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-- BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-8919
CompuServe ID# 70420.17

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232
NASHVILLE Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 636-3223

March 9, 1992

92-43

CLC trustees hear warning
on Human Genome Project

By Louis Moore

WASHINGTON (BP)--A multibillion dollar, 15-year effort to map human genetic material potentially could eclipse abortion as the major concern in medical ethics, Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission trustees were warned during their semiannual meeting in Washington.

"The Human Genome Project has implications for every facet of our lives," Ben Mitchell, director of biomedical and life issues for the Christian Life Commission, told the trustees.

"This project has some truly amazing and wonderful potentials -- cures for Huntington's Disease, cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, Parkinsonism and virtually any other genetically caused disease," he said. "But for every promise of benefit to humanity, there is an equally distressing potential for abuse."

The Christian Life Commission needs to face squarely the issues involved in the federally funded project because of the various ethical and moral dilemmas it presents, Mitchell said.

"The voting/tax-paying public needs to know how, and on what, these billions of dollars are being spent," he said. "If the project is ultimately going to be successful, it will need popular support."

"We need to explore the relationship between insurance underwriting procedures and the Human Genome Project," he said. "Will the project revolutionize risk data? Will it further limit access to health insurance? For instance, will it mean that persons who have a genetic predisposition to colon cancer may have their insurance coverage threatened?"

"The project also has the potential to establish new forms of racial and ethnic discrimination," Mitchell said. "Now we can know for certain who is in our gene pool and that information could be used against us. We don't have a very bright history of the use of this kind of information. For instance, the Nazi experiment and sickle cell research reveal that genetic privacy is a very real and pressing issue."

"We have the ability to help shape public thinking and policy in this area and we need to be prepared to do so," he said.

During their one-day meeting March 5, trustees approved the list of speakers for the 1993 CLC annual seminar on biomedical ethics, entitled "Life at Risk: Crises in Medical Ethics."

That meeting will be March 1-3, 1993, in Nashville.

Among the speakers will be Francis Collins, co-discoverer of the cystic fibrosis gene, and medical scholars Edmund Pellegrino of Georgetown University, Thomas Elkins of the University of Michigan, Kurt Wise of Bryan College, Ed Payne of the Medical College of Georgia and Thomas Harris of Vanderbilt University. Other speakers proposed were Louis Sullivan, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services; George Gallup of the Gallup Organization; J.C. Willke formerly of National Right to Life; author and speaker Chuck Colson; and Timothy George of the Beeson Divinity School at Samford University.

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The trustee meeting was characterized by a lack of debate on controversial topics. Some trustees and staff described the meeting as a trust-building between staff and trustees.

In a parting speech, trustee Vernon Holliday of Cottage Grove, Oregon, told his fellow trustees he is "grateful for what I've seen happen at the Christian Life Commission during my six years on this board. I'm grateful to have been a part of the transition." Holliday said he is considering resigning from the board because of his wife's health.

"When I came to my first meeting of this board six years ago, I was intimidated and treated as if I were an employee rather than a trustee of the agency," he said. In the wake of the transition, "we are now getting the biblical perspective on applied Christianity through this agency," he said.

In other actions, trustees:

-- Voted to give the 1992 Christian Life Commission Religious Liberty Award to James Dobson for his work to support families.

-- OK'd previously discussed changes in the commission's program statement defining the agency's religious liberty assignment and giving the agency the right to work directly with local churches rather than only through state conventions. Those proposed changes have been approved by the SBC Executive Committee and will be acted on by the Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis in June.

About those changes, CLC Executive Director Richard D. Land said, "The convention's action in its 1991 annual meeting merging Public Affairs Committee members and functions with the CLC further enhanced the commission's responsibilities in the religious liberty, church-state arena. The CLC has suggested appropriate changes in its program statement to more accurately reflect this more expansive, full-orbed responsibility."

