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First Baptist Church of Dallas
calls Joel Gregory as pastor

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (BP)--First Baptist Church of Dallas, the largest congregation in the Southern Baptist Convention, on Nov. 25 selected Joel C. Gregory of Fort Worth, Texas, as pastor and successor to W.A. Criswell.

A capacity crowd heard Gregory deliver a 40-minute sermon Sunday evening before voting to call him as pastor and to designate the 80-year-old Criswell as "senior pastor."

Gregory, 42, who has been pastor of Fort Worth's Travis Avenue Baptist Church since 1985, will begin sharing pastoral responsibilities with Criswell the first Sunday in January.

Initially, Criswell will continue preaching at the 11 a.m. Sunday service, and Gregory will preach at the other three weekly services.

Criswell, pastor of the 27,000-member downtown Dallas church for 46 years, has expressed the desire to devote more time to his role as chancellor and chief executive officer of Criswell Bible College, where he will begin teaching in January.

"I want to pour the strength of my life into the building of that college," he said during a Nov. 26 press conference at First Baptist Church.

Criswell described Gregory's coming as an answer to prayer, noting that he had been seeking a "helper" for more than 15 years.

"We need a young man to come to lay the foundation for his ministry here that I pray will last toward 50 years also," Criswell said.

While questioning the senior pastor's arithmetic -- noting he would be in his 90s at that point -- Gregory underscored his commitment to a prolonged tenure at the historic Dallas church.

When Gregory was asked about his future plans for the church, including any possible relocation, Criswell interrupted, "We're going to hang him if he says we're going to move this church."

Gregory expressed his own commitment to "keeping the best things" downtown while at the same time exploring innovative means of outreach to unchurched segments of the community.

The selection of Gregory ended a 27-month nationwide search by a 19-member committee that considered about 70 candidates from 16 states.

A Fort Worth native, Gregory holds undergraduate and doctorate degrees from Baylor University, and a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

He was pastor of Gambrell Street Baptist Church in Fort Worth, from 1977 to 1982 before becoming assistant professor of preaching at Southwestern Seminary, a position he held until accepting the pastorate at Travis Avenue. He previously was pastor of churches in Waco, Cottonwood and Granbury, Texas.

He and his wife, Linda, have two sons: Grant, 17, and Garrett, 13.

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Gregory was elected to two terms as president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas in the late 1980s and has served on numerous denominational committees at the associational, state and national levels.

He preached the annual convention sermon at the 1988 Southern Baptist Convention in San Antonio and recently was named permanent speaker on the long-running "Baptist Hour" radio program.

For several years, Gregory remained publicly non-aligned in the controversy that has raged within the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979. However, at the Nov. 26 press conference in Dallas, he said that his closest associates knew all along on which side his "sympathies, empathies, prayers and quiet influence" rested.

In 1988 he publicly called on Baylor University to give "enlarged and enhanced representation" to conservatives on its religion faculty.

Last year, prior to the SBC annual meeting in New Orleans, Gregory joined several other high-profile "non-aligned inerrantists" in endorsing conservative candidate Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, for the convention presidency.

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Criswell, Gregory agree
FBC's future is downtown

By Toby Druin

Baptist Press
11/28/90

DALLAS (BP)--W.A. Criswell and Joel Gregory agreed on a lot of things in Dallas Nov. 27, including the belief that the future of First Baptist Church of Dallas is in the heart of the city where it has been for 122 years.

They also shared the opinion that if all else fails, a lawsuit should be brought to restore the relationship between Baylor University and the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Criswell and Gregory spoke to a noon press conference at the church following the election the evening before of Gregory as the new pastor of the church, effective Jan. 1. Criswell, who has been pastor since 1944, will become senior pastor.

Criswell, who will be 81 on Dec. 19, which is one of the reasons he will be "senior" pastor, he said, "to start off with," will continue to preach at the church's televised 10:50 a.m. worship service on Sunday.

Gregory will preach at the 8:15 a.m. service and 7 p.m. services on Sunday and at 7 p.m. on Wednesday.

Criswell said the decision for him to preach at the 10:50 a.m. service on Sunday's was due to the church's commitment to KTVT, Channel 11, the Dallas television station that approached him in 1989 about televising the services.

