics until assuming leadership roles in retirement.

“I was always supportive, and this church has always been very deeply committed to ABC. But because I didn’t know a lot of those ins-and-outs and history, there have been a couple of times that I’ve been blindsided.”

As ABC president, Hulst said she has learned to “read between the lines” to discover that past experiences and hidden agendas are sometimes more important to the process than the issues on the table. But she welcomes the challenges of the diversity that now marks American Baptist life.

“The opportunity is to create the kind of mosaic that is God’s kingdom — that represents all of God’s children ... Now the struggle is figuring out how to do it best.”

Hulst is also eager to join hands beyond her beloved ABC family.

“The New Baptist Covenant was, for me, a breakthrough event,” she said. “It is easier, I think, for ecumenical activity between denominations to happen than it is for Baptists to get together — which saddens me greatly.”

Service in the Baptist World Alliance



(including four years on the General Council) has been important to Hulst too, particularly since her retirement from the pastorate in 2006. She embraces both the challenges and opportunities faced by the diversity found within ABC and BWA.

“I tend to be an optimist, and I love challenges. So I am unwilling to give up on the ways we can find common ground and work together.”

Though born and bred a Baptist, Mary, along with her husband, was a Methodist for 12 years until embraced by Calvary — first as a member and eventually as senior pastor.

“I was restless the whole time because I am really deeply committed as a Baptist — with liberty and freedom as a part of who we are. That identity is evermore important to me, having been in a more hierarchal structure for 12 years.”

The Hulsts joined Calvary at the insistence of their sons who loved the children’s program. It was the beginning of a journey that Mary never imagined.

“Less than a year after we joined I was asked to join the staff as a very part-time children’s worker. I said I’d do that for nine months. That turned into 29 years. I really moved around the offices.”

She describes Calvary — located at one of the busiest crossroads in metro Denver — as “a loving congregation that has enjoyed deep

commitment from multigenerational families” and one deeply committed to denominational and local missions.

“There are tons of local missions projects that we’ve supported, encouraged, begun and moved on to something else. That’s been an important part of who we are.”

After 14 years on the church staff, Hulst was called as interim pastor when her trusted mentor LaRue (Larry) Loughhead retired in 1992 after 23 years.

“It was not my intent to become senior pastor. Midway through that interim, I was asked to apply for the job ... I prepared a preaching tape — a video — and submitted it like everyone else.”

Calvary called her as pastor when having a female in that role was not very common among Baptists.

“I’m sure it was easier because I had been on staff for 14 years and they knew and trusted me. That doesn’t mean I had a unanimous vote because I didn’t. Even those that I learned were in opposition to a woman serving in that position, before very long, became supporters and encouragers. It has been an encouraging congregation. And it’s a place where I find great joy.”

She describes her only pastorate as a “very happy relationship” with the church where she remains involved.

“The retirement party this church gave for me was stunning as a sense of love and affirmation. Everyone should have that kind of sendoff into retirement. It’s a wonderful way to close a particular chapter and to open another.”

That next chapter includes leadership in ABC and BWA, as well as in ecumenical and interfaith interaction. She also advocates for women ministers following in her footsteps.

As a pastor, Hulst said she had to find peace with the fact that work is never done and to balance different needs and expectations.

“When I became pastor I think there was probably an expectation that a woman couldn’t do it — on the part of a number of folk. So there was added pressure to prove something, I suppose. I’ve always felt that I worked hard to make it easier for the next generation of women.”

She expresses deep appreciation to her church family and her late mentor who taught her many practical aspects of pastoral ministry.

“I love the church — and I love being a Baptist,” she affirmed again. **BT**

Major Moments

Global Baptist story highlighted

EDE, THE NETHERLANDS — As global Baptists celebrated 400 years of history during the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) annual gathering, two special sessions highlighted significant markers of Baptist life in the BWA's six regions.

BAPTISTS IN EUROPE

Peter Morton, of Spurgeon's College in London, focused on Thomas Helwys, Anne Steele and Johann Oncken, who he said illustrated key themes in European Baptist history.

Helwys and John Smyth founded the first Baptist church in 1609, in the city of Amsterdam. In 1612, Helwys and a few followers returned to England and organized the first Baptist church on English soil, at Spitalfields. That same year he published *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, which challenged the king's right to interfere with an individual's religion. Helwys was arrested and thrown into prison, where he died a few years later.