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Romanian Baptists reject money
intended for Swiss seminary

Baptist Press
3/9/92

By Mike Creswell & Stanley Crabb

BUCHAREST, Romania (BP)--Romanian Baptists have refused to accept \$20,000 reallocated to them by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board from funds originally earmarked for the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

A letter faxed to the Foreign Mission Board on March 3 stated, "Because of the misunderstanding raised around this subject and supported by the Baptist press concerning our stand, we cannot accept this money." The letter was signed by Vasile Talos, president of the Romanian Baptist Union, and Nic Gheorghita, general secretary.

Talos indicated Romanian Baptists would be willing to accept Foreign Mission Board assistance if the money involved was not that which had been reallocated from Ruschlikon. "If (the) Foreign Mission Board decided to support financially the Baptist churches of Romania and their institutes from other funds than those appropriated to Ruschlikon initially, we would gladly accept any help," he wrote in the March 3 letter.

The \$20,000 was part of the \$365,000 Foreign Mission Board trustees cut from the Ruschlikon seminary last October, an action they reaffirmed in December. Trustees cited liberal theology and excessive costs as two key reasons for the defunding. But the defunding action also sparked a widespread backlash of protest from many Southern Baptists, including resolutions from 10 state Baptist conventions, and many European Baptists.

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Steve Hardy, FMB trustee from North Carolina, said the Romanian refusal to accept the \$20,000 indicates "they want to deal with the Foreign Mission Board with as much integrity as possible."

Hardy, chairman of the trustee committee overseeing work in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, said FMB staff will decide how to reallocate the \$20,000 to other theological needs. He said he anticipates the staff will continue to work with Romania Baptists concerning their future needs.

In February the board's trustees voted to divide the \$365,000 among eight Baptist seminaries in Bulgaria (\$100,000), Estonia (\$50,000), Ukraine (\$50,000 in Kiev and \$50,000 in Odessa), Russia (\$50,000), Latvia (\$45,000) and Romania (\$10,000 in Bucharest and \$10,000 in Oradea). The work in Oradea received an earlier \$50,000 from the FMB for construction of the Second Baptist Church, which sponsors the seminary there.

Two Romanian Baptist leaders said in March 5 interviews with Baptist Press they never intended to get the money which had been earmarked to the Ruschlikon seminary.

Benjamin Poplacean, a pastor in Sibiu and executive committee member, confirmed five members of the seven-member committee approved turning down the Ruschlikon money. Those voting for the measure, Poplacean said, included himself, Talos, Gheorghita, Josif Steffanos and Busuoc Belciu. Two other members, Ovidiu Bulzan and Paul Negreut, were out of the country.

They declined to accept the \$20,000, Poplacean said, "because it was connected with the decision about Ruschlikon."

"We didn't make any statement about Ruschlikon for money," Talos said. "We found that Baptist Press -- I suppose mainly in (the) States -- spread a lot of news about us, rumors that we wanted those monies. No, it is not true."

Talos apparently referred to published allegations by Southern Baptist foreign missionary Charles "T" Thomas that the Romanian Baptist Union chose to support the conservative movement within the Southern Baptist Convention and the Foreign Mission Board in return for promises of "massive funding." Thomas and his wife, Kathie, announced in their Jan. 11 resignation letter they were resigning over this, plus what they termed "a hostile takeover" of the Foreign Mission Board. The couple had served as Southern Baptist missionaries 17 years in France, then transferred to Romania last September.

At that time, Hardy said he "would be willing to review any documentation that they (the Thomases) can present about promises of massive amounts of mission money to the Romanian union if they (the Romanians) would support the defunding of Ruschlikon." He said he has not yet received any such documentation.

But some controversy has come from among Romanian Baptists themselves, Talos had acknowledged earlier.

The Romanian union was the only one in Europe which expressed support for the defunding of Ruschlikon. Talos and Gheorghita sent a letter to the board Dec. 10 indicating the union's general council agreed to the board's defunding action. But some Romanian Baptist leaders, upon learning of Talos's letter, denied the council had taken such an action.

