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Southern Seminary informed
ATS not imposing probation

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
2/27/96

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Southern Baptist Theological Seminary will not be placed on probation by its primary accrediting agency, according to information received by the school Feb. 26.

The Louisville, Ky., seminary has been under review by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada. The accrediting agency was responding to faculty concerns related to new procedures for hiring faculty, new policies for granting tenure and the March 1995 dismissal of the dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work, Diana R. Garland. Representatives from the accrediting agencies visited the seminary in November.

Michael Gilligan, assistant director of accrediting at ATS, did not include mention of probation in a letter to seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr. dated Feb. 21. The letter, however, notified the seminary of several actions the school must take to keep its accreditation in good standing, and it informed the seminary of a "notation" on its accreditation. The requested actions and the notation, all of which were imposed by the ATS Commission on Accrediting, include the submission of four reports regarding:

1. the status of all contract and tenure-track faculty employed before the seminary changed its hiring procedures in April 1995.
2. the status of the Carver School of Church Social Work and the future of its students and faculty. (Trustees have voted to close the school at the conclusion of the 1996-97 academic year.)
3. the "process and content" of the faculty's response to the current hiring policy.
4. Actions taken to address concerns expressed by the visiting committee's report about communications among the administration, faculty and trustees.

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Reports on the first three matters must be submitted by April 16. The seminary must report to ATS on the final action by Nov. 15.

The notation, which used standard ATS language for accreditation reporting, said: "General tone of the school impairs the capacity to provide significant theological education and ministerial training."

The Commission on Accrediting also authorized another focused visit in the spring of 1997 to monitor progress the institution has achieved in addressing concerns about "academic freedom, status of contract and tenure-track faculty, the faculty's role in shared governance and communication among the board, administration and faculty."

"I am very pleased to receive the action report from the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools," Mohler said Feb. 26. "From the onset, we have indicated our commitment to work with all appropriate accrediting agencies through this period of institutional transition."

He said the ATS commission has been helpful in addressing several issues of concern. "My intention is to work through these issues in a manner which respects the concerns of the ATS, the concerns of the faculty and is consistent with the commitments which undergird Southern Seminary and frame her future," he said.

Mohler said he "takes seriously" the imposition of the notation, and he expressed confidence "this notation will be removed as quickly as possible."

In the letter from ATS, Gilligan listed several matters the visiting committee believed in the need of "remediation." These include a lack of faculty counsel in the changing of qualifications for new faculty, insufficient faculty input in developing hiring procedures, not enough consultation with faculty in setting forth disciplinary procedures and inadequate faculty consultation in the decision to disband the Carver school. The committee also cited the overall need for improved communication among faculty, administration and trustees.

However, the visiting committee also noted four strengths of the seminary that were determined by interviews with faculty and administration. The strengths were "an unusual degree of unanimity and support" for the seminary's mission, a commitment to the seminary's work and place in the Southern Baptist Convention, a desire for the institution to prosper and a "constructive spirit among the faculty interviewed as well as strong and appreciative collegiality across the ranks."

"We will continue to cooperate with the ATS Commission on Accrediting and other appropriate agencies," Mohler said. "We will also stand proudly before the Southern Baptist Convention and its churches. Southern Baptists should know that Southern Seminary is moving forward with confidence, faithfulness and eagerness."

Controversy over Southern's social work school erupted in March 1995 when Mohler dismissed Garland as the school's dean for breaching administrative processes by releasing a document criticizing his refusal to approve a social work faculty nominee who had been recommended by faculty and student committees. Mohler cited the nominee's stance allowing for the role of women as church pastors in refusing to recommend him to Southern's trustees for final approval.

Also at the time, the seminary's vice president for academic administration, David S. Dockery, who has since been named president of Union University in Tennessee, acknowledged in an interview that the seminary is operating on four requirements for faculty nomination that reflect a strong consensus among trustees: 1) affirming women in ministry and their giftedness but restricting the role of women in the church from the office of senior pastor; 2) affirming the exclusiveness of salvation in Jesus Christ alone; 3) being clear that the Bible teaches that all homosexual behavior is sinful; and 4) acknowledging that the sanctity of human life is pro-life and against abortion except in the most extreme circumstances.

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Art Toalston contributed to this story.

**Southern's CSWE accreditation
to be intact through May '97**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Accreditation of the Carver School of Church Social Work at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary will be intact through May 1997 if the school can maintain accreditation standards, according to seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr.

The Carver school's current accreditation from the Council on Social Work education ends in May 1997. The Louisville, Ky., seminary has sought an assurance of the accreditation so approximately 25 students in the school can complete degree programs. The seminary's trustees have voted to close the school.

The seminary had asked for accreditation to be extended through December 1997 to assist students who may not have completed degree requirements by May 1997. "The extension was denied due to CSWE policies, but almost all students are expected to graduate by May 1997," Mohler said Feb. 26.

"The Council on Social Work Education has responded to Southern Seminary in a manner which is both helpful and instructive," Mohler said. "We are very pleased that full accreditation for the program will continue through May 1997, so long as accreditation requirements are maintained in a manner satisfactory to CSWE."

