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February 17, 1993

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Agee withdraws candidacy  
for Southern Seminary post

By Marty O'Gwynn

Baptist Press  
2/17/93

SHAWNEE, Okla. (BP)--Oklahoma Baptist University President Bob R. Agee has withdrawn his name from consideration for the presidency at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Agee was one of four men on the "short list" of candidates to replace retiring seminary President Roy Honeycutt, according to an Associated Baptist Press article Feb. 11.

Citing numerous "compelling reasons" and a strong personal conviction that he should remain at OBU as the basis for his decision, Agee voiced concern that premature news releases about the "short list" might be disruptive to the OBU campus. Agee faxed the letter of withdrawal to Southern Seminary trustee chairman Wayne Allen Feb. 16.

"The seminary's Search Committee has acted in a very responsible and professional manner and I deeply appreciate the courtesies it has extended to the candidates," Agee said.

"My willingness to go through the interview was prompted by my devotion to my alma mater and my high regard for the teachers and staff there," he wrote Allen.

In his letter of withdrawal, Agee contended that "the action by the Associated Baptist Press has compromised the interview process and creates a very difficult atmosphere which can be potentially harmful to the current places of service of the candidates."

He further stated "the decision of the Associated Baptist Press to run the story the week of the interviews and to report the story with the tone used, in my opinion, has compromised the process and has the potential to be harmful or hurtful to the OBU family as well as to the candidate chosen for the post.

"God is blessing our work at OBU far beyond anyone's imagination ... . The opportunities and future prospects for our work are incredibly bright," the university president said. "For me to leave OBU now could disrupt the potential achievement of some very important things I am convinced God wants done."

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Agee became OBU's 13th president in 1982. After completing a bachelor's degree at Union University, he earned both the master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from Southern Seminary. He also holds a Ph.D. degree in higher education administration from Vanderbilt University's George Peabody College for Teachers.

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O'Gwynn is director of public relations at Oklahoma Baptist University.

**Africa turmoil continues  
to displace missionaries**

By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press  
2/17/93

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Tense political climates in Togo and Zaire continue to block the resumption of most Southern Baptist ministries in the two besieged African nations.

In Togo, recent failed peace talks between feuding political parties have dampened missionaries' hopes of quickly returning to Lome, the capital of the west African country.

Seventeen Southern Baptist mission workers evacuated Lome Feb. 3. While most drove to Cotonou, in neighboring Benin, two couples drove to northern Togo, an area free of the unrest, to stay with missionaries there. At that time, both groups planned to return to their work in the coastal capital in about a week.

But they revised their plans when talks aimed at ending Togo's political crisis collapsed Feb. 9. News of the failed negotiations also prompted more Togolese to leave Lome. Press reports estimate more than 100,000 Togolese have fled the country to Ghana and Benin since Jan. 31.

In Zaire, meanwhile, political turmoil forced the last Southern Baptist missionaries to leave Feb. 13. Steve Seaberry, from Laredo, Texas, and his wife, Anne, from Denton, Texas, temporarily transferred to Senegal in west Africa.

The Seaberrys had returned to Zaire's capital, Kinshasa, last October after evacuating with two other missionary families in 1991. The missionaries were part of a large expatriate evacuation after mutinous national troops rampaged through the city in protest for not being paid for months.

In Togo, the current exodus of refugees was prompted by several violent episodes in late January and an economy left crippled by a three-month-old general strike. One of the worst periods of unrest began Jan. 25 when troops loyal to President Gnassingbe Eyadema reportedly fired into a crowd of 10,000 pro-opposition demonstrators, killing at least 20 people and wounding as many as 35.

In light of the ongoing unrest, displaced missionaries to Togo planned to reassess their situation in a February meeting with Bill Phillips, area director for west Africa. During the meeting in Benin, they also were to explore the possibility of beginning work among Togolese refugees.

The Seaberrys' recent decision to leave Zaire came after some 300 people died during clashes between the special guard of President Mobutu Sese Seko and army factions supporting the transitional government of Prime Minister Etienne Tshisekedi.

