



SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee
-- **BAPTIST PRESS**
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

SEP 26 1996

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Art Toalston, Editor
Fax (615) 782-8736
CompuServe ID # 70420,17

September 26, 1996

96-170

TENNESSEE--BSSB trustees honor Draper, applaud 2nd year of gains; photos.
VIRGINIA--Gospel taking fragile root among 'friendless' Kurds; photos.
VIRGINIA--Iraq's Arab majority also desperate for hope; photos.
VIRGINIA--Prayer box for Iraq.
TEXAS--'Crucify dreams of big churches,' go where God leads, Lewis urges.
TENNESSEE--Pace of scientific discovery described as evidence of God.
CALIFORNIA--Science deflating Darwinism, Mormonism, astronomer says.
MISSOURI--Don't invest too much faith in science, observers caution.
ALABAMA--Scientists underscore proper use of advances.

**BSSB trustees honor Draper,
applaud 2nd year of gains**

By Charles Willis

**Baptist Press
9/26/96**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Trustees of the Baptist Sunday School Board celebrated the fifth anniversary of leadership by President James T. Draper Jr., and a second year of positive financial results during their semiannual meeting Sept. 23-25 in Nashville, Tenn.

In a surprise celebration at the beginning of the meeting, Nick Garland, trustee chairman and pastor of First Baptist Church, Broken Arrow, Okla., presided at a program of appreciation and observed that Draper is "setting a course that's going to make the Sunday School Board a leader into the 21st century."

Later in the meeting trustees approved a 1996-97 budget of \$281,423,135 after hearing the church ministries and publishing organization expects a second consecutive year of positive financial results for the 1995-96 year ending Sept. 30. The two years of agency gains follow two years of losses, 1992-94, while the agency restructured to fix problems in its strategic business units.

Included in the anticipated totals is a first positive contribution from the trade publishing division since its establishment in 1991.

The 1996-97 budget represents an increase in revenue of \$20,576,710 or 7.9 percent over the 1995-96 projection of \$260,846,425. Trustees also approved a fixed and intangible asset budget of \$15,148,616 for computer hardware and software, construction and remodeling projects at Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) conference centers and 21 Baptist Book Store projects.

Funds provided from operations (FPO) -- revenue and other income remaining after all product costs and operating expenses and contributions for convention support have been deducted -- is budgeted in 1996-97 for \$12,004,544 or 4.3 percent of revenue.

Ted Warren, executive vice president and chief operating officer, said 1995-96 revenue is expected to fall about \$5.6 million below budget, primarily due to the establishment of a sales return reserve, but approximately \$13 million above 1994-95. Final figures will not be known for several weeks. FPO is expected to total about \$10.6 million or 4.1 percent of revenue.

Warren said the board's business and financial objectives call for FPO of 4-6 percent on a rolling five-year average. At the end of 1993-94, with two consecutive years of losses, the five-year FPO average was -0.1 percent. This improved to +0.1 percent in 1994-95 and is expected to be approximately +0.5 percent in 1995-96. A final \$3.5 million loan is expected to be paid by next September, making the board debt-free.

"Because the board receives no Cooperative Program money, we must generate funds from the sale of products and services to assure stability and fulfill our Southern Baptist Convention ministry assignments," Draper said. "At the Sunday School Board, more money translates into more ministry."

Draper credited growth in all strategic business units and "an outstanding job" of cost containment by employees among factors contributing to financial progress.

--more--

"We are learning how to make changes more quickly," he said. "Established products are continuing to sell well, and new products are making a positive impact with great potential for the future."

Draper said funds from 1995-96 will be used in several areas, including funding for five new assignments the board is receiving from the Southern Baptist Convention as part of the "Covenant for a New Century" restructuring. Assuming responsibility for stewardship education, church history education, capital fund-raising, men's and women's enrichment ministries and Christian schools and home school ministries is expected to cost \$1.25 million the first year.

Additionally, he said good financial results and stabilized paper costs will allow the board to cancel a planned 3 percent across-the-board literature price increase approved by trustees in February. Only the prices of some individual products will increase in instances of improvements in color or paper.

