

(BP)

-- BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #7
Nashville, Tennessee 372
(615) 244-23
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-89
CompuServe ID# 70420

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Martin King, 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 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) 638-3223

May 4, 1994

94-75

TEXAS -- Ministry center director shares his faith amid life's calamities; photo.
HOUSTON -- His heart for missions soars beyond comfortable upbringing.
WASHINGTON -- Mitchell: Kevorkian acquittal assault on life's sanctity.
LOUISIANA -- School system opens itself to True Love Waits message.
ALASKA -- Good sex to great sex requires understanding.
WASHINGTON -- Scholar: Baptists have strayed from British, Colonial heritage.
WASHINGTON -- Speakers hold out hope, need for common Baptist identity.
WASHINGTON -- Baptists, despite diversity, can work together, speakers.
NASHVILLE -- Corrections.

Ministry center director shares
his faith amid life's calamities

Baptist Press
5/4/94

By Russell N. Dilday

TEXARKANA, Texas (BP)--Steven Cain sits at his desk at the Friendship Center in Texarkana, Texas. The center is a ministry to "the physical and spiritual needs of the poor, homeless and transient people in Texarkana," he explains. The ministry is co-sponsored by Southwest Baptist Association in Arkansas and Bowie Baptist Association in Texas.

The desk, like the rest of the office, has piles of papers stacked in every available corner. On top of one of the piles is the pamphlet "Management of Assaultive Behavior" and over the desk is a string of painted wooden letters reading, "Merry Christmas!" It is April.

There is a toaster oven in a corner of the desk where a computer should be. "The computer burned in the fire," he notes.

"The fire" is the house fire that completely destroyed Cain's house March 11, displacing him, his wife and one of their four children.

"March was a bad month," he says, surprisingly with a smile. "And on the 18th my father-in-law died and on the 25th my dad had a stroke. I've had a lot of people call me Job lately.

"It's a test," he says of recent events, "and I hope we don't fail."

A woman at the office door interrupts his story. "Is there any way you can put me in a hotel?" she asks. "If I sleep in my car again tonight, I'm gonna scream."

He tells her she needs to go back and try living at home again and promises to see what he can do. "Problems at home forced her out and she won't go back, so she's living in her car."

There are many stories in Texarkana like those of the woman at the door. "There will be a thousand people on the streets tonight," Cain remarks. He said the border town between Texas and Arkansas is a high traffic area for transients because it is between Little Rock and Dallas on Interstate 30 and is a major railroad center. "A lot of people come through."

The center's 1993 report supports his statement. Last year the center ministered to the needs of more than 27,000 people, serving nearly 15,000 meals, providing groceries and clothing for nearly 1,100 families and helping clients with utilities, medical needs, rent, lodging and gas.

--more--

Along with ministering to the physical needs of clients, Cain says, "It has always been my belief that spiritual needs are as great or greater than physical needs. It seems that people who are spiritually well often have less of the physical needs we provide here."

Underscoring Cain's commitment to meeting spiritual needs is the 150 professions of faith recorded last year by the center. When speaking of unsaved people, his tone becomes urgent. "There are more lost people in the world today than yesterday."

Cain has been director of the center since 1990. Trained as a mechanical engineer, he answered God's call to ministry at a revival service at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Texarkana. "I gave God three reasons why I couldn't work for him," including excuses of time, money and qualification. "He said, 'Steven, if you're obedient, you are qualified.' I gave up and surrendered my life to his service." That call was to lead to the Friendship Center.

Cain sees himself as the "pastor" here. "When people come in here with a problem, in essence I'm their pastor. God loves them and hung on a cross for them. These people are all a flock like a pastor would have."

As he drives to the ruins of his home, he tells of God's support for his family. "God takes care of us." The job as the center's director pays only part-time wages, though he often works a full day. "Somehow at the end of the month, we have a little change. It's by the grace of God that we survive."

Getting out of the car, he looks at the blackened timbers and remnants of his personal possessions and is silent a moment before entering the roofless remains. He pauses in the garage, looking at a filing cabinet. "That was my grandfather's." He and his wife lost many family heirlooms in the blaze.

He walks past a twisted bicycle and a brick wall that collapsed out onto the lawn as the house's frame burned. Sifting through pages of his theological books, now browned and crisp, he says he regrets most the loss of his library as he seeks to "look for the good" in the fire. "Our son was at home and he got out alive. The dogs barking saved his life. They now get to sleep at the foot of the bed and they get to split a burger when we go to McDonald's."