Helwys' call for religious liberty was "no postmodern mushy of toleration" in which anything goes, Morton said. Rather, he emphasized the uniqueness of Christ, the priority of evangelism and the advantages of Baptist distinctives while arguing that no matter what one's beliefs, it is not the role of the king or state to compel people regarding their religious conscience.

Steele, an 18th century poet and hymn-writer, knew a life shaped by intense suffering, but expressed profound faith despite her pain, so that her hymns gained wide popularity in the early 19th century. Steele's hymns express an utter dependence on God was deeply experiential, reflecting the experiential nature of Baptist faith, Morton said.

Morton also mentioned Oncken, a German Baptist who was baptized in 1834 and helped organize the first German Baptist church, in Hamburg, the following day. Serving as pastor, Oncken integrated evangelism and social action, offering his church's facilities for public use and building bridges that led to a sharp decline in persecution and greater appreciation for Baptists, Morton said.

Helwys, Steele and Oncken exhibited "key Baptist principles to which European Baptists have sought to aspire," Morton said, principles of radical commitment to Christ, patient endurance under persecution, a commitment to religious freedom, trust in the scriptures as God's word and a passion for holistic mission.

THE CARIBBEAN

Horace Russell, from Jamaica, said Baptists in the Caribbean must be understood in the contexts of slavery and migration. George Leile, a freed slave from America, came to Jamaica in 1793, and other freed slaves went as missionaries to the Bahamas, with other works following in later years.

The early missionaries came out of the experience of an evangelical revival that targeted people of African descent, Russell said, but did not leave them free to practice their faith as they wished. In 1834, slavery was abolished in Jamaica, making all slaves apprentices, though still not fully free.

Baptists in Jamaica invited the British Missionary Society to assist in the work, and a theological college was formed in 1843 to aid the Caribbeans in developing an educated clergy.

A significant contribution of Caribbean Baptists has been the recognition that ministry has to do "with development of the human person as a whole," Russell said, with church being "a place where people could develop."

The Caribbean emphasis on missions and the important role of women's work continues a holistic ministry of health and salvation as two sides of the same coin, he said.

ASIAN BAPTISTS

Ken Manley spoke on the development of Baptists in Asia and the Pacific, the largest of the BWA's six regions, and home to more than half of the world's people. Most Baptists in Asia and the Pacific trace their roots to the witness of Baptists from Britain or North America, he said, beginning in 1793 with William Carey's arrival in India.

Manley surveyed the beginnings and extent of Baptist work in countries across Asia and the Pacific, noting at several points how mission work in places such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Indonesia began in earnest after missionaries were forced out of China in 1949 and sought new fields of ministry.

Manley also pointed to indigenous leaders and spontaneous revivals that contributed to the growth and vitality of Baptist work in Asia and the Pacific. Baptists there, who serve "in some of the poorest and most heavily populated nations on earth, with their amazing tapestry of religious beliefs and political systems are an integral part of the global Baptist story," he said.

FERTILE AFRICA

Solomon Ishola, general secretary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, spoke on the growth of Baptists in Africa. Despite their many differences, Africans share many of the



Timothy George



Ademola Ishola



Ken Manley



Dinorah Mendez



Peter Morton



Horace Russell

same socio-economic realities, he said. In addition, “Africans are generally and incurably religious,” Ishola said, a trait that permeates every facet of life, and has “provided fertile soil for the Gospel to take root.”

Baptist work in Africa did not begin as intentional mission work, he said, but as freed slaves from Britain and America returned to colonize Sierra Leone (1792) and Liberia (1822). The Baptist presence had little contact with indigenous peoples, however, who they considered inferior, Ishola said.

The migration of German and English settlers brought the Baptist witness to South Africa in the early 1800s, but the exploitation of blacks by the white settlers and the resulting system of apartheid led to sharp divisions among white and black Baptists that are just beginning to be healed, Ishola said.

The first missionary to Nigeria was Thomas Brown, sent by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1850. It was a painful irony, Ishola observed, that a convention begun because of its support for slavery “set the pace in sending missionaries to the relatives of the slaves they were still keeping.”

When most of the American missionaries returned home during the American Civil War, Ishola said, national Baptists assumed greater leadership, which led to discord when the missionaries returned.