Also, the board will absorb increased costs as it makes a transition in 1997 to seasonal quarters in response to requests from churches. Production costs for the April-May issue will be about 81 percent of a three-month quarter but prices are being held at 67 percent so that churches will pay the same cost per session for dated curriculum.

In celebrating Draper's anniversary, Tom Elliff, Southern Baptist Convention President and pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., described Draper as "epitomizing a servant's heart" and "a true encourager, having purity of motives and clarity of vision."

Morris Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee, added his belief "there is no Southern Baptist of our generation who would be better characterized as 'Mr. Southern Baptist' than Jimmy Draper."

Bill Anderson, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Clearwater, Fla., and chairman of trustees when Draper was elected in 1991, said the agency president has assembled "a good team, putting the right persons in the right places." He said Draper has not been afraid of risk and has looked toward the future.

In responding, Draper said his years at the board have been "difficult and wonderful. The Sunday School Board needs the best that we can all do. This is not a one-person effort."

Trustees devoted an evening session to the official launch of solicitation for a capital campaign to raise a minimum of \$20 million for maintenance, upgrades and expansion at the denomination's two national conference centers, Glorieta and Ridgecrest.

Draper made the first pledge to the campaign, saying he and his wife, Carol Ann, had prayed and discussed the matter and had determined to give \$25,000 over a four-year period.

"This is important to us," he said. "I feel convinced there are people who need time together as families. I believe there are couples who need their marriages renewed and I believe there are people who need time alone to sense the presence of God."

Trustee Al Parks, senior advisor to the president at Dallas Baptist University, said the university will contribute \$1,000, and that he and his wife, Doris, also will give \$1,000.

Urging 100 percent participation by trustees, Garland encouraged trustees to respond with pledges within 10 days.

When the campaign begins outside the board, efforts will be aimed at a limited number of donors able to contribute significant amounts. Funds will not be accepted that otherwise would be given to local churches and the Cooperative Program. Churches and the general SBC membership will not be actively solicited.

Active solicitation is expected to reach a high point from April through July 1997, according to Mike Arrington, BSSB executive director of corporate affairs. Completion of the campaign is anticipated in December 1997, ending the year in which Ridgecrest observes its 90th anniversary and Glorieta observes its 45th year of operation.

At the close of the meeting, trustees approved a motion by Sid Nichols, pastor of Heritage Baptist Church, Dothan, Ala., asking the corporate affairs subcommittee to study the possibility of the BSSB making a cash contribution to the conference center capital campaign and to revisit the possibility annually during the life of the campaign. The motion asked for a report at the February 1997 trustee meeting.

In other matters, trustees:

-- affirmed without opposition the continued exploration of a possible name change for the board and the employment of a consulting firm to assist with the process.

--more--

-- received a report that the board has contacted churches damaged or destroyed by arson in the last 18 months with an offer of free books. So far, 53 churches of many denominations have been contacted, with 23 responding. The board has replaced quarterly church materials and/or hymnbooks for six Southern Baptist churches.

-- authorized the sale of approximately 12 acres of property several miles south of the board on Powell Avenue.

-- approved an adjustment in the price of Home Life magazine from \$1.06 to \$1.11 per month, effective with the January 1997 issue to make the pricing consistent with other similar magazines produced by the church growth group.

-- received a report that shipping and handling charges will be adjusted effective Jan. 1, 1997, from 6 percent with a maximum charge of \$150 to a chart with variable rates based on the amount ordered. The maximum charge will be \$300 for orders of \$5,000 or more. Shipping and handling charges for orders from Baptist Book Stores also will be based on the new chart.

-- received a report on the redesign of the weekly leaflet Adventure into a monthly magazine, Adventure, Inc in September 1997; the redesign of the weekly leaflet More to a monthly magazine More Kid Stuff; and the release in January 1997 of Minister's Family, a quarterly magazine.

-- learned of continued efforts to remodel and relocate Baptist Book Stores, which will bring to 46 the total number of stores in renovated or new facilities in four years.

--30--

(BP) photos (one vertical and one horizontal) to accompany this story are posted in the SBCNet News Room.

Gospel taking fragile root among 'friendless' Kurds

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
9/26/96

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The world seems to have confirmed yet again the old Kurdish saying: "The Kurds have no friends, except the mountains."