The unrest has eased in Kinshasa, but daily life hasn't returned to normal. Many shops and schools remain closed and tension in the city runs high. The Seaberrys' transfer also allows their three children -- Lendy, 16, Jennifer, 13, and John, 9, -- to continue to attend school.

The Seaberrys plan to work in Senegal for the next year and a half.

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Baptists lead groups eligible  
for earned income tax benefit

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--The federal government will provide tax benefits this year of as much as \$2,200 to some working families with children, but as many as 4 million to 5 million eligible families, including apparently many Baptists, may be in danger of forfeiting the money as they did in 1992.

Earned income credit is a federal tax benefit available to a parent or parents who had at least one child living at home for more than half of the year and whose total income was less than \$22,370. While the average family claiming the EIC will receive about \$900, an eligible family potentially could earn as much as \$2,211 this year, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Nearly 14 million families claimed the earned income credit in 1992 and received about \$11.3 billion in benefits. Roughly another 25 percent, or about 4 million to 5 million families, failed to file for the EIC or did not file the proper forms and lost their benefits, estimated a spokeswoman for the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Many who failed to receive the credit probably are Baptists, according to a 1991 survey sponsored by the Internal Revenue Service. The survey revealed 33 percent of those families who make less than \$20,000 per year, thereby making them eligible for the earned income credit, identify themselves as Baptists. Only Catholics, at 27 percent, come close to Baptists in this wage group.

"The Bible commands us to 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's,' but apparently Baptists are rendering too much, and, of all things, Caesar wants to give some of it back," said James A. Smith, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"This credit is the type of government assistance which we believe most benefits working-class families, because it encourages self-sufficiency, work and family cohesion. The EIC is the only welfare program at this time which actually requires its recipients to be employed," Smith said.

The CLC supported expansion of the EIC as part of the child-care legislation adopted in 1990.

In order to receive the earned income credit, eligible families must file a federal income tax return, either Form 1040 or 1040A, and a Schedule EIC form. Both forms must be filed for a family to receive the credit.

Both married and single parents are eligible. Rarely will the EIC lower a family's benefits from such public assistance programs as food stamps, Medicaid and subsidized housing, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Families which do not earn enough to pay federal taxes can receive a check from the IRS for their earned income credit.

Free assistance concerning earned income credit is available from IRS during business hours at 1-800-829-1040. A recorded message about the EIC may be heard 24 hours a day by calling 1-800-829-4477 and requesting topic 402.

The IRS survey showed 53 percent of those eligible for the EIC are from the southern United States.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, which is a nonpartisan organization dealing with issues affecting low- and middle-income Americans, is focusing its 1993 EIC outreach campaign on Baptists.

The Christian Life Commission plans to send letters and information packets on the EIC to the executive directors of the 36 state conventions and three fellowships in the Southern Baptist Convention. The letter will encourage the officials to publicize the EIC to Southern Baptists in their convention, Smith said.

Caring from all quarters needed  
for strong families, leaders say By Ray Waddle

NASHVILLE (BP)--Families need help from as many quarters as they can get it: from compassionate churches, strong marriages, decent television and conscientious corporations, according to speakers at the Baptist Center for Ethics' "Hope, Help and Healing for the American Family" conference.

Some 200 people attended the Feb. 15-16 sessions at Nashville's Woodmont Baptist Church.

Barbara DaFoe Whitehead, historian at the Institute for American Values in New York, said parents and churches need to tell more stories: Too many children today have a weak moral compass because they don't know Bible stories.

"One of the best ways to help parents teach children right from wrong is to teach children Bible stories," Whitehead said.

Whitehead said Bible stories can help parents provide an alternative to media culture and television, which has become the prevailing baby sitter for children with no after-school recreation activities.

Quoting author George Gerbner, she said, "Those who tell stories hold the power in society. Television is so powerful because it tells most of the stories to most of the people most of the time."

Whitehead added, "Religious institutions are the custodians of our greatest stories."

Another speaker, the president of a leading supermarket chain, said corporations can strengthen family life by putting higher value on the "dignity, value and employment security" of employees.

"The primary responsibility of the corporation to the family is to provide the opportunity for long-term employment security," said Mark Hollis, head of Publix Super Markets, a chain of more than 400 stores in Florida and Georgia.