Mohler received news of CSWE's decision in the mail Saturday, Feb. 24.

Mohler said the seminary will develop a "program phase-out agreement" in consultation with CSWE which will "provide clear steps and specific actions necessary" to keep accreditation.

"Without question, our first concern is for the interests of our students who will continue in the program next year," Mohler said. "This administration is committed to marshal the resources and attention of this institution to enable students on track for graduation in May 1997 to complete their program and receive an accredited master of social work degree" from Southern Seminary.

The first step in the phase-out agreement will be the appointment of an acting dean for the 1996-97 academic year. Mohler said a search process has begun to fill this position. Current Acting Dean Janet Spressart will leave her position in July to join the faculty at Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester, N.Y.

Mohler also said each student will be given a specific plan to meet graduation requirements. While CSWE refused the seminary's request for an accreditation extension from May 1997 through December 1997, Mohler expressed confidence "that we can assist all students toward the fulfillment of their academic goals."

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**North American Mission Board
could have up to 86 trustees**

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
2/27/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The new North American Mission Board could have as many as 86 trustees, under the charter recently approved by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee and to be recommended to the SBC meeting in New Orleans in June.

According to Bob Reccord, chairman of the Implementation Task Force of the SBC Executive Committee, the "Covenant for a New Century" specifies the first North American Mission Board will consist of the trustees of the Home Mission Board, Radio and Television Commission and Brotherhood Commission whose second term expires in 1998, 1999, 2000 or 2001 plus the president of the SBC.

The Covenant calls for a board of 75, Reccord said, but the charter allows the first board to be larger.

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"Two factors caused this decision," Reccord, pastor of First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va., said. "First, there are currently a few more than 74 second-term trustees serving on the existing entities. We believe it is the intent of the Covenant that all of these persons be given an opportunity to be on the initial board. Secondly, the pool of second-term trustees does not provide representation from some state conventions that are qualified. It was necessary to make provision for these gaps in the initial board."

Executive Committee staff research revealed, at the present time, the formula in the NAMB charter will produce a board of 86 people. The Home Mission Board currently has a board of 88 trustees (including 6 local members), while the Brotherhood and RTVC boards both have 30 members.

"It will be no larger than that (86)," said David Hankins, Executive Committee vice president and staff liaison with the ITF, "but it will likely be smaller because of current second-term trustees who move from their current state convention, decline to serve on the NAMB or otherwise become unavailable for election between now and June of 1997."

SBC officials' plans are predicated on the second approval of SBC bylaw 15 at the June New Orleans annual meeting. The bylaw lists the entities of the SBC; presently there are 19 but under the restructuring that would be reduced to 12.

Reccord said while some details of the formulation of the board vary from the stipulations in the Covenant for a New Century, the charter of NAMB keeps faith with the intention of the Covenant.

By June 2001 all initial board members will have completed their service, Hankins said. Because their election to the NAMB is considered "an authorized subsequent term of service," no initial NAMB trustee will be re-elected to the board until at least one year has elapsed, according to SBC bylaw 16.9.

The size of the board, at that time, will have been reduced to 56 unless there are significant fluctuations in the current memberships of the SBC churches in the cooperating state conventions. Hankins said the NAMB charter, which is identical to the Baptist Sunday School Board charter in this regard, requires one trustee shall be chosen from each cooperating state, as defined by the SBC, which has 20,000 members, and one additional trustee from each state having 500,000 members, and another additional trustee for each additional 500,000 members in such state. The trustees will be elected to staggered terms so that approximately one-fourth will rotate each year.

The ITF plans to bring a recommendation to the 1997 Committee on Nominations which explains the specifications of the NAMB charter and the intention of the Covenant to name second-term trustees to the initial board, Hankins said. The recommendation will identify those persons to be nominated. It will be the responsibility of the Committee on Nominations as part of its report to the 1997 SBC meeting to bring nominations for the NAMB.

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Same-sex vows, 10 Commandments
among Tenn. legislative issues By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press
2/27/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A focus among Tennessee lawmakers in 1996 appears to be on family values and moral concerns.

State lawmakers are taking a strong stance against same-sex marriages and are encouraging Tennesseans to follow the Ten Commandments.

The Senate Judicial Committee approved SB 2305 by an 8-1 margin Feb. 20. It bans formal marriage between members of the same sex.

The bill will be placed on the Senate calendar possibly sometime the week of Feb. 26, said Bill Bates, public affairs consultant for the Tennessee Baptist Convention. The House version of the bill (2907) has been referred to the House Judicial Committee.

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"I think the bill reflects the feelings of Tennessee Baptists who believe along the lines that marriage is sacred and should be as God intended -- between man and woman," Bates said.

On Feb. 21, the Senate approved by a 27-1 margin a resolution supporting the Ten Commandments.

The action is simply a resolution and is not a law, Bates explained.