The mountains ... and perhaps Christians, who have helped ease the Muslim people's hardships since the Persian Gulf War while spreading the gospel among them.

War and suffering opened the door, both to the 4 million or more Kurds in the north and the 16 million Iraqi Arabs who live in the southern part of the country. Christians are working and praying to share God's love with both these "Last Frontier" people groups, who have little access to the gospel.

Five years ago the United States and its Desert Storm allies encouraged millions of Kurds in northern Iraq to rise up against Saddam Hussein after his crushing defeat in Kuwait. They did -- with disastrous results.

Saddam's still-intact forces hit back with typical brutality, driving thousands of Kurdish families into the freezing mountains. Children and the elderly quickly began to die. The U.S.-led coalition responded by beginning "Operation Provide Comfort," a supposedly safe haven in the north for Kurds until Saddam's expected fall from power -- which never came.

On Aug. 31 Saddam's police forces returned to the Kurds' northern home -- this time at the invitation of one Kurdish faction fighting another. The move drew little reaction from the United States beyond a few air strikes at the other end of the country. "Operation Provide Comfort" is apparently over.

Southern Baptists and most other Western aid workers left Iraq in September for their own safety. Their Kurdish co-workers are desperately trying to get out to escape Saddam's secret police. But even if 1996 marks the end of outside Christian presence among the Kurds of Iraq, the gospel of Jesus Christ has been planted once again.

"There is a church in northern Iraq," said a Southern Baptist worker in the Middle East. "It's small and pretty weak, but there is a church."

The "Jesus" film has been translated for Kurds. By the end of this year, a New Testament translation should be completed -- with the whole Bible expected to be available soon in both major Kurdish dialects.

Kurdish converts are proclaiming the gospel, including some who challenge their people to review their own history. Before embracing Islam long ago, this ancient people -- possibly descended from the biblical Medes -- was heavily influenced by Christianity.

--more--

"I think God opened up the doors" after the war, the worker observed. "God uses crisis to wake people up and bring them to their knees."

Many Kurds also have opened their eyes to behold some new friends. Iran-style Islam has a foothold in parts of Kurdistan, but numerous Kurds are "disillusioned with Islam," said the Southern Baptist worker. "Saddam calls himself a Muslim and they're persecuted by him. Iran, Turkey and Syria persecute them. Muslim countries come in and build mosques for them, but that's about it. They're nice mosques, but the Kurds are still poor, hungry and uneducated."

Christian workers, meanwhile, came to feed the hungry, heal the sick and rebuild towns destroyed by Saddam.

"Kurds say, 'The Muslims don't help us, but the Christians do,'" the worker said. "There have been Christians up there showing the love of Christ for five years."

--30--

(BP) photo (horizontal) and cutline for this article and the one following to be mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press and posted on SBCNet News Room.

**Iraq's Arab majority
also desperate for hope**

By Erich Bridges

**Baptist Press
9/26/96**

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Iraq's Kurdish minority isn't the only object of God's love in that troubled country. Christians also are working and praying to reach Iraq's Muslim Arabs, who, like the Kurds, don't have many friends either.

After the Persian Gulf War, the Kurds enjoyed a five-year respite from Saddam Hussein's control, until his forces returned to northern Iraq Aug. 31 at a Kurdish faction's invitation. But in the south, the rest of Iraq's population has suffered all along under Saddam Hussein's jackboot -- and under the U.N. economic sanctions in effect since the war.

Disease, malnutrition and infant mortality rates are soaring. Hospitals lack medicine to treat the sick. Food production reportedly may fall 50 percent below last year's levels because of drought and the impact of sanctions.

"Iraqis are finding that to feed their own children they're having to work several jobs, sell their family possessions and even consider crime," said a Southern Baptist working to evangelize Iraq's 16 million Muslim Arabs. "The suffering, though, has driven people to realize that materialism does not solve the questions they've got deep inside. They are desperate for hope."

The ancient traditional churches of Iraq are experiencing spiritual and numerical growth as a result, according to the worker. But so far, he added, most lack the evangelistic vision to reach out to the 16 million Iraqi Arab Muslims, who belong not only to a different faith but a different culture and ethnic group. The few Muslim converts who visit existing churches feel like outsiders and usually don't come back, he said.