He mentions the family had "good coverage" from home insurance, "but I don't know anyone who got their home back the way they wanted. Some of the things we didn't need, but I wouldn't suggest this method to you for spring cleaning." Again, he produces a grin.

Refusing to mope over his recent calamities, Cain quietly affirms, "God has mysterious ways and watches out for people."

--30--

(BP) photo available upon request from the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine.

His heart for missions soars
beyond comfortable upbringing

By Dave Couric

Baptist Press
5/4/94

HOUSTON (BP)--It was only natural for John Lewis Jr. to go into medicine, following in the footsteps of his famous father.

But sometimes the supernatural occurs instead.

As a teen-ager growing up in Houston, Lewis had a close relationship with his father, John Lewis Sr., well-known Houston cardiologist and recently-appointed president of the state board of medical examiners.

As a Christian, the father greatly influenced his son, who struggled while in college between the prospect of going into medicine and the call to the ministry.

"I was thinking originally of just going into medicine," said the 35-year-old Lewis. He spent one summer working with a doctor in heart surgery but decided it "wouldn't fulfill something that is inside me that I feel. I feel like I want to make a difference for people for eternity, not just for their body in this life. I began to pray about that, and during that time the Lord called me into the ministry."

--more--

But what makes it more unusual is that Lewis was called to inner-city missions rather than a ministry to those with a similar background to his own. He currently is pastor of Glenn Rose Baptist Church, a multi-ethnic mission of Houston's First Baptist Church.

For some reason, Lewis always found himself doing missions, summer missions in inner-city Dallas, for example. Then there was work with Vietnamese refugees in Tulsa, again in the inner city. Another time Lewis started helping with his church's bus ministry and at that point felt a calling to inner-city missions, or "declining churches," as he calls it, which most pastors aren't inclined to choose.

"Since I came out of an upper-class family, my tendency would be to relate to people my age out of that background," said Lewis, married with three children. "But for some reason, since I'm called into missions, I have that desire to cross over to working with the poor, multi-ethnic and international," Lewis said. "That's how I developed a love for missions over the years as I was doing those kinds of things."

It's a love that extends to foreign missions as well. Before taking his current pastorate, he intended to serve a two-year assignment in Romania with the Foreign Mission Board, but the particulars didn't work out. Instead, he has been on some short-term mission trips overseas as an outreach of his church.

Lewis also has a dream: to establish a missions training center at his church to train a diverse group and send them out on the foreign mission field.

"Servants and stewards" in the community sums up Lewis' philosophy of missions, while his theme for this his first year at the church has focused on the kingdom of God, "his right to rule his kingdom."

Starting out with 20 in attendance a year ago, the church has grown to 250, including 50 professions of faith and 20 baptisms, said Lewis, a graduate of Baylor University, Oral Roberts University and Wheaton College.

The multi-ethnic congregation on the north side of Houston consists of 40 percent Anglos, 25 percent Hispanics, 20 percent Asians and 15 percent African Americans. Because of language differences, some of the Asians -- the Cambodian and Filipino groups -- meet at alternate times for worship. Celebrating unity in the midst of diversity is the church's multiracial approach, the pastor said.

"We're here to be two things: servants and stewards," Lewis reiterated. "That means that whatever God needs or who he needs us to serve or how he calls us to be a steward of what we have, our answer is yes. Then we ask what the question is."

The unique thing about Glenn Rose Baptist is that unlike some other seemingly similar missions, Lewis said, this was not a dead church that was resurrected with an entirely new congregation. It was a dying church that was transformed from a single-race -- white -- to a multiracial congregation, now in a mostly black neighborhood. Some of the original charter members from the late 1950s are still active in the church.

Indeed, the church is open to any ethnic group wishing to join the rest of the congregation for worship, Lewis said, whether with separate meetings or together.

Although the "international church" concept requires many changes and adjustments to the traditional church situation, the past year has been the "most exciting" year of John Lewis' ministry. It's also been the "hardest and most painful," he said, in leading Glenn Rose to undertake its challenging transformation.

For the previous three years, Lewis was pastor of Grace Baptist about a mile away in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood. Grace is now a Hispanic church, having outgrown the rest of the originally mixed congregation.