But Hollis, a lifelong Baptist layman, said many companies have fallen down on this responsibility -- announcing layoffs, closings and "downsizing" -- because they failed to make tough decisions to ensure job security.

"They have failed to change in an ever-changing market," he said.

Hollis said Publix is a "family-oriented" company whose 70,000 employees are encouraged to have family members to work in the company, though not under direct supervision.

The first three principles of Publix's mission statement are to be "passionately focused on customer value, intolerant of waste and dedicated to the dignity, value and employment security of our (employees)."

Minister-author Guy Greenfield of Albuquerque, N.M., told the group how to prevent becoming "wounded parents" who are in despair if their youngster gets into trouble. His advice included:

-- Early on, make friends with the children. Learn the art of having fun with them.

-- Give them quality time, not leftovers of a busy life.

-- Begin early to control the family TV. Set other firm but loving parameters in the home.

-- Teach them early how to select friends carefully.

-- As they mature, release control of them. Trust them to be responsible.

-- Be unashamedly Christian without being "preachy." Make worship a regular habit, but make it enjoyable.

-- Learn child-rearing techniques, such as those of Christian author and radio show host James Dobson of Focus on the Family.

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Waddle is the religion writer at The Tennessean in Nashville. Used by permission.

Too much TV watching outweighs  
concern over TV content, prof says      By Connie Davis

NASHVILLE (BP)--Christians should be more concerned over the loss of time spent watching TV than the content of shows, claimed a Christian author and professor during the Baptist Center for Ethics conference on families Feb. 15-16 in Nashville.

Quentin Schultze, communications professor at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., said, "The Christian community loves to blast all the secular humanists in Hollywood ... but a lot of that anger is there because we don't have our own houses in order."

He reported the average child in the United States watches three and a half hours of TV a day but only spends an average of 12-15 minutes a day with his or her mother and an average of two to four minutes per day with the father.

Adults watch an average of four and a half hours of TV a day. In contrast to 31 and a half hours of TV per week, spouses spend 17 minutes communicating each week, Schultze said.

"Outside of working and sleeping, it is what defines us as a culture," said Schultze, who is the author of "Redeeming Television: How TV Changes Christians - How Christians Can Change TV."

Relatively speaking, he cited, the flap over Murphy Brown is not important. He referred to the criticism by then-Vice President Dan Quayle of TV producers who ignored family values in a show in which a character had a baby out of wedlock. Schultze claimed the single most important factor rising from TV viewing is the "shifting of our use of discretionary interpersonal activities."

He pointed out God made people communicative beings not only to spread the gospel but to witness through relationships. When Christians choose to watch TV rather than communicate, they are choosing selfishness and desire for immediate gratification through the power of the remote control, he said.

In his research, he has determined families suffer because time is not spent on building families. Crucial events in the memories of grown children like playing games, physical activities and vacations are disappearing, Schultze said.

Rather than boycotting TV, which results in ostracism of youth by peer groups, he recommends Christians develop discernment for TV watching.

Parents should protect youth and children from inappropriate viewing by considering their developmental needs, he said. Children younger than 8 years of age cannot grasp abstract messages. Individual fears of children should be considered. Very young children need slow-paced programming, he continued. Fast-paced images grab attention but are confusing, he said.

Consider the goals of the TV producers, Schultze said. To hook viewers and thus make profit, it has become more than entertainment. "TV is like all the other media. It is really in the business of identity," Schultze said.

To find role models, the producers don't go to churches, schools, parents or traditional social institutions, but rather the peer group of the audience. Thus role models for teens in TV and movies are macho males and ideal females, he said.

With such "culturally fabricated ideals," teens feel enormous but unrealistic pressure to conform, he noted.

"We (Christians) need to be careful of looking for truth in TV that merely confirms our own biases," Schultze said.

As an example, he noted he disagrees with some Christian TV critics about the show "Home Improvement," especially after interviewing series creator David McFadzean.