Public proselytizing of Arab Muslims is strictly forbidden. Muslims are being led to Christ through Christian radio, in quiet one-on-one contacts, relations within families, and outside Iraq when they leave the country.

"The problem is that Muslim (converts) have no natural contact with each other," the worker said. "They can't meet in the churches and there's no other way they can meet without drawing the harassment of the security police. They're alone. Most of them revert to Islam after a short period of time."

Is there a solution? An authentic Iraqi Arab church, the worker believes.

"It will not have the pews and the pulpit and the Charles Wesley hymns," he explained. "It may be people sitting on the floor barefoot, people bowing on the floor when they pray. It will be coming out of their own experience and life, not depending on a Western liturgy. It will be 'Muslim,' but it will be following Jesus Christ."

--30--

PRAYER BOX FOR IRAQ:

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Here are prayer requests from Christians working to evangelize Kurds and Arabs in Iraq:

1) Pray that the fledgling Kurdish church of northern Iraq will survive and grow, and that believers will be granted the freedom to share their faith without fear of persecution or worse.

2) Pray for the completion and effective distribution of the Kurdish-language New Testament and full Bible.

3) Pray that the Kurds will be spared a new round of death and destruction at the hands of Iraqi forces.

4) Pray that Iraq's traditional Christian groups will gain a vision for evangelizing their Muslim Arab neighbors, in cooperation with outside workers and agencies.

5) Pray that the physical sufferings of Iraqis will be eased and that medicine, clean water and food will be provided. "This conflict is between governments," a Christian worker noted. "But it is people, who have the same needs that we do, who are caught up in it."

6) Pray that more Southern Baptists and other Christians will come to the Middle East and become a part of God's work there.

--30--

**'Crucify dreams of big churches,'
go where God leads, Lewis urges**

By Sarah Zimmerman

**Baptist Press
9/26/96**

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Citing a litany of statistics about the need for mission work in the United States, Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis asked two questions during a home missionary commissioning service: "Do you really care? What can we do?"

Thirty-five missionaries were commissioned during the Sept. 25 service at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the first to be held on a Southern Baptist seminary campus. The new missionaries will serve in 14 states to start churches, lead associational missions, implement ministry programs and develop student missions.

Statistics Lewis cited include:

-- An estimated 184 million lost people live in the United States.

-- The Home Mission Board has identified 20,000 places needing an evangelical church, including 400 counties with no Southern Baptist ministry or congregation.

-- If no one lived in America except the ethnic population, the United States would still be one of the world's largest countries. With 64 million people, ethnic America is larger than the population of England, France, Italy or Spain. Yet Southern Baptists have yet to reach 1 percent of any ethnic group in the United States.

-- More than 1 million babies are aborted every year.

-- Seventy-four percent of the nation's residents live in cities with a population of 100,000 or more, but only 40 percent of Southern Baptist churches are there.

Although Southern Baptists have more than 15 million members and 40,000 churches scattered throughout all 50 states, Lewis said U.S. residents still cry with the Psalmist, "No one is concerned for me. I have no refuge. No one cares for my life."

Lewis recalled moving to Ohio to start a church immediately after graduating from Southwestern Seminary and living in a trailer in a mobile home community. One August night when he wasn't sleeping well because he didn't have air conditioning, he thought he heard a woman cry for help. He said he walked around the park for at least 30 minutes but saw no lights and no signs of danger.

"Was it really a nightmare, a dream on that hot, sultry night? Or could it have been a vision of God?" Lewis asked. "Don't you know that all across this land are people behind closed doors crying out, 'Somebody help me.'"

Lewis challenged the new missionaries and people who came for their commissioning to be individually involved in missions.

--more--

"Missions is not crossing the seas. Missions 'is seeing the cross,'" Lewis said. "Anywhere there's a lost person is a mission field, and the Christian nearest to that lost person is a missionary. ... You may say, 'I can't do much,' but you can do something. If we don't, who will? Is the government going to save the soul of America?"