Ishola noted a more recent round of conflict when Southern Baptist missionaries withdrew from their traditional fields of work as the International Mission Board began its “New Directions” strategy. The loss of funding and resources for cherished ministries was painful, Ishola said, but the experience ultimately helped African Baptists grow and take more responsibility for their own future.

A lesson to be learned, Ishola emphasized, is that cooperative partnership that leads to self-sufficiency is a more effective mission strategy than paternalism that leads to dependency.

LATIN AMERICA

Dinorah Méndez, of Mexican Baptist Seminary, spoke about Baptist growth and issues of concern in Latin America, where Protestant mission work began with the arrival of Scotsman Diego Thompson in 1818. Beginning in Argentina, Thompson distributed Bibles throughout Latin America as an agent of the British Bible Society.

Méndez reviewed the beginnings of Baptist mission work in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Brazil, Chile and Argentina, emphasizing how early Latin American Baptists had to struggle for religious liberty because of the entrenched nature of Catholicism in the area.

Following the Spanish conquests of the 16th century, Catholicism became deeply ingrained not only in the culture, but also in the government of Latin American countries. The lack of separation between church and state led to intolerance and physical persecution of minority groups such as Baptists, Méndez said.

While some Baptists have hopes of better relations with the Catholic Church, Méndez said efforts at rapprochement are generally led by those who have not experienced Catholicism in the Latin American context, where such relations are viewed with greater distrust.

Conflict with Catholics can't just be swept away, Méndez said: “We must keep alive an awareness of the particularities of context, and how the struggle for religious liberty continues where the Catholic church continues to dominate.”

In response to restrictive governments and Catholic domination, Baptists' belief in free will and congregational government has fostered opportunities for freedom not experienced elsewhere, Méndez said, “an alternative model from which many democratic ideals were nurtured.”

Méndez said Neo-Pentecostalism and

post-denominationalism are current threats to the Baptist churches in Latin America. In many churches, she said, Pentecostals have gained enough influence to lead congregations away from their Baptist identity and from Baptist distinctives such as the separation of church and state.

Poverty, inequality and religious confusion add to the challenges, Méndez said. Even so, Latin American Baptists continue to grow and are becoming increasingly involved in sending out missionaries of their own.

Baptists' 400th anniversary offers Latin American Baptists “an opportunity to recognize our history, to locate ourselves in it, and to appreciate it as valuable,” she said.

NORTH AMERICA

Timothy George, dean of the Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala., traced four major themes in Baptist life through the four centuries Baptists have been present in North America.

The 17th century was marked by a struggle for liberty, George said. Though Puritans had been persecuted in England, when they came to power in New England, they set up an “ecclesiocracy” and persecuted others, whipping and even hanging those who proclaimed a gospel contrary to their own beliefs.

Roger Williams and other early Baptists were key voices in support of religious liberty, but the price of religious freedom is eternal vigilance, George said. Massachusetts retained an established church until 1833, and persecution continued in Virginia through the Revolutionary period.

Revival was a primary theme in the 18th century, George said. The Philadelphia Association spread its influence through many of the colonies, but the fires of revivalism were more of an indigenous movement sparked by George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards and others.

“New Light Baptists” were among those

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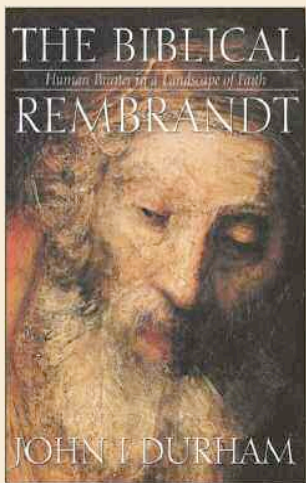
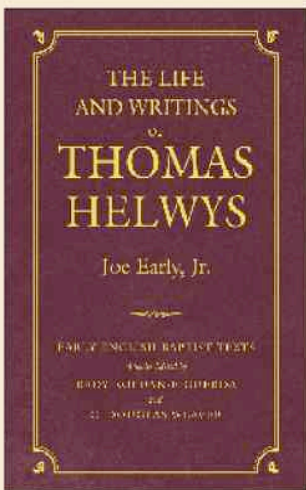
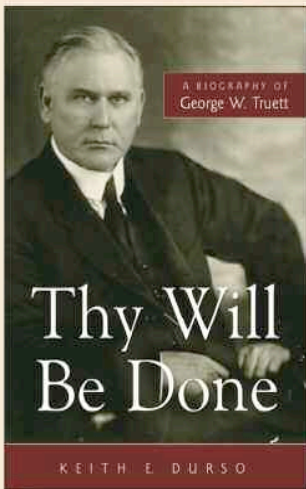


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to emerge from the movement. Led by Shubal Stearns and Daniel Marshall, their influence moved south into North Carolina and beyond.

