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March 7, 1983

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Gregory Scholds, Suggests
Model For Urban Preaching

By Michael Tutterow

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--"There is a loss of confidence in the gospel in the pulpits of many cities," warns a Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary instructor, adding urban pastors must recognize their authority rests "in the revealed Word of God and not in your own particular personality."

Joel Gregory, preaching instructor at Southwestern seminary, told Southern Baptist urban pastors and urban directors of missions that authoritative, biblical preaching began in an urban environment. Now, he said, the cities' ethnic and religious diversity has caused pastors to rely on gimmicks and resources other than the Bible to attract people to church.

"We've said now that we're in the cities we've encountered something new and we're losing confidence in the apostolic call," claimed Gregory. Citing the Pentecost Sunday account in the Book of Acts, Gregory asserted, "We've come back to where the authority of apostolic proclamation began--in the pluralism of the urban environment."

Gregory, former pastor of Gambrell Street Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, said that approaches to preaching that attempt to address the pluralism of the city lack authority when cut off from the "roots of the Word of God." The Bible provides a framework in which to address urban problems, he said.

Without a biblical framework, pastors preach contemporary themes which lack any "sense of direction or authority," Gregory said. The urban society can "devour preaching material," he continued, adding, "If you become merely a paid purveyor of contemporary themes you'll find yours if preached out and burned out. However, the Bible, as a resource for preaching in urban ministry, is inexhaustible," he said.

Gregory explained that the average urban resident is bombarded with more than 5,000 sensory messages a day, all "laden with advocacy." In such an environment, said Gregory, the city "will drown out preachers that do not have an authority base for their ministry."

Gregory also said the "radical and relentless discipline of biblical preaching" keeps pastors from "dodging the difficult" and guards "against your own bias" of the scriptur .

"Using the Bible as your norm for proclamation helps you avoid the urban pitfall of the me churches--those churches not proclaiming a balanced Christian message but getting caught in some backwater truth instead of the broad river of biblical revelation," he explained.

He criticized preaching that presents a verbal barrage of theological terms or in-depth explanations of Greek verb tenses.

"People in the city are not interested in '-ologies, -isms and -tions,'" said Gregory. He suggested that pastors who overemphasize the Greek language in their preaching "are more familiar with that than they are with the sins of the businessmen in the congregation."

He also charged too many contemporary sermons contain "too much analysis of urban problems and too little answer."

"If our urban churches are empty it is because the pulpit has suffered the paralysis of analysis," Gregory said. "We must have biblical preaching that forces itself to specificity of application. If you can't apply it, don't preach it."

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Gregory said pastors face increased competition from public media. He noted recent statistics showed the average adult watches 23.3 hours of television per week. Such an influence makes people physically lazy, said Gregory, "many so much so that they won't get up and come to worship."

He also said the "spectatoritis" has left church members intellectually uncritical, and has caused Baptists in particular to confuse images with issues. He cited political campaigns that present "good old boy" images draw Baptists' votes without ever dealing with issues.

Gregory added that the media age has left people psychologically confused. "David and Goliath are on the same par with Spiderman and others of the Saturday morning sci-fi heroes," he lamented.

"If we're going to communicate in an urban world, both in the material content of our preaching and the stylistic approach to our preaching, there must be variety," said Gregory. "We simply cannot become predictable, three-point preachers in a contemporary urban world."

"People are not interested in an ancient book if it's presented to them in a dull, unimaginative presentation," added Gregory. "Authentic biblical preaching brings together the 'then' of the text and the 'now' of the need of the city."

Gregory pointed to the prophet Nehemiah as a model of an effective urban minister who reclaimed the city for God, and noted circumstances in Nehemiah's time parallel Southern Baptists today.

"We have moved up and out," explained Gregory. "We may not have moved from Jerusalem to Persia, but we've moved from the inner city to the suburbs and the exurbs and we do not have to be disturbed about the need of the city."

But, warned Gregory, "If Southern Baptists lose the cities it will be as pathetic as a child drowning while a thousand live, lean lifeguards watch and do nothing."

Gregory said Nehemiah's vision for the city motivated laypeople to rebuild Jerusalem, adding that with Southern Baptists' institutions, financial resources and capable laypeople, the denomination could make tremendous strides in urban ministry, he said.

"We must find the key, we must find the dynamic, we must find the personal force that will compel people who live at a distance from the inner city to provide resources and manpower to reclaim the city," said Gregory. "We must prepare a comprehensive strategy that will not allow anyone in our churches to be exempt from the task of reclaiming the city for the Lord."

