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Toward A Broader Defining
Of 'Academic Excellence'

By James Lee Young
For Baptist Press

Cruz Casarez as a grown man had never been to school and could not read or write. He was working in a cotton patch when he felt "God's call" to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He hurried home to tell his wife, who replied, "I'm glad; I've always wanted to be a preacher's wife." But the couple did not know where or how to begin.

They heard about the Mexican Baptist Bible Institute in San Antonio, Tex., a four-year theological school for Spanish-speaking adults who cannot go to a regular college or seminary because of English difficulty or lack of academic background.

Casarez, his wife and eight children went to the Institute in Sept. 1970, asking for nothing but the chance to study and to preach. Before long he was invited to preach, but his wife had to read scriptures for him. At first, his children were embarrassed as their father struggled with simple words. But before long, the entire family was singing, reading or witnessing of God's love.

Then Casarez was called to be pastor of a mission about 50 miles from San Antonio. The family moved to their new church field, and the couple drove to classes and back four days a week. They had been in the little town of Stockdale, Tex., just over a year when a son was graduated from high school.

For their baccalaureate speaker that year, the Stockdale high school's seniors chose Cruz Casarez, a Mexican-American who three years earlier could not read or write.

"He had given himself freely to God and to the Stockdale community so that young and old turned to Casarez for a message from God," says H.B. Ramsour, who recently retired as the Institute's president.

Ramsour, who holds solid academic credentials of his own--including the doctor of theology degree--uses Cruz's story to emphasize what he sees as a broadening of the definition of "academic excellence."

"We have set our standards. And sometimes we have made them very rigid in an effort to secure what might be called the ideal product. We base it upon what has been called 'academic excellence'--and that isn't to be discredited.

"I feel, however, that during these years, Baptists have come to accept a more generous interpretation of that term and we are coming to see that academic excellence can be expressed at many levels. It comes to us with its greatest blessings when it meets the student at the level where he can receive it and make it his."

Academic excellence is best determined, Ramsour believes, by the teacher's ability to provide the best instruction possible for the student at the level where that student can understand, appropriate and use it.

"In the past we have built our (Baptist) colleges and universities, seminaries and Bible schools with a sincere effort to meet the need of every man and woman where we found them and to thoroughly train them for Christian service.

"But we have overlooked a great area of opportunity by gearing nearly all our training to the average Baptist. This person goes to high school and college. And, then, if he or she feels so led, they can go to a seminary to secure further training for Christian leadership."

When Ramsour originally gave his views on broadening the definition of academic excellence at a Southern Baptist Education Commission meeting over a year ago, reaction was one of wide acclaim from Baptist college and university presidents, recalls Ben C. Fisher, the commission's executive director.

The need to recognize the truth of what Ramsour espouses continues to be of increasing importance, Fisher says, particularly in light of aims for Baptist schools cited at the National Colloquium on Education, sponsored by the commission in Williamsburg, Va., last June.

While the colloquium spotlighted "purpose" of Baptist schools, Ramsour's views pinpoint the increasing relevance and purpose of non-degree programs for Baptist adults, Fisher notes.

"In many cases," says Ramsour, "we have almost bypassed the man or woman who has missed some of these channels of training--especially the untrained man who is converted at 30-35 and feels called to preach when he gives his life to the Lord. Neither our evangelism programs nor our education system have really zeroed in on him with all his potential and with our possibilities.

"A highly qualified and dedicated high school teacher," Ramsour continues, "can teach with the same degree of excellence as a college or seminary professor. Their objectives and levels of instruction will be different, but the excellence of achievement can be just as evident and gratifying at one level as another. This is why I feel a seminary can and should project a non-degree theological education without apology, in addition to graduate-level programs," he says.

All six Southern Baptist seminaries offer graduate-level programs, plus certificate or diploma programs for non-college graduates over 30-years-old. The non-graduate programs run for two years. At three of the seminaries, diploma or certificate students can complete up to one-half of the residence requirements through Seminary Extension courses, reducing time on-campus by one year.

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville has its Boyce Bible School for non-graduate level training, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary has the School for Christian Training, primarily to train pastors who do not have college degrees.

Seminary Extension Department of the six seminaries is tied in with this type of training and caters to clergy, other church staff and lay persons--college graduates included--who cannot get to a seminary, Baptist college or Bible school campus for training in Christian areas of study. The department offers courses both in extension centers and by correspondence.

Southern Baptists have students in four Bible institutes and other non-degree programs (including those offered by the seminaries and Seminary Extension). Others enter one of 53 Southern Baptist colleges and universities across the country. Increasing numbers of Southern Baptists spanning all age groups are entering seminary on the graduate level.

It is a paradox, Ramsour notes, Southern Baptists "are more educated than we once were, but the more we grow and the deeper we penetrate the mission fields of the world, the more common we become--whether in New York City, South Georgia or Southwest Texas."

With all of today's emphasis on education, experts believe there are still over 5,000 Southern Baptist pastors among the denomination's 34,902 churches who have not had the benefit of college or seminary training.