The resolution urges every citizen to honor the Ten Commandments, teach them to their children and display them in their homes, businesses, schools and places of worship. It also sets May 5-15 aside as a time to honor the Ten Commandments.

Last year the Tennessee House of Representatives passed a similar resolution on their consent calendar without an objection, Bates said.

The Senate took action despite an opinion by State Attorney General Charles Burson that it is unconstitutional.

Bates noted family values is a popular topic. "The emphasis today is on family values and the legislature is becoming sensitive to these values and is taking some positive actions," Bates said.

The veteran public affairs consultant said he didn't see why "anyone could object to the resolution. Most of our laws are built around the Ten Commandments," he observed.

Another action of interest to Tennessee Baptists, Bates said, concerns the so-called "monkey bill." This bill (SB 3229 and HB 2972) prohibits teaching the theory of evolution except as scientific theory and, as initially written, states that any teacher teaching the theory as fact "shall be dismissed or suspended."

The bill was amended to say "may" be dismissed or suspended.

The bill cleared the Senate Education Committee Feb. 21 by an 8-1 margin and will be sent to the Senate Calendar Committee. A House education subcommittee also approved the bill. It was scheduled to be voted on by the House Education Committee Feb. 27.

Bates said he feels most Tennessee teachers are teaching evolution as a theory rather than fact and is not sure whether a bill is needed to "tell the teachers how to teach."

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Experience in evolving church
trained preaching, worship expertBy Charles Willis

Baptist Press
2/27/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Frank Lewis gained his experience in preaching and worship for both small and large churches in one congregation.

Moving from the classrooms of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary to the pulpit of a 16-member mission in suburban Las Vegas was both a geographic and a cultural leap for the Birmingham native.

But if moving in 1985 from Bible Belt roots to a city better known for casinos than churches were not a big enough lifestyle change, Lewis could not have known he had only begun a lengthy transition.

In the 10 years he spent with Green Valley Baptist Church of Henderson, Nev., Lewis took all the steps from one-man staff to senior pastor of a multi-staff congregation.

Membership grew to 850 people, despite the transient nature of the city. Of the several thousand people who joined the church during his tenure, some had no sooner professed faith in Christ than they were transferred to other locations before they could be baptized. Lewis had many opportunities to help new Christians find church homes in other cities. Yet the church came to be the second-largest church in the Nevada Baptist Convention.

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Lewis was active in the Southern Nevada Baptist Association, as well as serving as a member and committee chairman for the Nevada Baptist Convention. He earned a doctor of ministries degree from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., and also was a preaching instructor at the seminary's Las Vegas Ethnic Leadership Development Center. Added to those responsibilities was volunteer work as a chaplain for Sunrise Hospital in Las Vegas.

When he came to the Baptist Sunday School Board in January to become the national agency's preaching and worship consultant, Lewis left behind a growing congregation, a completed first-unit church building, a second-unit building campaign in progress and a treasury with more money than budget required. Because of the congregation's good stewardship, the church was able to purchase a building for another church, send members on mission projects and sponsor two more churches.

Among the factors Lewis feels contributed to preaching success in a challenging setting is the application of cultural relevance -- knowing one's community. Preaching style as an isolated factor, he said, is not as important as using a style that speaks to the persons who need the gospel.

"Context is important to worship style," Lewis reflected. "If you worship in a way that honors God, is culturally relevant, heart-moving, intellectually stimulating and life-changing, you are bound to influence your community for Christ.

"I think these five elements transcend the styles of worship that are used today. Attention to them will enable our worship to stay fresh, and as cultural changes continue, we won't find ourselves lagging behind."

He said in honoring God, everything in a worship service must point the lost to Christ and enable the saved to learn to love him more.

"If anything takes away from this, it belongs somewhere outside of our worship experience," he said.

Worship should speak to the culture, he continued, with an awareness that Christianity is as counter to today's culture as it was to first-century culture.

"If cultural relevancy makes the church more like the world, we've lost sight of the kingdom. However, if in our worship we can speak to and impact the culture for Christ, then we are providing a ministry that proves the relevancy of Christ today for the needs of the world," he observed.

Worship meets an emotional need, he said, prompting the need for a heart-moving experience. But Lewis cautioned worship which requires no thinking "is a poor substitute for worship."

"Our whole mind, spirit and body are to be involved. We must hear the Word of God expounded by men who are willing to pay the price to study. Worship that fails to challenge the intellect produces believers who do not know how to discern truth from a lie."

Worship changes lives only as people have an opportunity to respond to Christ, he maintained.

"Life-changing worship calls for and expects commitments. Often we evaluate worship by measurable standards only. It is difficult to measure how many lives are changed each week. However, we must begin to look critically at what our worship experiences are producing in our churches."

A man who admits his "passion is in the area of preaching," Lewis empathizes with pastors coping with administrative responsibilities and pastoral counseling, along with sermon preparation. "Preachers struggle with balancing time for family, study and responsible pastoral work," he said.