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In a second letter dated Jan. 27, Talos again insisted the council had indeed endorsed the board's decision to defund Ruschlikon but said the action was "through consensus, not by voting." In that letter Talos blamed Josif Ton, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Oradea, for arousing suspicions of intent to get financial support for his church through a Nov. 1, 1991, letter Ton sent to the Foreign Mission Board. Ton congratulated the Foreign Mission Board trustees for defunding the Ruschlikon seminary, which he denounced as liberal.

Ton's letter "aroused suspicions in Romania, too, among some pastors and (general) council members who have considered it an intention to orient financial support to the Second Baptist Church of Oradea," Talos wrote. Ton also is chancellor of the Baptist seminary in Oradea. Gheorghita, the union's general secretary, is senior minister at Second Baptist and also helps run the school.

Poplacean was one of several Baptist leaders who earlier said the council never made a decision on the board's defunding of Ruschlikon either by consensus or in any other way. In the March 5 interview, he again expressed that same position.

"I don't know if it would be possible to find any person in Romania or in the council of the union to say that we decided about funding or defunding the money for Ruschlikon. We didn't talk about money. How could we take a decision on defunding if we did not talk about money? It is confusing for me. We didn't talk about defunding. We just thought we would develop our institutions in Romania," Poplacean said.

In the March meeting of the executive committee, Poplacean said, there was agreement there had been no talking about money in the general council, which last met in November. But he had no explanation for the apparent discrepancy between his insistence that Romanian Baptist leaders had not approved the defunding of Ruschlikon seminary and the repeated affirmations from Talos they had indeed done so.

Poplacean said he had come near to resigning his position with the union because "I don't want to be involved in such problems." He said as of now, there is just one kind of Baptist in Romania, but added, "If people bring this type of problem among Baptists in Romania -- Baptists with moderates and fundamentalists -- it is not good to import this into Romania."

Poplacean also questioned why the Foreign Mission Board had allocated \$100,000 to Bulgarian Baptists, who number fewer than 2,000, and only \$20,000 to Romanian Baptists, who number over 100,000. "This is confusing for us," he said.

Hardy said although Romania is larger, more funds were allocated on staff recommendation to Bulgaria at this particular time because of their critical need and current lack of resources.

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Alliance changes name,
contemplates its future

By R. Albert Mohler Jr.

Baptist Press
3/9/92

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)--Members of the Southern Baptist Alliance voted to change their organization's name, dropping references to the Southern Baptist Convention and renaming themselves "The Alliance of Baptists, Inc.."

The Alliance met March 5-7 at Charlotte's Providence Baptist Church for its sixth annual convocation.

Nancy Ammerman, a professor at Emory University and chair of the Alliance's constitution and by-law committee, said the name change reflects "the new place we find ourselves." She told the assembly "we know that we can no longer define ourselves primarily by where we have been," an apparent reference to the Southern Baptist Convention.

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The name change was affirmed by a unanimous vote and numerous speakers expressed satisfaction with the move. The removal of any reference to the Southern Baptist Convention had, as participants understood, considerable symbolic value. "Many of us no longer consider ourselves Southern Baptists," explained Stan Hastey, the Alliance's executive director.

Nevertheless, recent events and issues within the SBC continued to frame much of the debate at the meeting. The crisis at the Foreign Mission Board loomed as one development Alliance members clearly understood to have potential impact on their own organization.

In his address to the convocation, Hastey said while any schism within the SBC could be "enormously energizing," he also warned "it might also create enormous pressure to re-create some modified version of the old SBC in the pragmatic interest of a quick fix."

Hastey said the Alliance would resist any effort to create a structure resembling the SBC, for the Alliance had moved on to its own agenda. In recent years the Alliance has explored joint mission projects with the American Baptist Churches, USA. Those ventures are now on hold due to insufficient funding.

In his address, Hastey told the convocation "we must face the fact that our movement's growth has been stalled." The Alliance currently reports 133 "affiliated congregations" with a total membership of 73,000.

The Alliance movement is, as Hastey stated, "a largely regional group," with 71% of their membership located in North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

The emergence of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship -- another moderate organization -- also framed the discussion at the Alliance meeting. Representatives from the Alliance and the CBF have met to discuss the possibility of merger.