"As time goes on, we will do whatever he (Gregory) would like," Criswell said, "maybe rotating it. He would preach and then I would preach. It is in the purview and direction of Dr. Gregory, but to start with ... I will have one service."

Turning to Gregory, he added, "If that is all right with you."

Criswell, who said he will turn much of his time and energy to Criswell College, said he hopes Gregory's ministry at the church will last "50 years or more."

Gregory, 42, and pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church of Fort Worth, since 1985, will be only the third pastor the Dallas church has had since 1897. George W. Truett became pastor that year and served for 47 years until his death in 1944. Criswell has served the 46 years since then.

As early as his 65th birthday Criswell said he had asked the church to consider getting him help in the pastorate. And some 28 months ago he renewed the request, asking for a co-pastor to work alongside him so that the church would have no "hiatus" between his ministry and that of his successor.

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Gregory said the search committee had asked him to come and the church had called him -- a unanimous, standing vote on Sunday night -- to be pastor and successor to Criswell.

He praised Criswell and his "unabated" strength and said he would depend on him for counsel and wisdom, but said he understood that the "pastoral responsibility and most of the preaching responsibility ... will fall to me."

"We will be co-laborers and will share and pool resources," he added. "I will lean on his inestimable wisdom as one of the greatest pastor/leaders Baptists have ever had."

Gregory praised the church as the "most vital, vivacious, energetic downtown church anywhere in the world. He pledged to keep it downtown but said it would have to innovate to meet challenge of the future.

Criswell said he felt his decision to lead the church to remain at its downtown location, even when a banker offered to build him the "most beautiful church in the world" in a suburban location, was the highlight of his ministry at the church.

Both ministers commented on the future of the Southern Baptist Convention and the church's position in it as the largest of the SBC's 37,000 congregations.

Criswell said he expects the SBC to go forward and predicted its best years are ahead.

Referring to a meeting of moderates in Atlanta that is providing a funding alternative to the Cooperative Program to support Southern Baptist missions and educational causes, Criswell said, "That little bunch over there ... would be like a flea on an elephant's body." He predicted it will be "inconsequential."

Gregory said he will give his attention immediately to becoming pastor of the church, but will lend "whatever sympathy, weight or influence I can as pastor, preacher, speaker and writer" to furthering the "conservative resurgence in our denomination."

He said it was nothing new for him to be a defender of the inerrancy of the word of God. And responding to one question noting that during his BGCT presidency he was characterized as an "independent or bridge-builder" in the SBC fray, Gregory noted his "colleagues, associates, friends never had doubt where my sympathies lie."

He did not get more involved in the SBC before his endorsement of Morris Chapman for the convention presidency last spring, he said, because of his commitments to Travis Avenue church and his heavy speaking schedule.

Gregory said he endorsed Chapman because he felt last June's SBC meeting in New Orleans was the most crucial since the founding of the denomination in 1845 and also because of Chapman's commitment to "enlarge the tent" of his SBC appointments beyond perceived political parameters to include everyone who confesses the perfect word of God.

The issue in the SBC remains, Gregory said, the nature of the Bible.

He said he had encouraged Robert E. Naylor, chairman of the committee on BGCT/Baylor relationship to do "everything" he can to restore the relationship between the university and convention that was severed when Baylor's trustees changed its charter on Sept. 21.

Gregory and Criswell, both of whom are Baylor graduates, disputed the claim by Baylor officials that the charter change was done to protect the school from takeover by "fundamentalists." They denied such a threat exists.

And both said they favored a lawsuit if all else fails to restore the relationship.

The Baylor action, taken behind closed doors and after a two-year legal study, propelled it into the legal arena, they said.

"It may not be the perfect will of God to settle it in court," Gregory said, "but it may be the permissive will of God before they are allowed to run off with 145 years of Texas Baptist history."

Rosenbaum elected to
Executive Committee post

NASHVILLE (BP)--Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee announced the election of Richard P. (Bucky) Rosenbaum Jr. as vice president for business and finance of the Executive Committee.