Nehemiah's work preserved the city for 400 years until Christ came to Jerusalem to die and redeem all people, said Gregory, challenging Baptists to work to preserve the cities for God's redemptive act.

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Symposium Helps Baptists
Focus On Rural Churches

By Norman Jameson

Baptist Press
3/7/83

ATHENS, Ga. (BP)--After four decades of ingesting every country boy with a dream, cities now are spitting dissatisfied urbanites back into rural America at a rate which threatens social upheaval every bit as great as the original central migration.

It is irresponsible to engage in ministry without considering such sociological findings, participants in a recent symposium on the rural church were told.

The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board sponsored the three-day symposium for directors of missions and pastors from 13 states at the University of Georgia's continuing education center.

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Calvin Beale, center's analyst and statistician for the United States Department of Agriculture, said the new rural migration first was noticed in the 1970s in the Ozarks, the lower Michigan peninsula, and the Colorado ski areas.

He gave four basic reasons for the movement: people are not being displaced from rural industries and mining as they once were; job alternatives in rural areas are growing; more people are retiring to rural areas, and more people are living where they want to live rather than where they can maximize their income.

Beale gave statistics which could help sociologists prepare for the future: since 1977, the number of births slowly has been rising (3.7 million last year) and, since 1972, the white birthrate has been below replacement level (southern New England has the lowest birthrate with 12 per 1,000, Utah the highest with 28).

Illegitimate births also are rising. In 1980, 665,000, or 18.5 percent of all births in the U.S., were illegitimate including 11 percent of white births and 55 percent of black births. A continued decline in household size from the current 2.75 persons in each household is expected. Doug Walraph, former pastor and denominational worker in the Dutch Reformed Church, said too many rural churches "look forward to the past" when they consider what to do about the influx of newcomers.

They can respond in any of four ways, he said. They can regress, (fearing that change kills) escape (by looking away) protect themselves with a moat strategy, ("build a moat and see if the newcomers can get across"); or they can relate the newcomers to those who remained in town when every one else gave up and moved to the city.

Walraph, a church consultant and sociologist, said the church must wrestle with attitudes shaped by tradition and sociological trends of the past and consider who it is prepared to help believe. He urged pastors to follow Jesus' example of making disciples.

"I wonder if it is because of our lack of discipleship that we keep ending up with crowds instead of with churches", he said. "It will take disciples, committed and informed, to do missions. I don't think we can do any other way."

Howard Sthredder, a community analyst and faculty member of the University of Georgia, said religious leaders are not seen as influential in the rural towns he has analyzed, primarily because they do not get involved in community affairs.

"To encourage the church to participate in community development is tantamount to the mission of the church," he said.

"Everything that happens in a community is a concern of God, therefore it ought to be a concern of God's church," agreed Willis Bennett, professor of church and community at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Through town meetings or surveys Sthredder has found common worries of small town residents to be, apathy, recreation means, family relations, declining population, alcohol and drugs, crime and vandalism, education, land use change, jobs, land costs and taxes.

He recommended churches try to restore the art of conversation in the small town. "People don't talk to each other anymore," he said.

Bennett said the small town church is potentially the strongest church in America because it has the resources, strength, and influence in the community.

One-third of the Southern Baptist churches are in towns of 10,000 or less, including 3,942 in villages of up to 500 population; 4,067 in towns of up to 2,500 population and 3,518 of towns of up to 10,000. They represent 32 percent of the churches and 28.5 percent of the membership in the Southern Baptist Convention.

"We're talking about the heart of Southern Baptist churches when we talk about the churches in the small town", said Bob Wyley, associate director in the Home Mission Board's rural-urban ministry department.

Quentin Lockwood, department director, said the symposium participants needed to lead people to do three things: understand change, cope with change and help them assist in the process of shaping change.

"Our churches ought to be involved in the process of shaping changes like a cowboy racing to the front of a stampeding herd to move it into a circle," Lockwood said.

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Kampala Church Survives
Because They Persevered

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press
3/7/83

KAMPALA, Uganda (BP)--Jaques Masiko could tell you a lot about hard times. He could tell you about the time Idi Amin's looting, rampaging soldiers shattered his arm or the time explosives shattered the home of his friend, John Ekudu.

Unlike many Ugandans, Masiko and Ekudu lived to tell about their hard times. Kampala Baptist Church lived because Masiko, Ekudu and their wives, Cecilia Masiko and Grace Ekudu and others wouldn't crumble under the pressure.

Members of the small church, mostly students burning with Christian idealism, heard on Sept. 29, 1977, that Amin had banned numerous church groups, including Baptists.