As a part of his personal and professional mission to help pastors deal creatively and effectively with preaching, Lewis will travel as much as one-third of the year for the Sunday School Board, leading conferences in states and associations, as well as participating in national training events. He said some conferences will deal with sermon structure and content. Others will focus on the spiritual development of the person in today's pulpit.

As his work evolves, Lewis hopes to plan events to enable pastors to renew themselves and to exchange ideas related to common needs and interests. He said he believes pastors also need time without distractions for personal worship.

"There are two places that matter most for today's preaching worship leader. First, the closet. We will only preach and lead in worship as well as we can pray. The worship leader has to be a worshiper first," he said. "The second is the study. We need worship leaders who are committed to sound biblical scholarship."

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Church starts its own
disaster relief unit

By Dave Parker

Baptist Press
2/27/96

GROVE, Okla. (BP)--When major disasters -- floods, tornadoes, earthquakes or hurricanes -- strike an area, relief workers and victims often receive assistance from disaster relief units owned by state Baptist conventions.

That relief is coordinated nationally through the Brotherhood Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, in conjunction with the American Red Cross.

But what of strictly local disasters, such as fires or drownings? Who helps relief workers then?

First Baptist Church of Grove, Okla., recently solved that problem by converting an extra van into a disaster relief feeding unit, to serve coffee and hot chocolate to workers.

Jack Spurgeon, Brotherhood director for the church, said he had been talking to his wife about how he wanted the group "to do something. She said, 'Why don't you start a disaster relief unit?'"

That was in April. At first, he was not even sure what a disaster relief unit would do, but by May he had a proposal ready and the church approved it.

Pastor Robin Cowin said there was a real need for the unit in the Grand Lake area of northeastern Oklahoma.

"In this area we have emergencies on an almost weekly basis," he said. "We have fires, people get lost in the woods, convicts escape and there are drownings. For drownings, a lot of times they are out overnight looking for the body."

Rescuers were out three nights looking for one drowning victim, and by the time it was over, Cowin said rescue workers were worn out.

"In addition to giving out refreshments, we do also give out tracts," Cowin said. "They have a calendar on one side and the plan of salvation on the other."

Spurgeon said the nearly 20 volunteers who help with the unit are trained to minister to rescuers' needs.

"We need to be ready to minister to them," he said. "We had one firefighter who had to go in and get the bodies of a mother and child out of a burning house. He said he would have given anything to have someone pray with him."

Spurgeon is a former state pastor who worked three years as a houseparent at Boys Ranch Town, a Baptist home for boys in Edmond, Okla. He has also worked as a welder and auto mechanic. His wife, Evelyn, is Woman's Missionary Union director for the church.

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New member assimilation key
to 'closing the back door'

By Mark A. Wyatt

Baptist Press
2/27/96

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--Losing new members because of a lack of follow-up is "the greatest epidemic facing churches today," according to a prominent Southern Baptist evangelist.

Billie Hanks Jr. told more than 200 central California church leaders the Bible contains a clear prescription for solving the problem.

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"The Scripture has a great deal to say about follow-up, once we understand that follow-up is a ministry of example," Hanks said. Citing the example of Jesus, he said the biblical pattern of follow-up involved new Christians learning by observation.

"Jesus didn't give a class on fishing; he said, 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.' It was instruction by observation," Hanks said.

"This principle, so common to life, was the cornerstone of early Christian education because spiritual instruction took place in an environment where relationships were the primary means for gaining personal growth," he said.

"Love, integrity, truth and even ministry skills were best transmitted in the caring context of a personal friendship. The environment was one of trust and mutual encouragement," Hanks explained. "Spiritual discipline was first observed then emulated by the original generation of new believers."

And helping new believers develop relationships remains the most important key for retaining them as church members today, Hanks said.

"Many people come to our churches aching, hurting, lonely. When they find the redeeming love of the Lord Jesus Christ, they're looking for friendship."

Still, Hanks said, 40 percent of new members will become inactive in about 18 months. He said many likely "will be picked up by a cult or a sect or one of many groups that are feeding on the poor follow-up of evangelical denominations."

"This is a global problem," Hanks told the interdenominational gathering. "If we do not deal with this, it's like not dealing with the greatest epidemic in our churches today."

Addressing a large number of Southern Baptist ministers present at the conference, Hanks noted only "2 to 3 percent of Southern Baptists win someone to Christ" in a given year. "Why? Because we didn't do a good job training them when they were teachable.

"The greatest witnesses are new believers," Hanks noted. Properly training new believers is vital for helping them "respond to evangelistic opportunity," he said.

The Feb. 1 conference in Fresno was the largest in a series of meetings Hanks held across California promoting "A Call to Joy," his new process for new member assimilation published by Word Ministry Resources of Waco, Texas. The series was co-sponsored by Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, whose president, William O. Crews, was on hand to introduce Hanks.

Crews told the group, "The issue for the next century will be to develop believers who are godly in character, competent in skills and who have the kind of influence our Lord has." He said Hanks' process for new member follow-up is one way to do that.

But Hanks stressed conserving the results of evangelism is more important than whose method is used to do it.