Lewis challenged seminary students in the audience to "crucify dreams of big churches, big budgets and big salaries" and be willing to go where God leads regardless of the tangible rewards.

The commissioning service also was a celebration of partnerships between seminaries, Baptist associations, state conventions and the Home Mission Board. Bill Pinson, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, pledged the state convention's support of home missions through cooperative partnerships, prayer, financial gifts and preparation of future leaders.

Larry Allen, an Alabama native and one of the missionaries commissioned, told of being raised in a Baptist church and learning about missions as a Sunbeam (now Mission Friends) and Royal Ambassador. "I'm thrilled to be here because my earliest heroes were missionaries. I'm humbled to be joining their ranks this evening."

This was Lewis' last time to lead a commissioning service. He will retire at the end of the year and begin work for Mission America, a group of more than 100 evangelical denominations.

--30--

EDITORS' NOTE: The following four stories focus on recent key scientific discoveries and the relationship between science and faith.

**Pace of scientific discovery
described as evidence of God**

By Ken Walker

**Baptist Press
9/26/96**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Scientific discoveries seem to be rolling out like cars off an assembly line this year, and Christian observers say the phenomenon offers mounting proof of God's creative handiwork.

"The last six to 12 months we have seen powerful evidence," said Southern California astronomer Hugh Ross. "I have never seen such a pace of discoveries proving that God created the earth."

Ross is president of Reasons to Believe, a Pasadena-based ministry whose network of scientists come from physics, geology, mathematics and other disciplines. The ministry is gathering news of five to 10 discoveries per month that support creation belief, he said, compared to four a year during the mid-1980s.

Engineer James Odom, who managed the Hubble Space Telescope program for three years in the 1980s, believes these advances are uncovering the orderly pattern of the heavens.

"As we learn more about physics, earth, gravity and chemical reactions -- the finite laws that apply to everything -- we see the orderliness God has put in place," said Odom, senior vice president of a major aerospace firm in Huntsville, Ala., and a deacon at First Baptist Church in nearby Decatur.

While such breakthroughs as a new life form and speculation over life on Mars have generated considerable news coverage, pastor Emmitte Cornelius of Jackson, Miss., said he is more excited about recent findings from the depths of the oceans.

Undersea expeditions have uncovered brightly colored creatures where no sunlight penetrates and new, unnamed species of aquatic life, said Cornelius, a former biology and physics teacher who is writing a scientifically based book on God and creation.

"That is more demonstrative of the awesomeness of God," said the pastor of Grace Baptist Bible Church. "New life forms expand the vistas of God's glory."

"All that has been hidden from man ... God looked at it and delighted in it and enjoyed it first," Cornelius said. "I tell my church we live in a sea of glory. The glory of God evidences itself."

Among the range of scientific developments attracting attention this year:

-- speculation of life on Mars, based on certain minerals in a meteorite that fell to earth -- the finding that generated the most publicity nationally. After the announcement by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the White House announced Vice President Al Gore would convene a "space summit" to consider the future of the space program in light of the possibility of life on Mars.

--more--

-- the discovery of a third life form, confirmed after nearly two decades of study of volcanic organisms. Known as "archaea," its genetic code was recently reported in Science magazine. One scientist told USA Today, "Our understanding of this organism significantly increases the likelihood that life exists on other planets."

-- pictures taken through Hubble uncovering some 50 billion galaxies in the universe, much higher than previously estimated, according to media reports in January. An astronomer at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore said there are as many galaxies in the sky as stars in our own galaxy.

-- the Human Genome Project, which is running ahead of schedule in its efforts to identify the 50,000-plus genes of the body as one way of curing genetic diseases. Among this year's reported discoveries are nine genes behind important inherited diseases, including Huntington's disease and a form of colon cancer.

-- strong evidence the earth's inner core is spinning freely and faster than the rest of the planet, reported by scientists at Columbia University. The implications raise such questions as whether this produces fluctuations in gravity at the earth's surface, according to media reports last July.

-- a new species of early human reportedly discovered in the African desert of Chad last spring, challenging conventional thinking about the place of origin of humankind.

However, Ross said other advances are causing a bigger stir within the scientific community, such as new measurements of the mass density of the universe and the structure of cosmic background radiation.