Hastey reported 43 of the 495 churches giving through the CBF are affiliated with the Alliance and "fewer than 10 Alliance churches are giving the bulk of their monies through the Alliance rather than through either the Fellowship or the SBC."

Despite the fact the CBF dwarfs the Alliance in size, Hastey asserted the Alliance has provided much of the leadership for the Fellowship.

Hastey called for members of the Alliance to "take charge of our own fate" and "determine our future with intentionality and purposefulness," rather than allow the prospect of unplanned absorption into the Fellowship.

John Hewett, pastor of First Church, Ashville, NC, and moderator of the Fellowship brought greetings from the CBF. Hewett, who is also a member of the Alliance, told the group they have been "at the center of the Fellowship from the very beginning."

Representatives from the American Baptist Churches, USA were also highly visible at the meeting. L. Eugene Ton, chairman of the "American Baptist Task Force on the SBC" told the assembly the ABC was "trying in some way to be intentional" and to render a "pastoral ministry" to disaffected Southern Baptist churches.

Their intentionality was apparent in a workshop on "How a Church Becomes Dually Aligned" led by Walter L. Parrish, II, executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of the South, based in Laurel, Md. Ton said the message from his task force is "we are now ready" for churches to move toward dual alignment. Hastey told the convocation he is committed "to encouraging Alliance churches to explore the prospect of dual affiliation with the ABC/USA."

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An ecumenical theme pervaded the convocation from beginning to end. In addition to the ABC representatives, leaders from the Progressive National Baptist Convention and the European Baptist Federation also addressed the meeting. But the most symbolic event was the presence of Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, who brought the closing sermon for the convocation.

Brown told the group "my very presence here is a symbol of bridge building" and a sign of the enlargement of the ecumenical movement. "You are trying a very important experiment," she told Alliance members.

The Alliance also heard a report from its Public Affairs Committee which included the announcement that a task force on human sexuality would be appointed and charged to bring a report back to the Alliance.

Pullen Memorial Church in Raleigh, NC, a congregation affiliated with the Alliance, recently approved a "same gender" commitment service for two homosexual men. Binkley Memorial Church in Winston-Salem, also affiliated with the Alliance, has announced it may grant a ministerial license to an active homosexual.

Mahan Siler, pastor of Pullen Memorial, led a workshop on "Churches Responding to Homosexual Persons." A member of the Alliance's board of directors, said he had considered canceling the workshop, given the controversy which has surrounded his congregation's recent decision, but the board had encouraged him to move ahead with the workshop.

Tom Sims, chairman of the committee on public affairs, said the task force was prompted by the action considered by the SBC Executive Committee in regard to the two North Carolina churches. With reference to the SBC, Sims, prosecuting attorney for Perry County, Mississippi, said "I don't care what they do," but "they have no right to censure any church for any reason."

Sims added the task force report "will not be judgmental or diective," nor would it "recommend any viewpoint." Instead, the report will "represent a diversity of views" and serve as a platform for discussion and dialogue.

Hastey said the membership of the task force had not been determined, and it was unlikely to begin its work until the fall.

Members elected Ann Quattlebaum of Greenville, S.C. president of the Alliance. She will serve with Welton Seal of North Carolina, who was elected vice president and Billie Wilks of Texas, who was elected secretary. The 1993 convocation is scheduled for Feb. 25-27 in Daytona Beach, Fla.

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Three SSB products
make best-selling list

Baptist Press
3/9/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--The "Holman Bible Dictionary" was the seventh best-selling Christian reference book in the United States in 1991 and two other Southern Baptist Sunday School Board products made the top 100, a national magazine reported.

The dictionary and the first two volumes of Broadman's "New American Commentary" were included in Bookstore Journal's "Reference Premier 100" -- a list of the top 100 best-selling backlist reference books for 1991. The list, included in the March issue of the magazine, is compiled annually based on actual sales figures submitted by publishers.