"If you've got tools that are better, use them," he said. "The desire is to close the back door."

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**Hanks: Give new members
spiritual foundations**

By Mark A. Wyatt

**Baptist Press
2/27/96**

FRESNO, Calif. (BP)--A pamphlet outlining Billie Hanks Jr.'s new member assimilation process lists several steps recommended for effective follow-up. Among them:

-- Build spiritual friendships. "All new believers and new members need to be loved and feel accepted as persons," Hanks writes. "No matter what follow-up material you use your friendship with the new believer will normally be more important than the curriculum."

-- Be spiritually prepared. A daily quiet time is essential to prepare one's heart and mind for ministry. "Ask God to keep you fresh," Hanks writes, "for the benefit of each new believer whom you disciple."

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-- Intercede for specific needs. This will help new believers learn to depend on God's provision through personal experience.

-- Affirm spiritual progress. Sharing a new believer's excitement can be a source of real encouragement for both believer and discipler.

-- Plan ahead for fellowship. Always leave time after Bible study and prayer sessions just to enjoy friendship.

-- Develop spiritual gifts. Help new believers learn to understand and appreciate their own spiritual gifts. "The secret of personal fulfillment comes from learning to utilize those God-given gifts for his glory. In an era of chronic low self-esteem, this understanding can literally change the quality of a new believer's life," Hanks declares.

-- Major on Christian character. Character is the spiritual reality that wins the world's respect and penetrates its darkness, according to Hanks. "Said another way, your life will open or close the doors to your personal witness."

-- Present spiritual multiplication. Helping new believers understand their part in the Great Commission shows them they have a tangible role worth achieving and challenges them to follow your example of witnessing, what Hanks calls learning "how to fish for men without scaring the fish."

-- Always focus on Christ. "Keep him at the very center of your friendship!" Hanks stresses in the pamphlet. "Remember your objective is not to lead new Christians to think and act like you, but to think and act in obedience to God's Word."

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Ron & Patricia Owens' music
fueled by 37 years of teamwork By Jennifer Davis

Baptist Press
2/27/96

MOBILE, Ala. (BP)--"Have you ever thought of using your music to spread the Word of God?"

A friend's simple question changed Ron and Patricia Owens' lives. "God used this question to get to us," Patricia said.

The young married couple with a six-month-old son soon dropped everything to become music evangelists.

"We definitely walked by faith." With no one on the schedule, they left it in God's hands, she said. But it was not long until they had their first invitation, and life sped up from there.

The Owenses worked for many years as independent music evangelists, living solely on love offerings.

They also have worked with evangelists such as John Haggai, Manley Beasley, Stephen Olford and, most recently, Henry Blackaby at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

For the last five years Ron has been Blackaby's associate in the HMB's office of prayer for spiritual awakening.

"We've been blessed over the years to be teamed with some very godly men," Ron said, noting, "... much of our ministry is to the Bible teacher, getting their heart ready. We are preparing both the people's heart and the speaker's.

"We always try to fit into the flow of the meeting. We look at what is being said," he said.

"We try to be sensitive to the service and to the leadership to what we've been asked to do."

"Our music is not contrived," Patricia said, "but of the Spirit. We don't plan." She noted, "The preparation is spiritual rather than planning ahead."

"This is a little scary," Ron said.

"We adjust at the last second," he said, citing the advantage of being a team.

"But we have a life message that keeps coming back to us. No matter what service, it surfaces with that group," he said.

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Patricia accompanies Ron's singing on the piano, so they can change the order or even the songs at any time, he said.

"I just keep talking and saying things that will hint to which song I want to sing until she gets in the right key," Ron said. Being able to perform in this manner comes from years of practicing together, as well as 37 years of marriage, he said. "This would not be possible if we were using tracks or an accompanist I did not know."

Patricia has been accompanying Ron's singing since they first met at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y., where they were both studying voice.

In fact, it was their voice teacher who played cupid and brought them together, Ron said. "It took us three years to catch on, however."

Although they knew early on music would be a major part of their lives, they never intended on serving the Lord with it, Patricia said. They both grew up in Christian homes and knew the Lord, but their walk was not close during their early years of marriage, she said.

"But once Ron announced we were going to be music evangelists and we started doing concerts, we began to grow."

"As we began to put the message together through song in a sermon-in-song format, we soon found we couldn't find the materials we needed," Ron said. "So, we began to write our own."

"Ron began to write poetry and lyrics in his quiet time and I put them to music," Patricia said.

"We have even written songs sometimes while someone is speaking," Ron said.

"It is so important for us to pick just the right song," he said. "It is better for a musician not to do anything than to do the wrong thing."

"I've seen the Holy Spirit quenched in a service because of the music," he said. "Music is so powerful. People respond in the Spirit instantaneously. It is very emotionally draining to us not to miss what the Holy Spirit is saying."

Conferences such as the recent Alabama evangelism conference keep the musical team busy. Their schedule keeps them away from their home in Suwanee, Ga., just northeast of Atlanta, 75 to 80 percent of the time.