Baptist piety of the time was a corporeal experience, George said. Common Baptist rites such as baptism by immersion, receiving communion, the laying on of hands, the right hand of fellowship, and foot washing were all “bodily expressions of faith.”

George said the 19th century was marked by the theme of mission. Many missionary efforts were begun, along with supportive organizations such as Women’s Mite Societies and the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

As mission societies multiplied, so did challenges, George said. Landmarkism promoted a truncated and isolated form of Baptistness, while anti-missions movements “were a recrudescence of hyper-Calvinism.” The issue of slavery led to division between northern and southern Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. Yet, George said, “in that cauldron of oppression was born the seeds of revival among African Americans.”

The 20th century was marked by the theme of witness, George said, with influential voices ranging from Walter Rauschenbusch’s

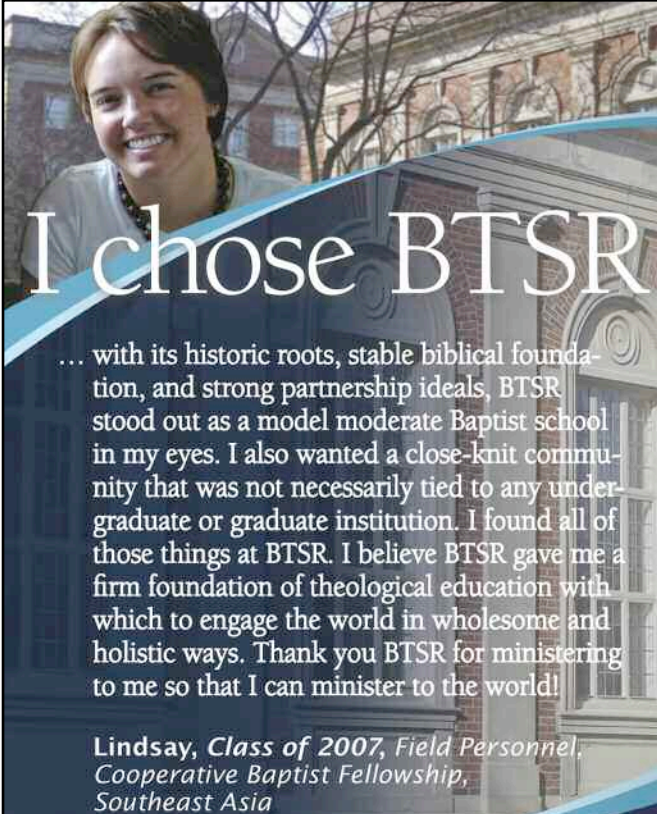
and Helen Barrett Montgomery’s calls for social responsibility to Annie Armstrong’s and Lottie Moon’s fervent appeals for mission support, to the preaching of George Truett, Carlisle Marney, Billy Graham, Martin Luther King and many others.

Despite those clear voices, George said, “the witness was not unsullied.” Tensions remain between sectarianism and ecumenism, and some Baptists still tend “to the vociferous end” of being schismatic and sectarian.

As North American Baptists face the 21st century, they face the threat of a post-denominational world “where labels have little value,” and where “the deepest divisions are not between denominations, but within denominations,” he said.

Baptists in North America must continue to struggle with the question of religion’s role in the public square and what religious liberty really means, George said — and they must also come to terms with the fact that the center of gravity of the global church has shifted from the northern to the southern hemisphere, where issues are often different.

In pondering what theme might characterize the 21st century, George said: “I hope it will be humility and hope.” **BT**