"We're totally excited about the success of this product," said Trent Butler, general editor of the "Holman Bible Dictionary." "Sales are way ahead of forecasts. We are already into our third printing and we had expected our first printing to last more than a year."

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Holman officials are hopeful the "Holman Bible Handbook," a companion piece to the dictionary scheduled for September release, will appeal to the same audience. The 800-plus-page book will offer practical study helps on biblical backgrounds, themes and ethical and theological teachings.

The two volumes of the "New American Commentary" included in the best-selling list were "Philippians, Colossians, Philemon," which ranked 25th, and "Mark," which placed 32nd.

NAC general editor David Dockery said the commentary volumes' inclusion on the listing "is a clear indication Broadman products are being widely received in the evangelical book market."

"This is a real tribute to the commentary writers and the marketing department at Broadman that we have received this kind of recognition with the commentary so quickly," he said.

The next volume in the commentary series -- 1 and 2 Timothy/Titus -- will be released in April."

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Missionary soccer player
builds 'bridges' in Uruguay

By Wally Poor

Baptist Press
3/9/92

COLONIA, Uruguay (BP)--The goalkeeper of the Juventud Soccer Club puzzles his Uruguayan teammates.

"You're obviously a man. You play football (soccer) well. Yet you don't run around on your wife. You don't drink. You don't smoke. What makes you so different?" a teammate asked John Prim, a player for one of the principal soccer clubs in Colonia, Uruguay.

Such questions give Prim, a 37-year-old Southern Baptist missionary in Uruguay, an opportunity to explain the difference Christ makes in his life.

Prim, from San Diego, Calif., is a celebrity in Colonia, a city of 20,000 across the Plata River from Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. "I can't go downtown without having people waving at me and greeting me," Prim said. "This is remarkable in a town that's somewhat closed to strangers because so many tourists come through!" (Many of the 7 million residents of nearby Buenos Aires spend their summer vacations in Colonia).

Prim's soccer days go back to high school in San Diego when his best friend got him interested in the sport. His friend was from England, so Prim learned to play soccer European-style, different from the way the game is played in South America.

Prim's high school, James Madison in San Diego, started a soccer team during his senior year. He later played soccer at the University of California at San Diego. He was chosen All Cal goalkeeper in 1974.

During his senior year in college, university officials told Prim, a physics major, he could not return because of a low grade average. "I was just goofing off instead of actually going to college," recalled Prim, who later earned degrees from California State University in Fullerton and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif.

About the same time, he joined a rock group called Harlequin as a vocalist. One group member was a Christian who shared his faith with Prim.

"He dared me to read the Bible," Prim recounted, "so finally I said, 'OK, I'm going to read it and show you all its errors.'"

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During the next year Prim accepted Christ as Savior. He was playing soccer in San Diego's city leagues at the time. After becoming a Christian, he began playing with Campus Crusade for Christ's Athletes in Action.

His big break as an athlete came in 1981 when he was invited to play professional soccer with the Memphis Americans. But after praying about it he declined the offer because he felt God was calling him into full-time ministry.

Shortly after that, Prim's church, Orangewood Avenue Baptist Church in Garden Grove, Calif., called him as associate pastor. Prim worked there until he and his wife, Karen, were appointed missionaries by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in 1989.

Prim kept up his soccer skills after arriving on the mission field. During a year of language study in Costa Rica he played practice games with some of that country's soccer teams.

And when it comes to soccer, Prim couldn't have gone to a better nation than Uruguay. Soccer, played year-round, is Uruguay's most popular sport.

After the Prims and their three children arrived in Uruguay in August 1990, fellow missionary Charles Swanner of Edenton, N.C., suggested Prim contact Julio Aragusto, trainer for the Juventud club in Colonia.

Prim asked Aragusto if he could practice with the Uruguayan team. "He said I could, more out of curiosity to see what a 'gringo' could do than anything, I think," Prim said.

But after the team's coach saw Prim play, his curiosity turned into intense interest. He asked Prim to play for his team. Since then Prim has used his knowledge of soccer as a "bridge" to fellow players.