Schultze said some Christians criticized it because the role of the father is so weak. McFadzean explained he tries to deal with male-female issues, male power issues and the issues of children. McFadzean noted the father has a male mentor -- the neighbor -- another positive aspect, according to Schultze.

The Christian community should become proactive, said Schultze, by producing video reviews to assist family viewing choices.

Baptist state paper editors  
name executive director

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (BP)--Lynn M. Davis Jr. has been elected executive director of the Southern Baptist Press Association, a newly created part-time post for the association of Baptist state paper editors.

Davis, a retired Baptist Sunday School Board marketing specialist and former state paper editor, was elected by the editors during their annual meeting in Scottsdale, Feb. 16-18.

A special ad hoc committee of seven editors, chaired by Presnall Wood, editor of the Texas Baptist Standard, was named last year to look at strengthening the association and recommended the new position. Davis now becomes the association's first and only employee. He will receive \$3,500 in total annual compensation and expenses although the committee's recommendation was amended to allow the association's officers to periodically review and alter that amount if needed.

"Lynn Davis is qualified by training, experience and interest in Baptist state papers to lead in this new venture," Wood told Baptist Press following Davis' election.

As executive director, Davis will supervise the general administrative duties of the association, facilitate training opportunities for members, promote the importance of the state Baptist paper among Southern Baptists, assist in planning the annual session and other meetings of the SBPA and promote fellowship and mutual understanding in the membership.

Davis, 62, was among the group of 191 employees offered retirement when the Sunday School Board went through a downsizing in 1992. He was editor of the Ohio Baptist Messenger, state paper for Ohio Southern Baptists, from 1962-66. He is a native of Jacksonville, Fla., and earned degrees from Ohio University in 1959 and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1962. He and his wife, Karen, live in Brentwood, Tenn., and have four grown children.

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Southwestern professor staying  
composed for oratorio premiere

By Lydia Murphy

Baptist Press  
2/17/93

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--When Michael Cox conducts the 200-voice Oratorio Chorus at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in May, he will guide the choir with his hands. But his heart has already given the music its meaning.

While Cox delicately leads the massive chorus through each note of music, his emphasis will be on more than precise singing. Cox will be looking for the choir to interpret the music the way the composer intended it to be sung.

And on that score, he's the only person who can judge the chorus' success. Cox is the composer.

"Even though I struggle with everything I write, I thoroughly enjoy what I am doing," said Cox, professor of music theory and composition. "Composing is one way I can share my love for my Savior and be a witness."

When the Oratorio Chorus performs Cox's "Magnificat" this spring, the composer/conductor will have one of Fort Worth's main stages for his witness. The seminary chorus has gained nationwide fame and packs Truett Auditorium for every performance. A local music critic has called the choir "one of the best of its kind in the world."

The performance in May will be the premiere of "Magnificat." But it is by no means the first piece composed or arranged by Cox. He has received awards the last five years from the American Society of Composers, Authors, Publishers.

Still, Cox admits he often struggles with his musical creations. The biggest challenge, he said, is wedding the text of a song with the music.

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An example is his anthem written for the dedication of the Kathryn Sullivan Bowld Music Library in October. After searching for the appropriate text, he finally settled on lyrics written by Edward A. Church. Working from the words, Cox developed the score.

Spending hours in front of music is nothing new to Cox.

He remembers practicing 45 minutes every day as a child and then spending another hour or more working on sheet music his mother, a music teacher, would give him. Those early experiences enabled Cox to read music extremely well.

Growing up in Frazier Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., Cox remembers Sundays and Wednesdays, listening to booming voices sing the old hymns.

"As a young person growing up in a Baptist church, you sang for the music content but were not really aware of the text. I have been drawn back to the older hymns with renewed interest, being more aware of their profound content," Cox said.

He completed his first anthem in 1978 while serving as associate professor at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee. By then, he had learned his lessons well, having received a bachelor of music degree with honors from OBU, as well as a master of music degree from the Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music.

Cox completed his doctoral work at Florida State University in Tallahassee in 1984 and taught at OBU until 1990, when he was elected to Southwestern's faculty.

"It is refreshing to come and teach students who are very strong in what they are about," Cox said. "The quality of students (at Southwestern) I've had has been encouraging.