Rosenbaum, 36, presently is manager of the conference center marketing section, coordinator of the church program training center and coordination specialist in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's office of church programs and services. He will begin his duties at the Executive Committee Dec. 15.

Rosenbaum succeeds Tim Hedquist who resigned earlier this year to become assistant pastor and staff administrator at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn.

Bennett said he recommended Rosenbaum to the Executive Committee officers who interviewed him Sept. 16 and concurred in the selection during an Oct. 22 telephone conference call. They reaffirmed their decision during a meeting Nov. 8-9.

Executive Committee officers are: Sam Pace, a director of missions from Antlers, Okla., chairman; Paul Pressler, appeals court judge from Houston, vice chairman; Fred Wolfe, pastor in Mobile, Ala., secretary; Charles Sullivan, pastor in Lenoir City, Tenn., chairman of the administrative and convention arrangements subcommittee; Ronnie W. Floyd, pastor in Springdale, Ark., chairman of the business and finance subcommittee; and James E. Jones, pastor in Campbellsville, Ky., chairman of the program and budget subcommittee.

Bennett said the full Executive Committee will vote on Rosenbaum's selection during their next meeting, Feb. 18-20, 1991, in Nashville. The 77-member committee approved during their September 1990 meeting a bylaw change allowing the six officers to fill staff vacancies on an interim basis between meetings. They also voted to invoke the bylaw to authorize officers to act before February 1991 on recommendations to fill any current vacancies.

"During his 10 years at the Sunday School board, Mr. Rosenbaum has had specific assignments in budget planning, procurement and sales," said Bennett. "I believe he is uniquely qualified to make a significant contribution to the future of the Southern Baptist Convention in this strategic position."

As vice president for business and finance, Rosenbaum will manage the business and finance office, serve as operations manager of the SBC Building and financial planner for the SBC operating budget. He also will be co-manager of operations for the annual SBC meeting, serve as staff to the Executive Committee's business and finance subcommittee and its workgroups, be administrator for the SBC business and financial plan, and serve as internal auditor and personnel director for the Executive Committee.

Since joining the Sunday School board in 1980, Rosenbaum has served as Holman Bible buyer in the procurement department and design and process specialist in the Bible teaching and church services divisions. He became coordinator of the church program training center in 1985, coordination specialist in 1989 and manager of the conference center marketing section earlier this year.

He is a graduate of Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., and began seminary external education studies through Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1989. He also has done additional study at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, the University of South Carolina at Columbia and the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, N.Y.

Rosenbaum is a member of First Baptist Church of Nashville. He is married to the former Joann Burnette, and they are the parents of five children.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Coppenger elected vice president for public relations, SBC Executive Committee

NASHVILLE (BP)--Officers of the SBC Executive Committee unanimously elected Mark T. Coppenger, executive director/treasurer of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, to assume responsibilities as vice president for public relations beginning Jan. 1, according to Harold C. Bennett, Executive Committee president and treasurer.

The Executive Committee voted in September to amend the bylaws to allow for interim election by the officers of a vice president of business and finance, a vice president for public relations, and Baptist Press personnel. Each of these is subject to confirmation at the next meeting of the Executive Committee Feb. 18-20.

Coppenger, 42, was pastor of First Baptist Church of El Dorado, Ark., from 1983-1988, and was assistant/associate professor of philosophy at Wheaton College from 1975-1981.

He is married to the former Sharon South. They are the parents of three children.

A graduate of Ouachita Baptist University, Coppenger received a doctor of philosophy degree from Vanderbilt University in 1974 and a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1983.

He is the author of numerous articles for denominational publications and scholarly journals, as well as Bioethics: A Casebook and a chapter on Herschel Hobbs for the Broadman Press release Baptist Theologians.

Regarding his selection, Executive Committee chairman Sam Pace of Antlers, Okla., noted the "unanimous enthusiasm" of the officers that Coppenger had accepted the position. "We feel that the grassroots constituency of the Southern Baptist Convention needs to have an enhancement of their own self-image and Dr. Coppenger is the ideal person to provide that."

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(Tammy Ledbetter, co-editor of the Indiana Baptist contributed to this story.)