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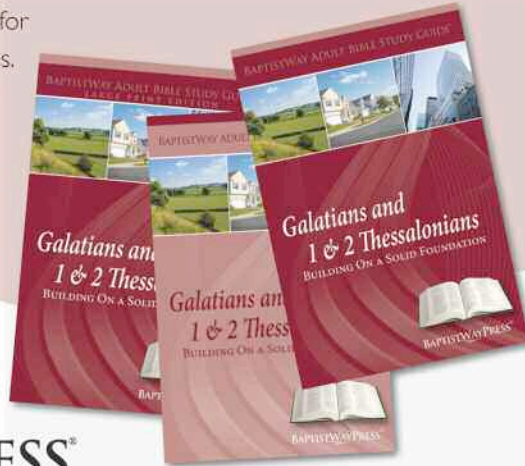
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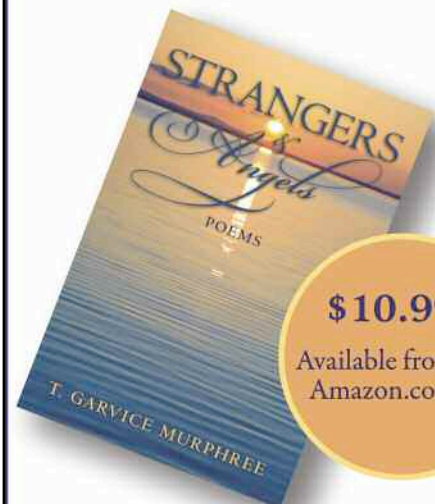
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STRANGERS & ANGELS

A NEW BOOK OF POEMS

A reflection on life's beginnings and endings by retired Baptist minister **Garvice Murphree** – Mississippi native, Navy pilot, and minister of education for over 40 years to churches in South Carolina, Alabama and Tennessee.



Bless Arthur

By John Pierce
posted July 16, 2009
www.bteditor.blogspot.com

Arthur Blessitt quickly became one of the more recognizable figures of the "Jesus Movement" (hippie Christians) of the late '60s and early '70s. He helped to make Christianity cool for young people of that era — like me.

We put his little round "Smile, God loves you!" stickers on our cloth-covered "Good News for Modern Man" New Testaments with stick figures. Along with "One Way" T-shirts and Ichthus medallions around our necks, we were styling for Jesus.

Of course, Blessitt is best known for walking around with a large cross ... and walking, and walking, and walking, and walking...

My only personal encounter was brief and by accident. In an oddly fitting event, the Southern Baptist Convention held its 1989 annual meeting in Las Vegas.

Blessitt was invited to address a pre-convention evangelism conference. At the

conclusion, Blessitt took up his cross and headed down the Vegas Strip with hundreds of preachers in tow — handing out New Testaments and Gospel tracts to suspects like me in non-preacher attire.

I was headed from my hotel pool to the mall at that time in search of air conditioning and a Schlotzsky's original sandwich. Getting there was nearly impossible due to Blessitt's followers attempting to gang-save me several times.

While Blessitt has received his share of praise and criticism (some well deserved) over the decades, I'm not standing in judgment. He may be odd, but such could be said of most Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist. Undeniably, however, he is persistent.

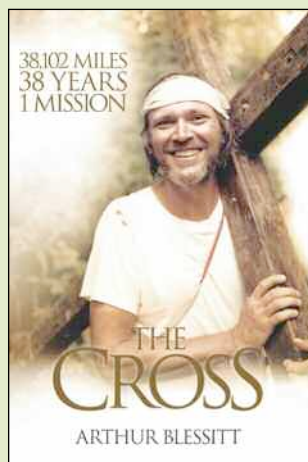
From Christmas 1969 through June 2008, he walked more than 38,000 miles with his familiar large wooden cross. For those interested in the details, he has writ-

ten a book about his journeys titled *The Cross*.

"One of the privileges of carrying a cross around the world is meeting all kinds of beautiful people," said Blessitt in an interview related to the release of his book. Then he added the following explanation:

"Just as Jesus related to all people, I have tried to do that myself as I carry his cross. In our world today, it seems few of us desire or are able to relate to various kinds of people. I've had encounters with world-famous people like Pope John Paul II, Jimmy Carter and Yasser Arafat. I've also shared meals with the poorest of the poor, the homeless. I've slept in remote villages where mine was the first white face any of the people had seen. And always, I have been awed by the beauty and joy of the children. In God's view (and in mine), all of these people are equally valued and equally loved."

Good point, Arthur. Makes our "normal" lives seem quite boring in contrast. Walk on. **BT**



Tweeting the wall

By Tony W. Cartledge
posted July 24, 2009
www.tonymcartledge.com

On a recent trip to Israel, we explained to participants the tradition of folding written prayers and tucking them into a crack or crevice in Jerusalem's famous Western Wall (also known as the "Wailing Wall," or in Hebrew, the "Kotel"). The site is part of a retaining wall for the Temple Mount where several courses of stone date back to Herod's day, when the Second Temple was remodeled and expanded.