"Up until I started working with Henry, 99 percent of our ministry was preaching through music," Ron said.

Now they are also teaching about music ministry, writing a book on worship and music ministry and doing seminars on the subject, Ron said.

"In our lives, in our ministry, we saw more and more the need to involve the people," Patricia said.

The latest challenge in the Owensens' life has come in the area of preaching, Ron said. "I never thought I would be doing that. I've always delivered my message through song."

"God is still teaching us and challenging us daily," Patricia said. "We still have a very real sense of dependency on God."

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Biblical dramatist states,
'I just preach differently'

By Michelle Shermer

Baptist Press
2/27/96

MOBILE, Ala. (BP)--Wearing a flowing robe and sandals like those of 2,000 years ago, the apostle Matthew takes center stage and begins to tell the story of Jesus: "Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot"

But it's not really Matthew telling the story; it's Jim McNiell, an evangelist and biblical dramatist from St. Louis who has traveled the world bringing the Bible to life.

"I am an evangelist," he said at the recent Alabama evangelism conference. "I just preach differently than most guys."

McNiell, who studied speech, drama and music in college, has memorized more than 20 books of the New Testament the past nine years.

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His portrayals of the apostles allow people to visualize the life of Jesus in their own minds. "Different ones touch different people," he said. "I'm touched differently too."

McNiel said his most emotional presentation, however, is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. "It is the most evangelical message that I do," he said. "I've seen hundreds, probably thousands of people saved through that message."

Most people don't know what to call what he does, but they usually like it, McNiel said, refraining from describing his messages that transport them back to the time of Christ as more effective than traditional evangelical preaching.

"The greatest compliment I can get is, 'I didn't see Jim McNiel up there; I saw the Lord,'" he said. "When they tell me that, that's all I need."

Some critics, however, have said McNiel's theatrical preaching style puts too much pressure on people to follow Christ.

"That's a compliment to me," he countered, "because one must realize we have an enemy, Satan, and he puts pressure on people all the time. With every ounce of strength in my being, I'm seeking to persuade people to take up their crosses and follow the Lord."

While in costume and in character, McNiel walks down the aisle, inviting people to stand and follow him as if they were following Christ. "Wouldn't it have been something if you had seen our Lord," he says during the invitation, "and not Jim McNiel dressed in costume?" Many times the whole church will come forward, he said.

Sometimes, McNiel said he gets so caught up in his character, his heart overflows and he is moved to tears.

Born in Paragould, Ark., McNiel was raised in St. Louis with five sisters. He received his bachelor of arts degree from Oklahoma Baptist University, majoring in speech and drama and minoring in music. At the outset of his college studies, McNiel intended to major in music and minor in speech and drama, but he was so busy he decided to switch.

"God was training me and preparing me for what I'm doing now, and I had no idea," said McNiel, who was saved when he was 12 years old. "I surrendered my life to his full-time service and he prepared me and I didn't even know it . . . I was going to be a pop singer, but of course God had other plans."

For 20 years after graduating, McNiel was a music evangelist, performing concerts, directing choirs and leading congregations.

He even recorded albums in the same studios Elvis used in Nashville, Tenn., and the Beatles used in London. "They sold more records, though," he added jokingly.

About 13 years ago he was at a seminar for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board on how to grow an evangelistic church. During a banquet afterwards, a man from West Virginia, Norman Arrington, did a dramatic monologue portraying a biblical character.

"It was almost as if I heard an audible voice when I saw what he did, because it just overwhelmed me," McNiel said. "It was almost as if the dear Lord spoke and he said to me, 'Son, this is what I prepared you for. Do it.'"

Later, the HMB's president, Larry Lewis, was the first to request that he perform. Two months later, McNiel was prepared -- he had memorized the entire book of James.

"I remember speaking to the Lord and I said something like this: 'Lord, I've got this ready to go, but I don't know how it's going to work as a character because it's just words.' And he said, 'You do what I've gifted you to do. My words are sharper than a two-edged sword. I'll take care of the rest.'"

The night of his first performance, there were 12 public professions of faith, McNiel said. That's when he committed to memorizing the entire New Testament.

"I believe I have a special gift of memorization and interpretation," McNiel said. He quotes from the King James Version of the Bible, which he hated at one time.

"When you do it, you fall in love with it," he said. "You want to keep your mind sharp, you memorize the Word of God."

McNiell said although he can visualize the words as he speaks, he does not claim to have a photographic memory. And he always prays before and after a presentation.

"Everything I am or have or hope to be is all because of Jesus," he said. "I didn't ask for this job. He called me by his grace. ... The reason I live is to bring people to Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Shermer is a freelance writer in Mobile, Ala.

Church ketchups, er,
catches up on giving

By Erma Koenig

Baptist Press
2/27/96

ROSWELL, N.M. (BP)--While flowers adorn the front of many churches on Sunday, the table at the front of South Manor Baptist Church, Roswell, N.M., was decorated with 20 bottles of ketchup Feb. 4.