SBC Executive Committee officers
change public relations job

Baptist Press
11/28/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--In naming Mark Coppenger to fill the post of vice president for public relations, officers of the SBC Executive Committee endorsed a significant change in the public relations position description. Their action separates responsibilities for public relations promotion from management of news services.

This is in keeping with the decision of the full Executive Committee in September that a vice president for public relations be elected as well as Baptist Press personnel.

Executive Committee president and treasurer Harold C. Bennett, in meetings with the officers and in background materials sent to all committee members, recommended the division of responsibilities for public relations and news services, including Baptist Press.

Both the public relations advisory committee and the public relations workgroup had studied the plan with the goal of establishing a national program of public relations in addition to Baptist Press.

Executive Committee chairman Sam W. Pace of Antlers, Okla., said, "Our convention at this time needs to hear about good and positive things that are occurring within the convention and we feel this is more of a public relations responsibility than a press responsibility."

When informing the board of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana on Nov. 20 of his intention to resign the position of executive director/treasurer and accept the public relations post, Coppenger said that he sees the work as focusing upon "the laudable aspects of our work. This is an R.A.'s dream job. I remember so well devouring Ambassador Life, learning about our mission work, joint efforts and godly servants at work in Christ. Now, I get to play a key role in telling the story.

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"I think it is no accident that I have a background in teaching," Coppenger said, "for it seems to me the work of a public relations vice president is instructive. It is his job to clarify, to make edifying information accessible to the people."

Responsibilities of the office will include research projects designed to determine the attitude of the public toward the Southern Baptist Convention, development of a comprehensive public relations program which will include advertising and promotional materials, and serving as the Executive Committee's information officer for the Executive Committee as requested.

Among other duties is serving as co-manager of convention operations for annual meetings along with the vice president for business and finance, a position to which Richard P. (Bucky) Rosenbaum Jr. recently has been elected.

The Executive Committee also has approved the employment of additional personnel to manage Baptist Press and other news functions. In response to inquiry about the schedule of decisions regarding press personnel, Bennett said that "work is in process in this area but no decisions have been made."

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(Tammy Ledbetter, co-editor of the Indiana Baptist contributed to this story.)

Banks called to Army duty;
Gardner named acting director

By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press
11/28/90

NASHVILLE (BP)--Bill Banks, director of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's special ministries department, has been ordered to active duty with the U.S. Army Reserve.

Banks, a major in the U.S. Army Reserve, reported to Fort Bragg, N.C., with his unit on Nov. 23 and anticipates spending six months at Fort Bragg. He is commander of the 678th Personnel Services Company in Nashville and will direct an element of the unit which has been assigned to assist in mobilization processing and personnel administration at Fort Bragg.

Gary Cook, vice president for church programs and services, said, "I know Bill will fulfill this responsibility in an excellent way. We look forward to his returning to the board upon completion of this military assignment."

Cook named John Gardner, manager of staff coordination, to serve as acting director of the department until Banks returns.

Cook said Gardner already has a working relationship and an understanding of the work of the special ministries department. He cited Gardner's eight years experience in division and office staff management, budgeting skills and "tough-minded, yet caring attitude."

Banks will benefit from a recently approved Sunday School Board policy on emergency military leave. The policy extends benefits offered for annual training military leave to cover situations of emergency military leave for up to six months.

Under the new policy, the board will make up the difference between active duty military pay and the individual's normal board pay. Also, insurance and other board benefits will be continued during the time of military service.

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Arizona Baptists
deal with deficit

By Elizabeth Young

Baptist Press
11/28/90

PHOENIX, Ariz. (BP)--Messengers to the 62nd annual meeting of the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention heard a report on the convention's Baptist Loan Fund, adopted a \$4,942,159 budget and elected a new president when they met at North Phoenix Baptist Church, Nov. 13-14.

The Baptist Loan Fund is facing a financial crisis, but plans have been made to deal with the problem, Dan C. Stringer, ASBC executive director-treasurer, told the messengers during the opening session of the annual meeting.

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As of the end of October, with holdings of \$4,403,181 that have been loaned to the loan fund by individuals, the Baptist Loan Fund has an operating deficit of \$3,624,496, Stringer said.