The wall is as close as Jews can get to the now-destroyed temple, which was the seat of Israel's religious life. Jews and Christians alike have found it meaningful to leave their prayers there, hoping perhaps that God will give them special attention.

Several of our students and others placed a prayer in the wall during the visit: one brought a one-page list of all his church members, and found a crack large enough for the entire sheet.



I read that someone has set up a Twitter feed so people anywhere can tweet a prayer to a special service that will print them out and stuff them into the wall. Those prayers, of course, will be limited to the 140 characters of typical tweets, so they won't be full-page petitions.

Prayers are cleaned from the wall twice each year, before Passover in the spring and the Jewish New Year in the fall, then buried on a mountain close to Jerusalem. Jews believe that anything containing God's name should never be destroyed, so even government documents are buried just in case they should contain God's name.

If you have a yearning to tuck a prayer into the Western Wall, but don't have a trip to Jerusalem on your itinerary, you can tweet your prayer to @TheKotel. **BT**

Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God..."



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commentary

Meet my friend Eddie

By Tony W. Cartledge

One of the best things about attending each year's annual gathering of the Baptist World Alliance is that I get to spend a little time with Eddie Enim, an impressive pastor-leader who lives near the coast of southern Ghana.

I first met Eddie through the BWA's "Emerging Leaders Network," a program designed to encourage and cultivate younger pastors and other ministers. They meet for training and encouragement at the annual gathering, including some time with an appointed mentor.

I was assigned to serve as Eddie's mentor, but so far I've learned much more from him than he has from me.

Eddie is not particularly young — he's 53. Nearly three decades ago he started a church in Winneba, on Ghana's southern coast, and went on to launch a ministry called "Coast for Christ." Through the years the ministry has planted churches and ministries at a surprising pace, including 16 in the past year, some more than 100 miles away in Cote d'Ivoire.

There's also a small hospital/clinic and several mobile clinics staffed by volunteers, an elementary-junior high school with 300 students, and a training school for future pastors.

Eddie is particularly concerned about assisting the poor villages in his part of the country with economic development. So, he started a fishing ministry, a sewing ministry, and a credit union that provides micro-loans to women who want to begin a small business. He also raises funds to drill wells, and advocates for small farmers to get government grants that allow them to move from subsistence farming to more profitable enterprises.

The fishing ministry, which now includes boats at four sites, has a particularly impressive impact. Eddie, who is a master of networking, raised funds to buy long fishing canoes that locals — who couldn't afford a boat — can use.

Each boat carries 25 or more men, who



paddle out to sea with nets in search of tuna, silverfish, snapper, mackerel and herring. Shortly after clearing the shore, the men stop the boat and have a worship service. Eddie has made sure they have life jackets — the only boats around that are equipped — and the bright orange color attracts other boats to come and listen to the service.



After prayer, the men go fishing for many hours and bring their catch back to shore, where some of their wives, along with other women, purchase fish and resell them as a way of generating income. Since families have five to six children on average, Eddie estimates that each boat benefits more than 400 people.

As the Christian fishermen meet other fishermen at sea, they often speak of their faith, which has led new converts to ask for Eddie to send someone to plant a church in their community.

I'm particularly impressed by Eddie's intuitive wisdom. He could have started more churches, he said, but he waits until leaders are developed and in place before beginning something new.

He'll even ask someone willing to

donate the drilling of a well to hold off until he believes the recipient village is ready to appreciate it and take proper care of it. And, he won't accept money for a project unless someone affiliated with the donor comes to participate in the implementation, so they'll feel true ownership in the mission.

While many entrepreneurial ministers want to pile up numbers, Eddie is more interested in training leaders and starting ministries that can become self-sustaining. When I complimented his approach, he said: "I spend a lot of time seeking the face of God and praying for discernment. I strive to be honest and faithful."

Along with his busy ministry schedule, Eddie is also working on a Master of Theology degree from the University of Wales, most of which he can do online. My "mentoring" is largely limited to offering editorial suggestions for each chapter of his thesis, and giving him such encouragement as I can.

I hope you'll pray for Eddie and his work. More than emerging, he is a leader indeed. **BT**

Editor's note: Eddie Enim can be contacted at eddieenim@hotmail.com. The Coast for Christ website is at http://www.fommm.org/Coast_for_Christ.htm.