"Moving from undergraduate to graduate level, you notice the maturity of the students. Students at Southwestern are called to study more than just music, but to also develop in ministry."

And while Cox has devoted his career to preparing students for music ministry, his commitment goes beyond the seminary classroom.

In the tradition of his mother, he has taught and encouraged his own children. Courtney, the 14-year-old daughter of Cox and his wife, Rhonda, has excelled in piano.

And now that 7-year-old Christopher is beginning percussion lessons, Cox appreciates more what his own parents put up with to develop his musical abilities.

"We all have degrees of musicality. Some are just born with a sense of perfect pitch and their oral skills are extremely fine at an early age," Cox said.

"Regardless of inherent skill, music develops so many parts of a person's life," he added. "A certain amount of gracefulness, poise and expression through performance, as well as gaining and building self-confidence, are developed through music instruction."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary.

Baptist pastor follows Macedonian  
call to reach fellow countrymen By Susan Simko

Baptist Press  
2/17/93

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--As Samoil Grozdanov finished his sermon at the 20-member Baptist church in war-torn Macedonia, he invited anyone attending to talk with him after the service.

As the congregation filed out, a young visitor grabbed Grozdanov's hand and said, "I want to be baptized."

His name was Sasa and he was 19 years old. Like many of his peers, he had been searching religions for truth. He tried Buddhism and Transcendental Meditation, but they did not fill his soul, he told Grozdanov.

Near suicide, Sasa decided to try attending church. He went to an Eastern Orthodox church, but the priest did not help him.

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Then a friend invited Sasa to attend Grozdanov's church. That Sunday, he heard the gospel for the first time. He told Grozdanov, "This is it. This is what I've been looking for."

Sasa's search is typical in Macedonia, Grozdanov said.

"There's been a revival of interest in religion after the communist breakup, especially among young people," Grozdanov said. "Unfortunately, many of them choose the way of cults."

The cults have overwhelmed Macedonia, an unrecognized country of more than 2 million people in what used to be Yugoslavia. Islam encompasses 40 percent of the country. The Orthodox churches do not preach a clear message of salvation and persecute those who do, Grozdanov said.

The evangelical witness there consists only of a few Methodist churches and two Baptist churches, both of which Grozdanov has served.

But Grozdanov, his wife and their two children were forced to flee to the United States in October because the threat of war in Macedonia is constant. The medical system has deteriorated, and Grozdanov's 2-year-old nearly died from a tonsil infection because there was no medicine to treat it.

"I felt torn apart between two primary responsibilities," Grozdanov said. "The responsibility to my church and the responsibility to my family. So I just left it to the Lord."

Grozdanov obtained visas for his family through a series of miracles and the help of Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, where Grozdanov had been a member when he attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1987-90. He took the visas as a sign from God to leave his homeland.

Fleeing the country did not erase the Macedonian call from his heart, however.

"I really feel a great burden for my people. I want as many as can be to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ," Grozdanov said.

Since returning to Fort Worth, Grozdanov has started a Macedonian translation of the Gospel of John. Using the original Greek text, he is fulfilling his Macedonian call.

"I was fortunate to have Dr. (Lorin) Cranford as my Greek teacher" at Southwestern, Grozdanov said. "He gave me a solid basis of understanding the Greek language and introduced me to translation theory."

Grozdanov has completed 14 chapters of John and Wycliffe Bible Translators have agreed to help him translate the rest of the New Testament. In addition, a team of Christians still in Macedonia is working on a Macedonian translation from English.

"If we want to have a revival we need to have the Scriptures translated into an understandable, readable language," he said. "Every revival is dependent on a good translation of the Scriptures."

Grozdanov longs for a revival in Macedonia, where becoming a Christian means almost instant persecution.

"It's a drastic change of lifestyle. It's a drastic decision," he said. "Not like here in the States. You're a Christian here -- so what? When you become a Christian in Macedonia, you risk being ostracized by your family. Some are thrown out of their homes, blotted out of the family books."

"It is very difficult to work in an environment as we have in Macedonia, but at the same time it is very rewarding when you see someone come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary.

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