Plans to deal with the deficit include selling Paradise Valley Baptist Conference Center in Prescott and the Baptist Building in Phoenix. In addition, the ASBC has made a major budgetary commitment beginning in 1991 to undergird the Baptist Loan Fund, Stringer said.

The 1991 budget, which is a 5.65 percent reduction from the one adopted by messengers last year, anticipates Cooperative Program gifts of \$2,250,000 from Arizona churches. That amount is based on actual giving during the year and is \$315,000 less than the amount adopted for 1990.

The budget is based on a Cooperative Program distribution formula adopted by the executive board in August.

The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, which distributes Cooperative Program funds to SBC agencies will receive 17 percent, or \$382,500, if the budget is reached. For 1990, the Executive Committee will receive a guaranteed \$480,000, which is 21.33 percent of the revised 1990 Cooperative Program budget that was reduced to \$2,250,000 in May.

The 1991 budget also calls for a reduction in the allocations to Grand Canyon University, from 17.37 percent to 16.0 percent; Arizona Baptist Children's Services, from 3.15 percent to 2.5 percent; and ASBC general fund, from 58.15 percent to 51.17 percent.

A new feature of the distribution formula is a separate allocation for the Baptist Loan Fund, which will receive 13.33 percent, or \$300,000 if the budget is reached. This amount will help pay interest that will be owed by the loan fund during the budget year.

A motion to increase the Executive Committee allocation from 17 percent to 20 percent and reduce the Grand Canyon University allocation from 16 percent to 13 percent was defeated.

Another motion, which would have given the budget committee a mandate to increase the SBC Executive Committee's Cooperative Program percentage "by a minimum of 1 percent next year," also failed on a voice vote.

Dennis Adams, pastor of First Baptist Church of Show Low, was elected president.

In other business, messengers adopted eight resolutions as a slate without discussion, including a resolution in support of the Cooperative Program.

The resolution declared that Arizona Southern Baptists' cooperation to share the gospel "will best be accomplished through the continued efforts of each of our churches to give through the Cooperative Program."

A total of 579 messengers, almost 100 more than last year, and 92 registered guests attended the annual meeting.

The 1991 annual meeting will be held at North Phoenix Baptist Church, Nov. 12-13.

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Wyoming Baptists
elect Stroud president

Baptist Press
11/28/90

POWELL, Wyo. (BP)--Messengers to the Wyoming Southern Baptist Convention elected a Casper pastor as president and approved a budget of over \$950,000 with an increase in giving to the Cooperative Program unified budget during their meeting Nov. 14-15.

Fred Stroud, pastor of Mountain View Baptist Church in Casper, was elected president during the meeting at First Southern Baptist Church in Powell.

Messengers approved a budget of \$958,979, sending \$305,854, or 31.8 percent to the Cooperative Program. That is an increase of 1 percent over last year.

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In other actions, messengers adopted a resolution opposing abortion and homosexuality. Another resolution in support of Billy Graham and his ministry was also adopted.

The 1991 convention will be Nov. 13-14 at College Heights Baptist Church in Casper.

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Roach elected president
of Dakota Fellowship

Baptist Press
11/28/90

BROOKINGS, S.D. (BP)--Carl E. Roach, pastor of Galvary Baptist Church in Blunt, S.D., was elected president of the Dakota Southern Baptist Fellowship at its annual meeting Oct. 24-26.

The proposed budget was adopted without opposition. This year's budget is \$649,538. Of that amount, 14 percent, the same as last year, will be forwarded on to the Cooperative Program unified budget for use in funding the SBC's missions and educational causes.

The next annual meeting of the Dakota Fellowship will be Oct. 24-26, 1991, at Temple Baptist Church in Fargo, N.D.

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Religious leaders propose
local film rating boards

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
11/28/90

WASHINGTON (BP)--The establishment of public film-ratings boards in communities and states throughout the country has been proposed as a way to correct an industry-run movie ratings system that has received increasing criticism.