Road to recovery

Set Free Church breaks the chains of addiction

RIVERSIDE, Mo. (ABP) — Reggie Carter doesn't look like a typical pastor. He sits behind his desk, wearing a black T-shirt and jeans. His Bluetooth mobile-phone headset rests on his ear, allowing him to quickly respond to calls about the church's lawn-care service.

His position at Set Free Church in Riverside, Mo., near Kansas City, doesn't allow for much time behind a desk — because caring for his congregation is a full-time job. Set Free ministers to “the homeless, the addicted, the afflicted, the lost and the hopeless.” One “joins” the church by moving in. And it is one of a very small percentage of congregations that actively works to help people leave the church.

Set Free utilizes a three-phase system to help people turn their lives around, Carter said. The first phase, “The Ranch,” is designed to help individuals “separate from their old lives and begin to focus on God,” he said. For 30 days, residents hand over all of their personal items — including cell phones — and submit to a schedule of daily work and Bible study. “They are completely cut off from society,” Carter said.

“They get one call — we ask that they please call family members to let them know they are safe.”

After the 30-day time period (which may be extended for up to 60 days for those needing extra help) residents move to the “Discipleship/Work Home” phase. During this phase, residents have an equal balance of spiritual study and development of positive work habits, Carter said.

Residents are encouraged to begin to seek employment. As they find jobs, residents are asked to pay program fees to help offset the cost of the ministry. They are also expected to tithe, “teaching them biblical financial responsibility.”

Carter said he encourages residents to stay as long as they need. Since program fees are considerably less than the cost of living elsewhere, remaining at Set Free gives them the opportunity to save money to help them become financially stable.

Staying also helps residents develop the strength and discipline to be on their own. “I advise some to stay a year, maybe,” Carter said. “They gotta know they are strong enough to face trials, and not just take the easy way by using again.”

Carter said 942 individuals were housed by Set Free last year, with 125 graduates and 132 baptisms. “I don't do no saving — God does it,” Carter emphasized, adding that lives are being changed through Set Free.

Carter is passionate about the program — because the program after which it was modeled gave him a new start years ago. His cocaine addiction left him homeless in Los Angeles and eventually landed him in jail.

It was Carter's parole officer who introduced him to Set Free, which started in California in 1993. Carter thought, “I've tried everything in life, why not try this?” So he moved to the “ranch,” expecting chickens and hogs, and instead found a life-changing relationship with God, he said.

Every day, he woke up at 5 a.m. for Bible classes. After completing the first two phases of the Set Free program, he continued on to the third phase for vocational-ministry training. Until that point, if you'd told Carter he

would become a pastor, “I would have laughed at you,” he said. “But God raised me up.”

Set Free has its own ministry-training program that takes five years to complete. Carter worked running the group's ranches in Riverside, Calif., before being asked to move to Riverside, Mo. “It's not been no easy road,” Carter pointed out.

The Missouri congregation is sponsored by Northland Baptist Church in Kansas City and housed at First Baptist Church, Riverside. Set Free Ministries requires a church sponsorship until the church is self-supporting. Residents are housed in an apartment complex just down the road from the church. While the building has space available for both a men's and women's ministry, Set Free doesn't currently have the financial resources to run the women's ministry, Carter said.

The church does run Set Free Christian Lawn Care, using donated equipment to help residents become self-sustaining. “We're praying God would [produce] fruit and let that grow,” Carter said. He is looking for options of work to do during the winter months. He emphasizes that he is thankful for all the volunteers and churches who assist with the ministry. “I thank God for bringing these men and women to help,” he said. “I can't do it alone — God knows that.”

Approximately 20 men go through the Set Free program at a time. As residents are in the program voluntarily, they can also leave any time they choose. “They can say ‘I'm done,’ and leave,” Carter said. “We'll not stop them,” although they do try to help the men think through the decision they are making.

“For every batch of 20 or 40, maybe two devote themselves,” he said. “The only way they can make it is they gotta give up everything, allow God to come in and work everything out.” **BT**



Reggie Carter

“I thank God for bringing these men and women to help.

I can't do it alone — God knows that.” — REGGIE CARTER

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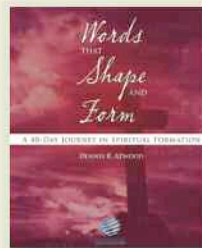
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