Each Sunday since the beginning of the year, one of the congregation's deacons had given his testimony on what it meant to him and his family to be tithers. Feb. 4 was designated "Catch-up Sunday," a day when members were encouraged to catch up in giving of their tithes and offerings.

Nearly a third of the members brought bottles of ketchup for the special day, along with their monetary gifts.

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Koenig is a member of South Manor Baptist Church, Roswell, N.M.

'48 Hours' set aside
for students to witness

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
2/27/96

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--Forty-eight hours in April have been set aside for a nationwide simultaneous effort for students to share the gospel.

From noon Friday, April 12, to noon Sunday, April 14, youth and college students are challenged to find their lost friends, share the gospel with them and give them an opportunity to respond, said Dean Finley, Home Mission Board youth evangelism specialist.

Known simply as "48 Hours," the effort is multidenominational, with supporters including Campus Crusade, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and various Southern Baptist organizations.

One purpose of 48 Hours is to make students aware of the urgency of sharing Christ. "We're saying to students, 'If you haven't done it before now, then now is a good time. If not now, then when?'" Finley said.

The emphasis does not include events such as youth rallies. Consequently students cannot use not being able to attend as an excuse to not participate, Finley said.

Afterward, participants are asked to call 1-800-868-4800 to report how God moved during 48 Hours, but Finley said organizers are not going to keep track of how many people make professions of faith. The emphasis, he said, is on students being obedient to the command to witness.

Because students are asked to witness to people they know, follow-up with people who make decisions will occur as they continue in relationships with their Christian friends.

For more information about 48 Hours, call Finley at (417) 862-1111.

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Theologian urges preachers
to redeem 'hopeful' voice

By Dena Dyer

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Understanding the authors of Scripture as artists and poets can help redeem biblical preaching, Thomas Long told a Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary audience Feb. 7. Long, professor of preaching at Princeton Theological Seminary, was the featured speaker for Southwestern's annual Jesse Northcutt Lectures.

Preaching has two natural predators, Long stressed.

-- First, the job description of a pastor often reads like that of a small corporation CEO, "so to take time to study the Scripture seems to steal time from our 'real' programmatic ministry."

-- Second, many people treat the Bible as if it were a senile resident of a nursing home -- telling the same story over and over -- with any creativity to be supplied by the preacher.

"But biblical preaching in the Christian faith is hard work done under pressure by those who have the courage to dwell with the Scripture until it blesses them," he said. "Only then will it bless their congregation!"

A key example of that blessing, Long noted, is "in choosing certain words, the biblical writers want the event to come alive in the consciousness of the reader."

In a second lecture, Long noted preachers often are afraid to speak the eschatological message of Scripture.

"It is the most dangerous word that we have to speak from the pulpit," he said. "It puts us in conflict with our culture in risk-taking ways."

Comparing the modern-day preacher's dilemma to Paul's hearing before Agrippa in Acts, Long said, "As Christians in our postmodern culture, we are on trial for hope."

Long recounted visiting a physician in Johannesburg, South Africa, who was working long hours in a dirt-infested hospital frequented by AIDS victims. When Long asked how he could work under such conditions, the doctor replied, "I am clinging to the possibility of hope."

"It is just such a hope that we must preach to the world," Long said.

Long related four options in eschatology: futuristic eschatology, realized eschatology, demythologized eschatology and hopeful eschatology.

In futuristic eschatology, which the synoptic gospels focus on, "the world as we know it is coming to a literal end," he said. "But the problem with that view is that it undermines the ethical responsibility of Christians. Why worry about the crumbling cities all around us when we are looking forward to a heavenly city?"

Realized eschatology is a view in which "the world ended when Christ died on the cross and the kingdom of God is now. It has become fully realized in the present," he noted.

The gospel of John portrays this viewpoint, Long said, citing Jesus' statement to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life."

"The problem with that view is that if this is the kingdom, why is the newspaper filled every day with stories of darkness and evil?" Long asked.

Demythologized eschatology claims the world has a literal end, but it ends every day.

"It keeps on ending in the existential experience of believers. This view also says that just as we pick up our cross every day, so we pick up our hope again every day," he said.

"This way of looking at eschatology has won the day in the pulpit, but it's the most dangerous view espoused in our churches today, because it cannot deal with real tragedy."

Demythologized eschatology leads to a kind of optimistic, positive-thinking gospel, he said. "And we know that there are some kinds of evil that are unfixable on this earth."

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In contrast, Long said, the belief shared by the New Testament writers of a literal end to history but that there is more to the present world serves as "an anchor in the future and an ethical guide in the present."

Hopeful eschatology will end "all self-serving and 'power of positive thinking' preaching and will keep us from domesticating the text into something tame," he said. "When we believe in this viewpoint, we will preach the gospel of hope."

Long's lectures were part of Scholars in Ministry Week, an annual conference on the seminary's Fort Worth, Texas, campus. This year's conference theme was "Evangelicals in a Post-Modern Age."