The recommendation was presented by the National Coalition on Television Violence, a TV and movie advocacy group, and Good News Communications, a Christian ministry that rates films, on Nov. 16 to the National Conference on Film Ratings, sponsored by the groups. A wide range of organizations were represented at the meeting, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, Women Against Pornography, the United States Catholic Conference, the National Council of Churches, the American Family Association, Focus on the Family and the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

The film-ratings conference was organized after the Motion Picture Association of America announced in September that it was replacing its X rating with a new NC-17 rating. Critics say the change enables movies to be featured in theaters that previously would not allow X-rated films and advertisements in newspapers that previously would not allow ads for X-rated films.

The proposed public ratings system would consist of the following classifications, which would be assigned to movies after they were previewed by the board:

- All Ages;
- Parental Guidance;
- Not Permitted for Young Persons Under Age 13 (R-13);
- Not Permitted for Young Persons Under Age 16 (R-16);
- Not Permitted for Young Persons under Age 18 (R-18);
- Unrated or X-rated.

Advertising must include the board's rating and any symbols it attaches to the film. The symbols are: L (obscene language); S (sexual conduct); V, VV, VVV (increasing levels of violence); D (drugs, including alcohol and tobacco, portrayed positively); N (nudity); P (perversion), and A (adult situations).

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"The local option is certainly one effective answer to what seems to be a trend of national standards reaching the lowest common denominator. Clearly, there are many, many, many communities across the country for whom such a lowest common denominator, East Coast and West Coast standard is going to be patently offensive, said Richard D. Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"What better way for parents to receive some meaningful guidance on the suitability of films for themselves and their families than to have a rating constructed by their friends and neighbors. I applaud the efforts of those seeking to bring meaningful ratings standards back to the American film industry."

The proposed ratings also would be required to be placed on videotapes for rent or sale in the community.

Violators could be punished by a maximum fine of \$500.

The classification board would include 26 citizen volunteers representing the entire community. The recommended ordinance is similar to that of the city of Dallas. Its movie ratings board was established in 1966. The Dallas ordinance has been revised twice to comply with court rulings. It has survived several tests in court.

The Motion Picture Association of America's ratings system was established in 1968. Ted Baehr of Good News Communications said that the United States is "one of the few countries where the ratings system is run by the movie industry." The MPAA is the public relations arm of the movie industry, he said.

"The MPAA has a very serious conflict of interest," said Thomas Radecki, research director of the National Coalition on Television Violence. "It is putting profits ahead of social concerns, ahead of the welfare of our children. The current film ratings system is a joke, an intentional joke on the public.

"Fifty percent of the theaters and almost 50 percent of the video stores don't pay attention to their movie industry's own ratings.

"We have documented a steady deterioration in Hollywood films since the birth of the MPAA rating system. The MPAA now gives PG and PG-13 to films that would have been X-rated in 1970. G-rated films, which in 1970 made up 30 percent of all films, have all but disappeared."

The new NC-17 rating was given first to "Henry and June," which contains partial nudity and illicit heterosexual and homosexual conduct, according to reviewers. Radecki said, "Actually, 'Henry and June' is probably the mildest NC-17 we're going to see."

One of the reasons offered by the motion picture industry and film critics for establishing NC-17 was so that serious films could be distinguished from blatantly pornographic ones. One film, "Blonde Emmanuelle," that has received an NC-17 rating illustrates the flaw in the new rating, according to the Washington Post. "Blonde Emmanuelle" is an edited version of a 1978 hardcore pornography movie, "Disco Dolls in Hot Skin in 3-D," the Post recently reported. The studio that produced the movie reportedly plans to submit the original version for the NC-17 rating.

Baehr suggested that Christians and other concerned citizens protest the new rating by:

-- Asking their local theaters and the theaters' booking agents not to show NC-17 movies.

-- Talking to the owners of stores in theater-occupied malls, which normally have restrictions against X-rated films being exhibited, Baehr said.

-- Asking media outlets not to accept advertising for NC-17 movies.

-- Picketing theaters that show NC-17 films.

Evangelicals losing
war on morality

By Breena Kent Paine

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--"While gaining political and numerical victories, evangelicals are losing the war of morality," Robert L. Thomas told over 475 theologians who attended the recent 42nd annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. "Our greatest need is for more individuals whose lives are holy."