When teammates ask Prim why he's in Uruguay, he doesn't use the word "missionary." That's because of the negative image some Uruguayans have of missionaries from another religious group there, Prim explained. "Rather, I tell them I've come to help in the churches," said Prim, a church planter.

So far, none of Prim's teammates have accepted his invitation to attend the Baptist church in Colonia. But everyday situations give him the chance to share his faith.

Prim told about a team dinner when all the players were drinking wine except him. "One of the players asked me if we (Baptists) taught that the wine is the blood of Christ, like the (Roman) Catholic Church does. This gave me a chance to explain the significance of Christ's death on the cross."

However, Prim finds the most effective way to share his faith is one-on-one rather than talking to the whole team. "The Uruguayan soccer player is very macho," Prim said. "In a group he doesn't want to show the interest he has (in spiritual matters) but one-on-one he opens up."

How have Baptist church members reacted to a missionary soccer player?

Some people had reservations at first, Prim conceded. "One lady told me, 'I couldn't believe a missionary would be out playing football (on Sunday, when most of the games are played) but now I can see it's a good thing.'"

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Wally Poor is press representative for the Uruguay Baptist Mission, organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in Uruguay.

(BP) photo mailed state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

'Pastor's heart' makes prof
ideal commentary writer

By Chip Alford

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--While it's been 13 years since Tommy Lea had a full-time pastorate, it was no surprise the consulting editors for "The New American Commentary" selected the 53-year-old seminary professor as the writer for a portion of the volume on the pastoral epistles.

"I fell in love with the pastorate from the moment I started serving in a church," Lea said. "I think the most exciting thing about it to me was being able to see people converted and then grow under the ministry we had. I enjoyed the one-on-one contact with people and being able to help train them in how to share their faith."

NAC general editor David Dockery said Lea "was an ideal choice to write this volume because of his years of pastoral experience and his reputation for having a pastoral heart while teaching at Southwestern (Baptist Theological) Seminary. He is very concerned with applying Scripture to everyday life and has concluded each section of his commentary with a contemporary pastoral application."

Lea, professor of New Testament at Southwestern, led churches in Texas, Virginia and Alabama before joining the faculty of the Fort Worth, Texas, school in 1979. His commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy will be combined with South Carolina layman Hayne Griffin's commentary on Titus in one volume on the pastoral epistles. The book is scheduled for release in April by Broadman Press.

Lea, who has taught classes on the pastoral epistles, said he learned something new from the books each time he edited his commentary manuscript. His focused study on 1 and 2 Timothy reminded him of the apostle Paul's sense of excitement about being called into ministry.

"I hope people who read and use the commentary will catch some of that excitement," he said. "And I don't say that just for preachers. There is a sense in which every believer is called to ministry. We all need to recapture Paul's sense of amazement that God would call him, a sinner, into Christian work."

The pastoral letters also give good advice on how to handle church conflict, Lea said, and show evidence of the early church's widespread ministry to the poor and needy. Also stressed is the importance of a good doctrinal understanding about the work of the church, the work of Christ and the hope his resurrection can bring.

Though he earned master's and doctorate degrees from Southwestern and has taught at the Southern Baptist school 13 years, Lea grew up attending a Methodist church in his hometown of Columbus, Miss. His father was a civil engineer who worked for a local railroad company. Lea, too, planned a career in engineering and earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Mississippi State University in 1960.

"But in my senior year of college, the Lord called me to preach, so I went on to seminary the next year," he explained. "I never even used the technical side of my engineering experience."

In some ways, going to seminary was like starting over for Lea.

"My earlier training was not Bible-related and, although I read the Bible, I didn't know much about theology. My years in seminary taught me how to study the Bible, gave me the desire to study the Bible and to help other people learn about it as well."

Lea continues to fulfill that latter desire through his seminary teaching and publication of such books as "How to Study Your Bible" -- the third book in the Survival Kit series published by the board's discipleship training department -- and the soon-to-be-released Lay Institute for Equipping course, "Step by Step Through the New Testament," a New Testament survey course for lay people.

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