So, Lewis for the second time in his life is leading a church to break down walls of separation in a community. They had a "Jericho Prayer Rally" recently at Glenn Rose in which the people fasted before marching around the church property, praying "the spiritual walls that kept people in the community from the church would come down." Meanwhile, Lewis' fervor remains steadfast, "that the kingdom of God would come."

**Mitchell: Kevorkian acquittal
assault on life's sanctity**

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--Jack Kevorkian's acquittal on an assisted-suicide charge provides "another example of the horrendous assault on the sanctity of human life," a Southern Baptist ethicist said.

A jury cleared Kevorkian May 2 of violating Michigan's assisted suicide law. Although Kevorkian placed a mask over the face of a gravely ill 30-year-old man and hooked it to a tank of poisonous carbon monoxide gas, the jury in Detroit decided his purpose was to alleviate suffering rather than cause death, according to news reports. The Michigan law allows an exception for physicians seeking to ease pain.

The exception should not have been a loophole for Kevorkian's benefit, said Ben Mitchell, director of biomedical and life issues for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"The intent of the Michigan law was to permit physicians to treat pain adequately, not to assist in the patient's death," Mitchell said. "Carbon monoxide gas is not an analgesic. It does not relieve suffering; it ends the life of the patient. No physician administers carbon monoxide to treat pain. The purpose of Kevorkian's act was to kill the patient.

"What Kevorkian did to Thomas Hyde was just as much accessory to suicide as if he had handed him a loaded revolver."

Hyde suffered from a degenerative nerve disorder commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, named after the famous New York Yankees first baseman who died of the ailment in 1941.

It was the first jury decision under the Michigan law, although Kevorkian, a retired pathologist, has assisted in or attended 20 suicides since 1990. According to news reports, some jurors said afterward the verdict was an emotional as much as a legal one. The jury also said the uncertainty of what county in which the suicide took place was a factor, it was reported.

Such a rationale is alarming, Mitchell said.

"They admitted that their verdict was not the result of an honest assessment of guilt or innocence in the light of the law, but a judgment based on misdirected sentimentality," he said. "The question is not whether persons can take their own lives in suicide, but whether or not our society is going to allow the Jack Kevorkians of this world to be accessories to self-murder."

The implications of the decision may be far-reaching, Mitchell said.

"Will we return to a compassionate society of men and women who love their neighbors, or will we continue to slide into the abyss of barbarism?" he asked. "The indications are that we are moving toward the latter at break-neck speed.

"We may not be far from the day in which 'crisis dying centers' will be as necessary as crisis pregnancy centers," he said. "Dying persons will need somewhere to spend their last days without the fear that their deaths will be hastened. Church-operated hospices should flourish under that scenario."

In the meantime, Christians can minister in this area, Mitchell said.

"Pain can be treated effectively with medications in nearly every case," Mitchell said. "Suffering is emotional and spiritual pain. Christians can help relieve suffering by helping dying patients feel loved and cared for. We can pray with them, spend time with them and help their care givers. When that happens, in most cases, the desire for assisted death disappears."

--30--

**School system opens itself
t True Love Waits message**

By C. Lacy Thompson

Baptist Press
5/4/94

BERWICK, La. (BP)--Stan Beaubouef knows one of his students at Berwick Junior High School is pregnant -- and likely a second.

--more--

One of the girls is 13; the other, 14. They will be mothers before they get a driver's license.

That's a problem.

Beaubouef, the school's principal, also knows dozens upon dozens of the junior high students are committed to sexual abstinence, students who have pledged to refrain from premarital sex.

That's a solution.

The reasons for the problem are many and well-documented, from the ever-increasing pressures on families to the constant and graphic depiction of sex in the media. "These kids are bombarded with sexual messages all the time -- day in and day out," said Beaubouef.

On the other hand, the reason for the solution is almost unexplainable -- a campaign to promote sexual abstinence that has exploded across religious lines and captured national attention.

A group of Christian churches recently brought the campaign to every junior and high school in the parish, complete with skits, songs and commitment cards.

"Do you know what TLW stands for?" organizers asked students before they brought the rally to the schools. Responses were varied, often humorous, seldom accurate.

But that was then.

True Love Waits began as a Southern Baptist effort to encourage teens to abstain from sex before marriage. The concept was simple. The effort urged them to sign commitment cards and support each other in their commitments. Parents were urged to enter into a covenant with their children, and churches were urged to support both parents and teens in fulfilling the commitment.