Thomas, professor of New Testament at The Master's Seminary in Sun Valley, Calif., delivered the presidential address during the largest-ever meeting of the organization for evangelical Christians. New officers were elected and theological papers were presented from a variety of writers on the general subject "Morality and Ethics."

"About 40 million people in America call themselves evangelical Protestants," Thomas said. According to a June 1990 Gallup poll, "The percentage of Americans affirming a personal commitment to Jesus Christ has risen from 60 percent in 1978 and 66 percent in 1988 to 74 percent in 1990; and 95 percent of these testify to a born-again experience," he said.

"Since evangelicals are generally recognized as the base center for this nation's morality, one could predict an environment of higher ethical standards than ever as we begin the last decade of this century. Instead, however, we seem to have reached an all-time low in national behavior.

"We see legal abortion claiming the lives of 1-plus million fetuses a year; a pornographic industry that annually brings in \$8-\$10 billion and is still on the increase; 18 million people addicted to alcohol and 28 million to drugs; homosexuality, a thoroughly disapproved lifestyle 30 years ago, is now accepted, is legal, and is increasingly respectable."

Alister E. McGrath, a professor of historical and systematic theology at Oxford University and a visiting professor at Drew University, said, "A recovery of confidence in Christian doctrine is fundamental to a recovery of Christian ethics."

As the featured speaker for two plenary sessions, McGrath, said many 19th- and 20th-century writers have held the view that "Christianity consists in the imitation of Jesus Christ."

"In one sense, that is profoundly right and helpful," he said. However, this idea "presents us with a dangerously shallow and inadequate understanding of human nature, and a dangerously inadequate and low view of the person of Jesus Christ.

"The idea that we simply need educating and that Jesus is simply an educator is inadequate as a summary of Christian teaching, and is so seriously out of line with our experience.

"He is God incarnate. He possesses the ability to transform our situation in order to enter into it, to change it from within and not from outside," McGrath continued. "To become a Christian is to enter into so close and so deep a relationship with him that we may in some way begin to be conformed to him. Conformity is the fruit of faith. It is not something we do, it is something that is done to us."

In other plenary sessions, Thomas C. Oden, professor of theology and ethics at Drew University and author of *After Modernity ... What?*, was a featured speaker; Christopher A. Hall, a doctoral candidate at Drew University in the area of systematic and historical theology, presented a historical approach to Oden's life and work; and the Near Eastern Archaeological Society celebrated its 30th anniversary.

First sanctity of life
lessons appear in 1991

By Frank Wm. White

NASHVILLE (BP)--Sunday school lesson planners are interrupting ongoing study units to provide the first annual sanctity of human life lesson on Jan. 20, 1991, for all older children, youth and adults using Southern Baptist Bible study materials, according to a curriculum manager responsible for the project.

It is rare that ongoing units of study in Sunday school materials are interrupted, but "the editorial staff, administration and trustees of the Sunday School Board have worked together to develop a lesson dealing with this," noted Louis Hanks, manager of the youth Sunday school curriculum section and the manager responsible for the sanctity of human life lesson committee.

The 1991 lesson materials discuss alternatives to abortion and encourage churches to provide counseling for persons who are contemplating an abortion and ministry to persons who have had an abortion, Hanks explained.

The materials emphasize the redemptive and forgiving nature of ministry to all persons in need of help, he said.

While sanctity of human life involves numerous issues, the focus of the 1991 lesson is abortion. However, he said, materials for older children provide a focus on the worth of individuals and on loving and caring for others, especially family members and friends.

As a worker with youth, Hanks said he sees abortion as a serious issue facing teens and young adults. "Many of them do not see the biblical basis of the sanctity of human life. I hope this lesson will provide some understanding of that biblical foundation."

Sanctity of human life materials for adults have been written by Jimmy Draper, pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, with Dan Taylor, minister of education at the church, writing teaching procedures.

Youth lessons were written by Nelson Price, pastor of Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., with Ozzie Ingram, minister of youth at Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky., writing teaching procedures.

Older children's materials were written by Hal Boone, staff counselor at Sagemont Baptist Church in Houston, with teaching procedures written by Judy Latham, children's Sunday school division director at First Baptist Church of Nashville.

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