"Fear spread," Masiko recalled. "We thought we'd be arrested. We thought a lot of things but we knew we couldn't just give up." They met at the Ekudu home the next day and decided to establish Bible study groups in four homes.

"We began to meet each week to pray and study the Bible," Masiko said. "It really lifted our spirits. Then we started hearing of others being arrested for having evening prayer meetings. We were scared. We wondered if we should continue."

The small groups finally decided to stop singing and just study the Bible and pray. After awhile, they started singing again--but not as much.

"Things got a bit more serious in 1978," Masiko said in classic understatement. "So I got a letter from a friendly Church of Uganda minister which endorsed the validity of our meetings." The politically powerful Anglican denomination had escaped the ban and could meet.

"Those who came were the people who really valued it," Masiko said. "It made a big difference in our fellowship. It was satisfying and edifying. It kept us together. We realized that help could come from nowhere but God."

The ban turned out to be a training ground for leaders such as Ekudu, now general secretary of the Baptist Union of Uganda, and Masiko, now treasurer for both the union and the Kampala church.

"Now we know how to handle situations because that was a time of strengthening," Masiko said. "Just like the best diamonds, we were subjected to heat and pressure. We were hardened, refined and polished. Now, when someone talks about suffering, we know what he means and can sympathize with him."

Masiko got his chance to put his new knowledge about suffering to the test. On Feb. 22, 1979, he taught a Bible study on trials, temptation and suffering. On Feb. 23, soldiers broke through the door of his home to terrorize and loot.

While trying to escape, Masiko put his small frame between the soldiers and his wife. A blow from a rifle butt shattered his arm.

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When he regained consciousness in a hospital, he realized that this was an example of the trial and suffering he'd talked about. "I prayed, 'Lord, I will not complain against you.' I asked God for strength and I immediately received joy and peace," he said.

Masiko still keeps the x-ray of his shattered arm in his office to show visitors and to remind him of what God did in healing him and giving him and Cecilia a chance to grow.

He thanks God that he and his friends were alive on May 6, 1979, when 30 Kampala Baptist Church members gathered openly to worship and praise God for life and for the end of the ban.

Now the church sits on the verge of great growth in Uganda's capital city. It plans to use Southern Baptist Lottie Moon Christmas offering funds to build a new 400-seat auditorium, with help from a conservative Baptist, who originally organized the church.

But the original members will never forget the hard times that shaped and strengthened the congregation.

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(BP) photo to be mailed to state Baptist papers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Students Provide Scholarships At Hardin-Simmons University

By Thomas J. Brannon

ABILENE, Texas (BP)--If they can wait "just a picking minute," students at Hardin-Simmons University can put the squeeze on some \$1,000 scholarships.

In February HSU students and several staff members made a 1,000 mile round trip safari to the Rio Grande Valley, and picked more than 500 boxes of oranges that will net the Baptist university's Student Foundation's Scholarship Program some \$12,000. These funds will be translated into at least a dozen \$1,000 scholarships for deserving students.

"The students take the project very seriously," said HSU President Jesse Fletcher, who work d alongside the student citrus pickers. "Not only do the students raise the funds, but th y process the applications and award the scholarships themselves."

Fletcher said the project is far more than just the funds generated from the citrus sales. (Sales are actually donations of \$20 or more to the scholarship fund.) "It provides an opportunity for the students to be personally involved in helping their fellow students and it provides fellowship and builds school spirit," he said.

In 1968 the H. W. McIntyres of Sweetwater, Texas gave to the school 30 acres of land including a 10-acre citrus grove near Mission in the Rio Grande Valley. Four years later, the first student trek to the valley was organized by students who raised \$20,000 toward a new library. In recent years, the emphasis has shifted to scholarships.

Students, some of whom have never seen an orange tree, pay \$5 for the privilege of 10-hour bus rides and getting up at 7 a.m. to do manual labor in the citrus grove.

Several of the fruit pickers have been recipients of scholarships. Scott Fewell of Merritt Island, Fla., and Fort Worth, Texas, said it was this scholarship that enabled him to come to Hardin-Simmons. "It was an answer to prayer, the secondary education major beamed. "I earned all I could and asked the Lord to provide the rest. The students selected me for one of 'our' scholarships."

'Orange scholarships' are not just randomly handed out. An applicant must have at least a 2.5 average and "have a genuine interest both in the University and in fellow students."

"We have had some very lucrative opportunities to sell the grove, Fletcher said, "But when we look at what awarding these scholarships means to the students, both givers and receivers, there's no way we could let it go."

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