The idea has moved beyond the local church setting and swept the nation, being featured in national news magazines, on national news programs and in editorials of prominent newspapers. It has been embraced by a host of organizations and denominations in this country -- and abroad.

And it has provided an answer to a serious problem confronting schools in St. Mary's Parish and elsewhere.

The idea for bringing True Love Waits into St. Mary's Parish schools grew out of a conversation Beaubouef had with a couple of area youth ministers about the sexual pressures confronting teens. "It's a serious problem," Beaubouef noted. "It's as serious as you can imagine."

Beaubouef and others realized they needed to address the problem in some way. "But we didn't know what to do," he recounted.

Eventually, he approached leaders of an interdenominational group known as Insight, begun five years ago as a means of organizing Bible study groups in parish schools. It was carefully established with school board approval and has enjoyed positive response. Several Louisiana Baptist churches are active in the group.

Young people and leaders from the churches also were involved in the True Love Waits production in the schools. David Spencer and Marty Harden led out in organizing the presentation. Spencer is minister of youth and music at Bayou Vista Baptist Church in Morgan City. Harden is minister of youth at First Assembly of God in Berwick.

The result of the effort, involving dozens of young people, was a high-quality, multimedia presentation that drew favorable response from students, school leaders and parents.

The presentation included a 12-by-32-foot True Love Waits banner produced by students, spotlights, skits, songs and videotape segments and testimonies. Prior to the scheduled rally in each school -- which students could elect not to attend -- organizers used a video camera to ask students if they knew what TLW was. A videotape of the response was used as an effective icebreaker for the presentation. Organizers also used billboards and teaser messages in schools to promote interest in the scheduled rallies.

Meanwhile, students involved in the production spent weeks preparing. Practice started in January. The school rallies were held three months later.

In addition to a time commitment, participants were asked to sign True Love Waits commitment cards. That cut down on the number willing to be involved, Spencer admitted. "But the ones who stayed were real in their commitment and serious about it," he said.

That seriousness showed in the rally presentation and in comments about the effort. For instance, when Jackie Street of Calumet Baptist Church in Patterson was asked why she was involved, she noted, "It's like somebody has to show an example." Tracy Werline of Bayou Vista Baptist Church agreed. "As Christians we are to witness, and this is a form of witness to me."

That witness drew a range of response from students. Some dismissed the effort. Others listened attentively. "We had kids who came up to us and said, 'This is great,'" Spencer said. "We had kids who tore the cards up. We had kids who put vulgar messages on the cards. But I told our kids not to worry about response. Our job was to present the message."

Tracy Brunet of Baldwin Baptist Mission admitted the rejection by some of the students hurt. "But I realized it's not personal. They're not rejecting me. They're rejecting the message."

Not all rejected the message, however. About 5,000 True Love Waits commitment cards were distributed. About half were returned.

"We didn't make it a hard-sell job," Spencer said. "We just presented the facts and let the kids make the decision. In fact, we told them not to sign the card unless they meant it, unless they were serious."

School leaders also responded well to the effort, realizing the need for a positive message regarding sexual activity. "We definitely do not feel it's healthy for kids to be involved sexually," Beaubouef said.

"I hope it will have a great impact," added Louis Watkins, assistant principal at Morgan City High School. "I hope it does exactly what they want it to do -- teach kids that true love waits. It was a great message."

Response from parents has been positive as well. "Most of the parents are very excited about it because it's a positive step," Spencer says.

But more is needed.

Insight leaders already are planning on following up with students who signed commitment cards. Meanwhile, school and church leaders are discussing the need for some sort of ongoing message to students.

Spencer said he keeps remembering a nicely dressed, attractive high school girl pick up the commitment card and shake her head as she read it. "No, not me," she said to one of her friends.

For Spencer and others, the girl represents the remaining challenge. "We have to keep saying it over and over," Beaubouef said. "We have to say it enough and hope that the message sinks in. We can't quit. We have to keep saying what is right.

"Of the 450 kids at my school, 360 signed commitment cards. That was the highest percentage of any of the schools. But that means there are nearly 100 who did not sign the cards. So we haven't reached everyone.

"We just have to keep saying it, keep telling these kids that they are destroying their lives," Beaubouef insisted.

"We haven't made a real impact on the problem until we have 100 percent of the kids committed."