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Some Alabama Baptists
listen to the newspaper

By David E. Reid

Baptist Press
2/27/96

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Some 115 Alabama Baptists who are visually impaired are able to "read" The Alabama Baptist through a free audio-taped edition of the newspaper.

Subscriber Dorothy Graham of Montgomery said she not only listens to the news but especially likes to hear her Sunday school lesson.

"I'm not completely blind, but I can't read for long because it hurts my eyes," said Graham, who attends First Baptist Church, Montgomery. "I'd much rather listen to the lesson so I can be prepared when I get to go to Sunday school."

Floyd Dozier, also of Montgomery, has received the tapes for many years and says he enjoys them very much.

"I like all the stories and the Sunday school lesson," said Dozier, a member of Highland Gardens Baptist Church who suffers from glaucoma in his eyes.

The service was started in the early 1980s by David Richardson, who retired as an associate in the associational and cooperative missions department of the Baptist State Board of Missions. It remains a cooperative effort of that department, the newspaper, and the board's promotion, program coordination and communications department.

The associational and cooperative missions department schedules volunteers to read the script and maintains the subscription list. Promotion, program coordination and communications department staff persons and other volunteers record and distribute the tapes by mail in a specially designed box. After subscribers listen to the tape, they return it in a box that is already imprinted with the Baptist Building's address.

Production of the tapes begins when volunteers come to the Baptist Building each Tuesday to read the script. Margaret Garret, a member of First Baptist Church, Montgomery, spends about an hour each Tuesday inside a recording booth at the Baptist Building.

"I just love doing it," said Garret, who also serves in her church's ministry to the blind. "The people who receive the tape seem to enjoy it a lot."

After each weekly edition is recorded, volunteers Borum Bishop and Grady McInnis handle the post-production tasks of duplicating the tapes, affixing address labels and mailing them to subscribers.

In addition to Garret, other volunteer readers are Cleo Thornton, Nettie Wallace and Mary Frank Teal. Beverly Lockhart, secretary in the associational and cooperative missions department, said she hopes to recruit others as well. "Some who've read for us in the past have had illnesses in their families, moved out of town, or accepted other responsibilities which prevent them from recording on Tuesday," she noted.

Further information about the state's audio newspaper can be obtained by calling 1-800-264-1225.

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Texas, Missouri musicians
honored by Southwestern

By Dena Dyer

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Dick Baker, retired minister of music at Prestonwood Baptist Church, Dallas, and Don C. Brown, chairman of the department of music at William Jewell College, Liberty, Mo., were honored Feb. 15 at Southwestern's annual school of church music honors luncheon. Each was presented a distinguished service award for significant contributions to the field of church music.

Baker received the bachelor of sacred music from Southwestern in 1953. While in seminary he served as minister of music for Birchman Baptist Church, Fort Worth, before beginning a 20-year worldwide evangelistic ministry with his brother Bo.

In 1979, Baker was called as minister of music at Prestonwood, where he served for 12 years. Benjamin Harlan, currently dean of Southwestern's school of church music, served with Baker when Harlan was a second-year seminary student.

"The best lessons I learned from Dick were those he taught by example," Harlan said. "I'm grateful for what he and his wife mean to me, to Southwestern Seminary and to those lives which have been forever touched all over the world."

Baker studied English, music and radio at Baylor University, where he formed the Baylor Religious Hour Choir and wrote the school's fight song. His college roommate was Jess Moody, visiting adjunct professor of pastoral ministry and church at Southwestern.

"Dick Baker is the greatest soul I have ever known," Moody noted.

A prolific songwriter, Baker has written such favorites as "Never a Man Like Him," "All to Thee" and "Longing for Jesus." More than 300 of his works have been published.

Baker's other recognitions include the Dick Baker Chair of Music Missions and Evangelism at Southwestern. He and his wife, Ann, have two children, Lori and Paul, and four grandchildren.

Brown has served as chairman of the department of music at William Jewell College since 1981 and currently is president of the Missouri Association of Departments and Schools of Music.

David Keith, professor of conducting, was one of Brown's students at William Jewell.

"I have had the privilege of knowing Don Brown as a friend, educator and church musician," Keith said. "Through my four years of college, he demonstrated to me that while grades are important, people are more so. The mediocre teacher tells; the good teacher explains; the superior teacher demonstrates; and the great teacher inspires. Don's classes were always inspirational."

A graduate of Southwestern, Brown earned the master of church music degree in 1964 and the doctor of musical arts degree in 1973. During his seminary days, Brown served First Baptist Church, Van, Texas, and Western Hills Baptist Church, Fort Worth.

He has served as interim minister of music in 15 Kansas City-area churches and has been a faculty member at Church Music Week at both Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist conference centers. In addition, he has been a choral and handbell clinician for several state Baptist conventions.

He served on the hymnal committee for the 1975 and 1991 Baptist Hymnal and is coauthor of "Handbook to the Baptist Hymnal." He also served two years on the Executive Council of the Southern Baptist Church Music Conference and is a former president of the organization.

Brown and his wife, Helen, have two children, Amy and Jeffrey, and two grandchildren.

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