Two other revelations he mentioned, which have received little media notice, are:

-- recognition by anthropologists that humans are a distinct species and appeared very recently, less than 49,000 years ago. Research has eliminated any biological link between Neanderthals and the human species, Ross said, proving that humans can't be the product of evolutionary processes.

-- new evidence that life has been on earth for 3.9 billion years, but that all of the Kerogen tars (byproducts of experiments with RNA, DNA and proteins) have organic origins. This means that life could not have evolved from inorganic matter, Ross said.

In addition, evidence that the conditions necessary for our planet to support life must arise from intelligent design is 1 trillion times stronger than it appeared just a year ago, said Ross, author of four scientifically based books on creation.

Ross has identified 50 characteristics of a planetary system that must be "fine tuned" for life to exist. In mathematical terms, this is a probability of one part in ten to the 65th power, he said, and physics considers anything with a probability of less than one in ten to the 50th power an impossibility.

"The new studies about life give evidence that God and only God is behind life," Ross said. "This means that God must have some reason for creating us."

Odom agreed, stating God has opened a small window into the universe during the 20th century and he expects humans to develop that knowledge.

"God put us here on earth to understand it," Odom said. "The emerging knowledge of the human body, cells and the environment ... are things he has challenged us to learn about. He says knowledge will make us free and has given us the ability to expand our knowledge. However, he expects us to utilize these discoveries and technologies properly."

--30--

Walker is a freelance writer in Louisville, Ky.

**Science deflating Darwinism,
Mormonism, astronomer says**

By Ken Walker

**Baptist Press
9/26/96**

PASADENA, Calif. (BP)--While Christians and scientists have often clustered in opposite camps, scientific discoveries are exploding evolutionary theories that helped spark this division, according to astronomer Hugh Ross.

Ross, president of California-based Reasons to Believe network of Christian scientists, said new, more accurate dating methods are disproving past theories about fossil records. Scientists now know the geologic period known as the Cambrian Explosion is much briefer than they had thought, he said.

--more--

During the Cambrian period, 100 phyla (classifications of plant and animal kingdoms) emerged -- the most significant appearance of life forms in history, Ross said. Since then, 70 phyla have disappeared, which he said contradicts evolutionary theory that more phyla should have materialized.

These discoveries forced one leading evolutionist to admit Darwinism had been "punctured," along with some of his pet theories, said Ross, who holds a doctorate in astronomy and has done post-doctoral work at the California Institute of Technology.

"On secular university campuses, I haven't heard any defense of Darwinism the last two years, although I do get that on Christian campuses," he said. "With the recent scientific discoveries, many Darwinists realize the evidence for their position is so weak they don't bother to defend it publicly."

Besides deflating Darwin, scientific advances make it possible to prove the existence of God, Ross asserted, saying astrophysics can demonstrate that God transcends matter, energy, height, length, width and time.

This discipline also can prove God is a personal being encompassing intelligence, creativity, power, care and love, Ross continued. "Once you get to that, you have a bridge to Jesus Christ. Some astronomers concede that there is some great entity out there that is personal and cares for humanity, but then they drop the matter," he said.

Not only does science give proof of God, recent developments help shatter the claims of various cults and false religions, Ross said.

For example, Mormon scriptures claim life originated at the center of the galaxy on a planet called Kolob, Ross said, which supposedly has a 1,000-day rotation period.

However, because of the huge stellar density, life is impossible at the center of our galaxy, he said.

"Plus, a life-supporting planet must have a rotational period close to 24 hours. If it is brief, like Jupiter or Saturn's, the result is 1,000-mile-per-hour winds. If it is as long as Kolob's, the night temperature would be near minus 460 degrees and the day temperature would exceed the melting point of lead.

"Astronomers can prove that (this) rotation would make it impossible for life to survive," Ross said. "Mormons picked the very worst place in the galaxy for their source."

Buddhists and Hindus also rely on a faulty foundation for their beliefs in reincarnation, he said. These religions teach there is a 4.32-billion-year cycle of reincarnation for the universe, which doesn't stand up to scientific examination, he said.

"If we can prove these religions are wrong about the universe, why should we give any weight to their other statements about reincarnation?" Ross asked.