--30--

Good sex to great sex
requires understanding

By Terri Lackey

Baptist Press
5/4/94

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (BP)--Husbands and wives tend to have different concepts about what makes good sex. But understanding each other's needs and desires could turn good sex into great sex, an Alaskan couple said.

--more--

"Sex is not something that Hugh Hefner invented. It is not something that has to be twisted," said Brad Riza, a sex therapist and senior chaplain at Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage. "Sex is a gift that God has given to us as Christian people and we ought to reclaim it as good."

Riza and his wife, Joy, a sixth-grade teacher, led the conference "From Good Sex to Great Sex: Getting There is Half the Fun" at one of six new Spring Festivals of Marriage held this year. The April 29-May 1 event was the first Southern Baptist Sunday School Board-sponsored marriage conference ever held in Alaska.

Of the 229 couples attending, 23 were Air Force couples whose expenses were picked up by on-base tithes and offerings and 26 were from the Army whose ways were paid by the Army.

Married 30 years, the Rizas said frequency is a male's idea of good sex, while passion is a female's concept of quality.

"We have a lot of definitions about what makes great sex, and you as couples need to come to some kind of consensus about what those are," Riza said. "We are not going to tell you what you ought to be doing, but we are going to tell you how to find out what great sex is for you."

Riza said understanding the three basic concepts of love is rudimentary knowledge for a great sex life.

The first is erotic love, which Riza explained as "a selfish kind of love. You want something out of it. It's sexual and selfish, but there is nothing wrong with it as long as it is balanced with the second type of love, which is agape."

Riza said many Christians believe erotic love is wrong, but he claimed it is only unhealthy when "you start having erotic, sensual feelings for someone other than your wife or husband."

Riza defined agape love as a giving, sacrificial kind of love.

And the third is "buddy, friend, companion type of love," he said. A balance of these three basic types of love is needed for a good marriage and a great sex life, Riza said.

Sometimes a balance is hard to achieve, according to Riza, because of the differences in the way "men and women are wired." An understanding of the differences allows mates to be more agreeable to them, he added.

For example, Riza said he believes men are more sensory than women. They are more readily stimulated by smells or visuals.

"While I don't have any hard research, I think women have a switch somewhere in their brain that allows them to select whether they want to be stimulated. Guys don't have the ability not to respond, yet women can choose to or choose not to," he said.

"Sights and smells stimulate a man, and this is a big piece of information for what it takes to go from good sex to great sex," Riza said.

On the other hand, women are a little more complicated to satisfy in the sexual arena, Joy Riza said. Women need affection and intimacy from their spouses in order to achieve better sexual relationships. Affection symbolizes approval of our personhood and of our physical bodies."

Affection also symbolizes comfort, security and emotional protection, she said.

"If women get affection from their husbands, they are more likely to feel comfortable and be able to relax," she said. "Women cannot provide great sex unless they are relaxed."

Intimacy in the non-sexual sense is another key element in a woman's ability to feel close to her husband, she said, adding couples can achieve intimacy through open and honest conversation.

"Through openness and honesty, women feel true caring and true concern from their spouses," she said. "We need communication -- verbal words, not grunts and groans and shrugs of shoulders. Women need conversation, and through conversation, we feel intimate."

The theme for the 1993-94 Fall and Spring Festivals of Marriage is "Celebrating Sex in Your Marriage." A book by the same title can be purchased in Lifeway Christian and Baptist Book Stores. Thirty-eight Festivals of Marriage are being held this year.

Scholar: Baptists have strayed
from British, Colonial heritage By Wendy Ryan

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptists in North America must address "the issue of who we are;" otherwise, "there may be littl n d for us collectively," said William Brackney told the North American Baptist Fellowship during its April 24-25 at First Baptist Church in Washington.

Brackney, principal of McMaster Divinity College in Ontario, Canada, and chairman of the Baptist World Alliance's study and research committee, spok on th meeting's theme, "Affirming Baptist Identity in National Life."

The NABF is a voluntary association of 10 Baptist denominations in North America and one of six regional groupings of the BWA.

Contending there is a critical need for Baptists in North America to recapture some of the fire and vision of their founders, Brackney said Baptists need to regain their energy level to fight church-state issues; do evangelism; return to congregational life; pay more attention to leadership development; and respond to critical world issues.

"Baptists in North America have in many ways, become weary in welldoing," Brackney said.

