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Land tells Republic of Georgia
law students religion necessary

By Louis Moore

TBILISI, Republic of Georgia, USSR (BP)--In a lecture to more than 500 law students in the Soviet Republic of Georgia, Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission Executive Director Richard D. Land said religious faith is "absolutely necessary to the foundation and maintenance of a moral and free society.

"It is true that there are many in our own country as well as in the former Soviet Union and in the Republic of Georgia who would question the role that religion has to play or its necessity in the maintenance of a decent and moral society which respects the liberty and dignity of human beings," Land said.

"But there are many others, who in the midst of increasing moral decay and degeneracy of both your society and ours, are increasingly aware of the need to reemphasize the essential value of religion."

The students attend the Institute for Law and Economy in Tbilisi, capital city of the Republic of Georgia, which recently declared its independence from the former Soviet Union. Land was in the Republic of Georgia as a part of a delegation of United States Christians concerned about the development of religious liberty there.

When Land quoted Russian Orthodox dissident Gleb Yakunin, who said, "Religion is like salt which protects humanity from decomposition and disintegration," most of the students in the lecture hall nodded their heads in agreement.

He spoke in English and his lecture was translated into Georgian, the primary language of the republic.

Land drew parallels between the early days of the United States when the colonies were struggling with the concept of religious liberty and today in the Republic of Georgia when the people are beginning to draft their own independent, autonomous constitution.

Currently in Georgia, the Georgian Orthodox Church dominates the religious culture, and many of that country's leaders refer to that church's patriarch as the head of all Christians in the country.

There are about 5,000 Baptists in Georgia, and about half of them live in Tbilisi. Land told the students Baptists composed the largest denominational group to endure significant persecution in the beginning of the settlement of the United States. "Initially they opposed the constitution because they feared a national church under the new system," he said.

Religious freedom in the United States did not come automatically but had to be hammered out over a period involving many decades, Land said.

"Puritans came to America seeking religious freedom with a desire to worship God without governmental interference and to be a 'city on the hill' to light the way for the Old World," he said. "Unfortunately, they came for freedom for themselves but not for others, so they persecuted those that disagreed with them, so there was quite a bit of persecution in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

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"This was why Roger Williams was forced to found the colony that became Rhode Island where people were free to worship as they pleased or not at all," he said. "By the time of the American Revolution, there were many people of different religious faiths in the American colonies. Some of them were victims of religious persecution in various colonies. Several of the southern states had Episcopal state churches which persecuted people of different faiths, and in the Northeast there were Congregationalist state churches which discriminated against other faiths."

He told the students it was only after the American Revolution the people in the colonies were able to wrestle effectively with, and come to a satisfactory resolution, of the question of religious freedom.

"American history is unintelligible without a strong and vigorous religious element," he said.

"Our prayers are with you as you seek to build a country where religious freedom is guaranteed and the people exercise strong and vigorous faith," he said. "And we ask you to pray for us as we seek to protect religious freedom in our own nation and to call people of faith to be the salt which protects against the decomposition and disintegration we too often observe in our own society."

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(Photos of the lecture and students available upon request from the Christian Life Commission offices in Nashville)

Draper calls on states
in meeting church needs

By Frank Wm. White

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NASHVILLE (BP)--In his first opportunity as Sunday School Board president to meet with state convention program leaders, James T. Draper Jr. called on state leaders to be partners in developing resources relevant to the needs of churches.

"It would be easy for us to cloister ourselves and think up wonderful programs that have no relevance. You help keep us relevant," he told state Sunday school leaders.

Draper spoke to leaders from Sunday school, discipleship training, student ministry and church architecture during annual December planning meetings between Sunday School Board personnel and state convention program leaders.

He expressed a willingness of the board to respond to the needs of churches and encouraged feedback from Southern Baptists to help the board understand those needs.

He said the Sunday School Board has a responsibility to provide materials to equip Sunday school teachers to reach people and win them to Christ.

"The real theologian in any church is the Sunday school teacher," Draper said. Those individuals rely on Sunday school materials for assistance.

"Our goal is to equip people to go out and tell others about Christ. The purpose of Sunday school is in the equipping for evangelism," he said. "The major difference in a growing Sunday school and a declining Sunday school is one word ... purpose."

If the Sunday school's purpose is out of focus, then upgrading is irrelevant. "Our upgrading of literature and the program won't help," he said.

"Let us never assume that the purpose of Bible study is to get people to be there on Sunday morning. The purpose of Sunday school should be to reach to win. The purpose of every piece of literature must be to equip to win," he said.

"What we need is a breakthrough in our understanding of what we are here to do," he said.

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A focus on the opportunity to win people to Christ places the Sunday School Board in the best position to bring Southern Baptists together, Draper said. "I commit myself to you that we are going to keep focusing on the opportunity. We are going to continue to produce the best materials available."

Draper told discipleship training leaders discipleship training and Sunday school are not options. "I see them as teammates working together," he said. "We have to move onward and upward to the task of discipling. Biblically, discipleship training is at the heart of the work of the church."

The problem in keeping the vision of discipleship training alive is "in lukewarmness about the amazing biblical truths we have heard since childhood."

Draper said he is convinced that without discipleship training "we would not have continuity in the church."

He told state directors and associate directors of student ministry of his "long love affair with the Baptist Student Union."

The college campus is "without a doubt one of the greatest mission fields in the world. It is where our future leaders are going to come from," he said.

He told the student leaders to "let us know when we are not providing what you need. Call us and let us know when we are not doing a good job," he said.

"To help churches" is the key phrase in the board's mission statement, he told state building consultants.

The task of the Church Architecture department and state building consultants is to help make church facilities functional and practical and to help churches avoid spending funds unnecessarily, he noted.