Daily problems are compounded by limited education, says Ramsour: "Whenever we find a man, for example, who feels called to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, the ideal and obligation of the Apostle Paul comes back to us to do everything in our power to provide training he can best receive and share." (BP)

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Cooperative Program Ahead 11-Month Check Point

NASHVILLE (BP)--With one month remaining in the 1975-76 fiscal year, the Southern Baptist Convention's national Cooperative Program unified budget has collected more than \$43.08 million--a 13.54 percent increase over the same period a year ago.

At the current rate of giving, Billy D. Malesovas of the SBC Executive Committee projects a final figure of about \$46.5 million, which would be well over the basic operating and capital needs of the SBC's worldwide missions program but under the overall goal. The basic operating and capital needs budget for 1975-76 is \$42,080,000. The total budget, which includes \$8,920,000 in challenge funds to meet unfunded mission needs, is \$51 million.

Total contributions for the year-to-date amount to \$82,068,059, a 12.28 percent increase over some \$73,089,286 collected last year. The total contribution figure includes the \$43.08 million Cooperative Program figure and another \$38.99 million in designated contributions.

For the month of August, Cooperative Program contributions totaled \$3,861,409, a 6.00 percent increase over last August, designated gifts amounted to \$535,191, a 7.57 percent decrease. The two amounts totaled \$4,396,599, an overall 4.14 percent increase for comparative months.

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R. A. McLemore
 Dies at Age 73

Baptist Press
 9/1/76

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--Richard Aubry McLemore, a prominent historian and former president of Mississippi College, died here Aug. 31 about three weeks after undergoing heart surgery. He was 73.

McLemore served as president of Mississippi College, a Baptist school in Clinton, 1957-68, after a 19 year tenure at Mississippi Southern College (now the University of Southern Mississippi) which included service as professor of history and head of the department of social studies, dean of the college, and acting president (for about one year).

The author of numerous articles and books on history, McLemore was former director of Mississippi's state department of archives and history, former president of the Southern Baptist Historical Society and had been serving as executive secretary-treasurer of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission. He was a member of the Southern Baptist Historical Commission and served on its administrative committee.

"Dr. McLemore has made significant contribution in helping Baptists understand and appreciate their heritage, through his writings and his leadership in Baptist history in Mississippi and through his service on the SBC Historical Commission," said Lynn E. May Jr., executive director of the Historical Commission, SBC.

McLemore's books included "The Mississippi Story," a elementary school text used in public schools throughout the state; "Our Nation's Story," a high school American history text used throughout the nation; and "A History of Mississippi Baptists, 1780-1970." He also edited a two-volume work on the history of Mississippi and was in the process of doing a history of Mississippi College.

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Before joining Mississippi Southern, McLemore had taught and served as a superintendent in Mississippi public schools and served as dean of Jones County (Miss.) Junior College, as a teaching fellow at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, while earning a doctor of philosophy degree, and as associate professor of history at Judson College, a Baptist school in Marion, Ala.

Funeral services were to be at First Baptist Church, Clinton, with burial at Highland Park Cemetery, Hattiesburg, Miss. He is survived by his wife, the former Nannie Pitts of Clinton, a son, a brother, and two grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests gifts to Mississippi College or the Willard F. Bond Home.

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Birmingham Pastor To Head
Baptist Retirement Centers

Baptist Press
9/1/76

BIRMINGHAM (BP)--Andrew W. Tampling, pastor of First Baptist Church here, has been elected executive director of the Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers, an agency of the Alabama Baptist State Convention charged with establishing a retirement homes ministry in Alabama.

Tampling, 48, will be the first person to fill the position since the retirement centers ministry was instituted by the Alabama Baptist State Convention last year. He begins his new work on September 13.

The first retirement center could be built in Dothan. Earlier this year, Mrs. B. W. Connell of Dothan deeded 44 acres of land in Dothan to the Alabama Baptist State Convention on which to build a retirement center, and the First Baptist Church of Dothan deeded 3.2 acres to the convention to use funds from the sale of the property toward building a center in Dothan.

Tampling has been pastor at First Baptist Church, Birmingham, since January, 1972. Previously he was pastor at First Baptist Church, Sylacauga, Ala., seven years; First Baptist Church, Opp, Ala., four years; and First Baptist Church, Fort Meade, Fla., 11 years.

Active in state and Southern Baptist Convention work, he was chairman of the resolutions committee of the 1976 Southern Baptist Convention and has served on the resolutions and state papers committees of the SBC.

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CORRECTIONS

On the BP story of 8/30/76, headlined "Retired Missionary . . .," substitute the following for graphs 21 and 22--

Reid had done some wrestling for an Indian friend while a student at Oklahoma Baptist University, but he really didn't discover the extent of his physical powers until after he became a missionary to Mexico in 1938.

According to Mexican law, no religious service could be held outside a registered church, and Reid wanted to take the gospel out where the people were. Soon he noticed that crowds always gathered whenever someone came to a town to perform some kind of a stunt.--(Pick up graph beginning--"If there . . .")

On the BP feature of 8/18/76, headlined "3,200 Hot Water Heaters Piping in Living Water," no photograph will be sent.--

Thanks, Baptist Press