Of course, the disappearance of various theories opposed to Christianity doesn't mean skeptics will quit, Ross added, citing a biologist at Cal Tech who has abandoned Darwinism in favor of "chaos" theory.

The latter is a belief that hidden in the complexity of chemical reactions is some unknown "self-organizing" principle. But, Ross said, scientists have never observed any self-organization outside of biological systems.

At the heart of every dispute over the origins of the world and humankind, James Odom reflected, lies the question: Where did it come from?

When Odom, of Huntsville, Ala., was managing the Hubble Telescope in the mid-1980s, he came in contact with numerous astronomers. Many of them supported the "Big Bang" theory -- which Odom doesn't necessarily disagree with, saying such an explosion may be an accurate way to describe how God created the universe.

"But when you asked, 'OK, but who created it? Where did the object come from that was exploded?' they spun out at that point," chuckled Odom, now senior vice president of an aerospace firm. "They would say, 'I can't answer that.'"

--30--

EDITORS' NOTE: A free one-year subscription to "Facts & Faith," the newsletter of Reasons to Believe, is available by calling 1-800-482-7836.

**Don't invest too much faith
in science, observers caution**

By Ken Walker

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--When it comes to judging reports of the latest scientific discoveries, some Christians think believers are wise to adopt a wait-and-see attitude.

"One thing I've noticed about scientific claims, particularly when they work at the grandest levels -- cosmological or creation accounts -- fact seems to overthrow those things regularly," said Mark Coppenger, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.

"One decade, we'll read in a popular news magazine: 'This is what we've discovered, this is the truth about man (and) the universe. And if you don't subscribe to this, then you're a knucklehead.' Then you wait about 10 years and they come out with a radically different account and say, 'Oh, we were wrong.'"

Aside from judging the merits of a particular discovery, sometimes the news may be exaggerated. One example is the recent frenzy over the supposed discovery of life on Mars, which Forrest Mims III said isn't true.

"I'm appalled at the way it's being handled," said Mims, a NASA consultant and former science magazine editor. "It's totally exaggerated. Nobody has even claimed there is life on Mars. The best conclusion they can reach from the evidence is there is no fossil life on Mars."

Mims, a deacon and adult Sunday school teacher at First Baptist Church, Seguin, Texas, said he has been surprised at the skepticism from within the scientific community toward the Mars announcement. Some suspect publicity seeking, since NASA's "Martian meteorite" press conference was predated by disclosures to President Bill Clinton and others, he said, and a museum exhibit was waiting in the wings. Also, contradicting reports from a team at the University of New Mexico were apparently not mentioned at the NASA news conference, he said.

Pastor Emmitt Cornelius isn't impressed with the reports about Mars, even if they prove to be true. That would only show God has a sovereign right to place life wherever he chooses, said the one-time science teacher who is writing a scientifically based book on God and creation.

"Some will say if there's life on Mars, it must be scattered throughout the universe and it must be highly intelligent," said Cornelius, of Jackson, Miss., voicing "a suspicion that (these accounts) would be used to undermine the uniqueness of man as created in the image of God."

And whenever scientific discoveries conflict with biblical teachings, the latter will prevail, Coppenger said, noting, "The Bible is truth and truth doesn't contradict itself."

Some are eager to capitulate to experts' pronouncements, whether in physics, sociology or psychology, Coppenger said. But he advised Christians not to feel pressured to blindly accept the validity of new discoveries.

Those who are slaves to the opinion of science and put their highest hopes in it are guilty of "scientism," an expression sometimes used by philosophers, Coppenger said.

"Scientism is not a Christian posture. We're not afraid of science; we're grateful for science because God is the God of creation. As we find out things about creation, we rejoice in that. But we are not so impressed with science that we think it can trump Scripture."

Coppenger also lamented the tendency of many to worship technology, saying they think if they fill their lives with enough clutter they have something of value.

Paraphrasing 1 Corinthians 13, he said though someone has a computer that can scan the Internet and read every Web page, though they have a big-screen TV that via satellite can pick up hundreds of channels, and though they have a car with dual air bags, without God they are nothing.