"It is a tremendous opportunity you have to help us stretch the dollar and make the maximum use of it, and at the same time, get the most practical facilities for the ministry of the Lord," said Draper.

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Also contributing to this story were Terri Lackey, Chip Alford and Charles Willis.

Lewis, Elder challenge
bivocational convocation

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RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)--Economics will make bivocationalism the wave of the future, Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis told a group of bivocational ministers and denominational support personnel at a national gathering in Raleigh, N.C..

Lewis was one of two keynote speakers at the second annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Bivocational Ministers Association. The meeting immediately followed the sessions of the National Council on Bivocational Ministries, made up of associational, state, and national staff members committed to supporting bivocationalism.

Lewis called the use of bivocational ministers "one of our chief strategies." He noted the Home Mission Board did not have the resources to fully fund its 15,000 Campaign, with a goal of starting 1,500 churches per year for the next ten years, "even if we put all of our money into that." Bivocational ministers and Mission Service Corps volunteers will therefore be essential in achieving that goal, he said.

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Lloyd Elder, retired president of the Baptist Sunday School Board and the second keynote speaker at the conference, contended "almost every minister starts out as bivocational in some sense. A large number serve a lifetime as dual-role ministers, and still others return to a bivocational ministry at the close of their career. Unfortunately, too many fully supported ministers forget how they began."

Elder pointed to Luke as a biblical model for bivocational ministry. (1) Luke bridged the ethnic and cultural differences of his day with the gospel. (2) He did not seem to get bogged down in his personal circumstances. (3) He was loyal to his coworkers, but he was committed to Jesus Christ. (4) He surrendered his intellectual powers to the lordship of Jesus Christ. (5) He told the story of Christ and not his own story.

Participants in the two meetings also elected officers, honored four exemplary bivocational ministers and considered several proposals for the future.

James Greer, of Pineville, La., was re-elected president of the bivocational ministers association. Other officers included: Ron Ward, of Loris, S.C., first vice-president; Richard Rogers, of Trenton, Mo., second vice-president; Bob Ray, of Burleson, Texas, secretary; and Ken Cook, of Brandon, Miss., treasurer.

New officers of the national council are: Charles Stewart, of Ashland, Ky., president; Claud Slate, of Fort Worth, Texas, vice-president; and Ray, who also will be secretary of the council. Elected to one-year terms as directors were: Paul Stevens, of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, representing institutions; Carl Elder, of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, representing state conventions; Billy Kite, of Ashley County (Ark.) Baptist Association, representing associations; and David Palmer, of the Home Mission Board, representing SBC agencies.

Work group recommendations received by the council included a proposal for publication and distribution of an annual resource piece for bivocational ministers, support for the new bivocational resource center at Southwestern Seminary, a suggested survey to identify the felt needs of bivocational ministers, an encouragement of state and local bivocational fellowship groups, a call for broader involvement by bivocational ministers in the key decision-making processes of state and national conventions, a request for associational leaders to provide orientation and mentoring opportunities for new bivocational ministers.

Coordinator for the two meetings was Dale Holloway, of Florence, Miss., national bivocational program consultant for the Home Mission Board. Holloway recommended the presidents of all state fellowships be enlisted to work with the officers of the national association on a general steering committee.

A proposal to accept non-bivocational persons as associate members of the national group will be considered this year. If the proposal is accepted, Elder and Lewis volunteered to be the first new members in that category.

Next year's meeting of both organizations will be in Fort Worth.

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Bivocational association
honors 'exemplary' pastors

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RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)--Bivocational ministers honored four of their own during the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Bivocational Ministers Association.

Recognized as exemplary pastor of the year in a town and country area was Winston Skinner, of Luthersville, Ga., where he is pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church. Skinner also is assistant news editor of the Newnan (Ga.) Times Herald.

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Brent Fletcher, of Glendora, Calif., was named exemplary pastor in a metropolitan area. Fletcher is a church planter in Calvary-Arrowhead Baptist Association, where he works with Las Brisas Bible Fellowship and operates his own lawn care business.

Pastor of the year in a metropolitan black church is Jim Harrell of Miami. Harrell began Glendale Baptist Church, Brownsville, Fla., more than ten years ago. He is a long-time employee of Southern Bell.

A schoolteacher was named exemplary pastor in a new work area. Ric (sic) Frazier is pastor of First Southern Baptist Chapel of South Point, Ohio. He teaches in Ashland, Ky.

Organized just a year ago, the national association is made up entirely of pastors and other church staff members who minister bivocationally.

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Heart attack takes life
of Eric. C. Rust

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Eric Charles Rust, emeritus professor of Christian philosophy at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, died of a heart attack Dec. 14 in Louisville, Ky. He was 81.

Rust, a native of Gravesend, England, joined the seminary faculty in 1953 as professor of Christian apologetics. He became professor of Christian philosophy in 1958 and was named senior professor in 1975 and emeritus professor in 1979. He also taught at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pa., from 1952-53 and at Rawdon Baptist College at the University of Leeds, England, from 1946-52. Prior to his teaching career, Rust was pastor of three Baptist churches in England.

Rust earned degrees in mathematics and atomic physics from the Royal College of Science at London University. He received theological training at Regent's Park College and St. Catherine's College at Oxford University. Much of his speaking and writing addressed the relationship between science and the Christian faith.

He was the author of 14 books, including "Nature and Man in Biblical Thought," "Science and Faith," "Evolutionary Philosophies and Contemporary Theology" and "Religion, Revelation and Reason."

Rust is survived by his wife, Helen, two daughters and a son. The family requests that memorial gifts go to the "Dr. Eric Charles Rust Scholarship Fund" in care of Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville.

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