The speculation about the origins and extent of life that have risen from the newest round of scientific discoveries demonstrate the innate need of humans to understand their universe, Coppenger said.

"Man naturally has a sense of wonder and anxiety about the heavens, the roaring seas and the intricacies of the human body. The questions naturally arise: What is the point to all this? Where does it come from? Where is it going? It's very sad to see people try to answer that without divine revelation, the Holy Scriptures."

**Scientists underscore
proper use of advances**

By Ken Walker

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. (BP)--Could today's pace of scientific discoveries be leading the world toward another Tower of Babel? James Odom said he thinks so -- and people may not recognize the danger until it is too late.

"We're only limited by what God wants us to know," said Odom, who managed the Hubble Space Telescope program for three years in the 1980s and is now senior vice president of a major aerospace firm in Huntsville, Ala.

"We may be approaching another Tower of Babel and not know it," Odom said.

"If we keep playing around with the dark side, it may all come crashing down. We may end up trying to do something we couldn't or shouldn't do. (The tower) was not the way God intended for man to get to heaven, and it may not be through modern science, either. But we'll find that out when the proper time comes," said Odom, a deacon at First Baptist Church, Decatur, Ala.

Aside from physical laws governing the universe, Odom said, there are few boundaries on science. With modern technology and other developments, humans are only limited by their imagination and the resources to execute such developments, he said.

Still, the aerospace engineer said science has a fatal flaw: its lack of a conscience. Scientists are incapable of placing limits on the applications they develop, Odom noted.

"Science was not able to develop atomic energy and it not be used for destruction," he said. "There are a lot of good and right things developed with modern-day television and communications, but at the same time TV has a lot of trash on it."

This is where religion plays a key role in society, Odom said. While science leads mankind to knowledge, the church must help with the righteous management of that information, he explained.

Thus, Odom said he feels strongly about the link between science and Christianity, which he said complement each other. While science seeks to learn more about the creation, Odom said, religion seeks a better understanding of the creator and his will for mankind.

"To me (recent discoveries) bear out more vividly the relationship between science and Christianity. It bothers me to see people trying to separate the two."

Odom speaks periodically to church and civic groups about the subject. While mankind tries to harness the forces of nature through science, through religion he seeks to control the forces of nature within, the Baptist layman said.

There are good reasons to avoid turning science and religion into antagonists, Odom said. In spite of quantum leaps in geological fields, medical knowledge, astronomy and communications the past 30 years, we now live with the specter that we can destroy ourselves, he said.

"There is ample cause for uneasiness," Odom said. "In the past, misdirected ambition, moral shortcomings or errors in judgment have dragged men, women and children into terrible wars. And we can see little evidence that the danger of the recurrence of such wars has disappeared from the planet."

The only power that can save the world from catastrophic war is the God-given power of reason and morality in humans, Odom said. "Maybe the control and best use of these forces are the areas of leadership the theologians must provide."

Given the world situation, another scientist said it is crucial that Christians return to contributing knowledge to technical arenas as they did in the past.

"Today too many Christians are bystanders to science," said Forrest Mims III of Seguin, Texas, a NASA consultant, former science magazine editor and recent presenter at the International Radiation Symposium in Fairbanks, Alaska. "This is just another reason why we are so often marginalized or even ridiculed by skeptics within the scientific community."

The place to start is through an increasing emphasis on science within Christian schools, said Mims, a deacon at his city's First Baptist Church, where he also teaches an adult Sunday school class.

"Unfortunately, too many Christian schools try to emulate their secular counterparts by overemphasizing expensive sports programs at the expense of scholarship," Mims commented.

He also sees a need for more Christian views in public to counteract the tendency of people to idolize scientific advances without understanding science's limits.

"Armchair scientists sometimes do this without fully understanding what they worship," Mims said. "Since science means knowledge, there may be no limits. The more we ask, the more we learn."

"Of course, this doesn't infer anything spiritual about nature or science. Science can manipulate the building blocks of life, for example. But science cannot create life from the raw elements. Only God can do that."

HOUSE MAIL

(BP)	BAPTIST PRESS 901 Commerce #750 Nashville, TN 37234
F I R S T C L A S S	Southern Baptist Library and Archives