"What has happened to our concern for separation of church and state and the principles of voluntarism?" Brackney asked. "Whatever happened to the public witness for our faith? Whatever happened to our sense of the urgency of the proclamation of the gospel?"

Brackney said Baptists had "capitulated to the mainstream," which has carried them off "into organizational complexity."

"Baptists never belonged there and it has not served us well," Brackney said. He called on Baptists to "reclaim our radical congregational nature and follow Christ where he will lead us, beginning with where we live and work."

Baptists must work on leadership development also, Brackney said, noting, "One of the great contributions to church and national identity is the lay leadership development cultivated in our churches and applied generally."

Brackney continued, "... we need to move beyond our safe haven churchliness where we create our own issues and cloak them in liturgical and theological jargon and discover through prayer and keen observation what the real issues are for our national communities at this critical time."

"Our identity has always been contextual," Brackney said. "At our best, we have been responsive to God's leading in the circumstances in which God placed us. This is how issues like religious liberty and world mission came to dominate national and international consciousness in our past."

Brackney reviewed the history of Baptists, how some of their distinguishing marks developed and how Baptists today often have little in common with their Baptist heritage.

"Which Baptist identity is one of the first questions you need to ask," said Brackney who reminded his audience Baptists began in England, not North America.

"Those of us in North America must settle for being part of a tradition that was birthed half a century earlier than our first churches and 3,000 miles away in another culture," he said.

Baptist distinctives of separation of church and state, religious liberty and voluntary support of churches "were rooted in Baptists' British origins and blossomed in an unusual way in the North American context," Brackney said.

Apart from their foreign heritage, Baptists in North America became perhaps th most diverse denominational group using the same name.

"Southern Baptist identity, American Baptist identity, black Baptist identity, ethnic Baptist identity, Conservative Baptist identity, Bible Baptist identity and independent Baptist identity" are just a few of the many Baptists in North America, he said.

"Does one count numbers? Does one group identify us all?" he asked.

--more--

Brackney appealed to Baptist history to help answer the "evolving identity" issue.

"Unlike the comfortable Christian faith many Baptists in North America enjoy today, the earliest Baptists were individuals and 'dissenters' who suffered for their beliefs," Brackney said.

"Baptists entered the North American colonies as individuals and later as congregations of 'hole-in-the wall-dissenters,'" Brackney said. Because they were poor, "our ancestors lacked much opportunity to have any impact on culture or public policy. They were poor outcasts in the early nation."

Being a "dissenter" was not easy.

A "dissenter" in the British 17th century was described, among other things, as "a person who engaged in extraordinary practices or experiences," a person who refused to worship and agree with the teachings of the established church, Brackney said.

"Believers baptism and their insistence on religious liberty put Baptists in the 'dissenters' group.

"Their practice of believers baptism -- a 'lewd' act which called into question the foundations of cultural identification -- and their outlandish statements on religious liberty which rocked the foundation of political and religious consensus placed Baptists clearly in the 'dissenters' group," he said.

While many Baptists love the King James Version of the Bible, "King James and his advisors perceived all too quickly what was at stake with religious freedom," Brackney said, "and despite later Baptist enthusiasm for the translation of the Bible which bears his name, he made quick to silence Baptist witness."

In the Colonies, "Baptists made nuisances of themselves, antagonizing the authorities over infant baptism, taxes to support ministers and other religious institutions," Brackney said, and early Baptist leaders paid dearly for this.

Beyond such religious liberty questions, Baptists faced other issues as time went on.

"Whether to be a missionary people or a hodgepodge of local congregations scattered from New England to Louisiana territory" was the question for Baptists in the 19th century and there were Baptists who chose both ways, Brackney said.

"Fundamentalism" more than any other issue gave Baptists a national identity in the early 20th century, Brackney said, and as result of the "wars" of fundamentalism, "Baptists broadly came to be seen as protectors of primitive Christianity in modern clothing."

Brackney credited Southern Baptists with changing that image nationally and worldwide. Because Southern Baptists agreed on missions, evangelism and congregationalism, they "created an image of growth, stewardship and internationalism for post-war America," he said.

But today, Baptists have a different image and Brackney said he thinks Baptists are more divided than ever and have strayed from their beginnings.

"The loudest and most obvious and most-often quoted Baptists in the United States seem to be nowhere near the historic principles of older Baptist bodies," Brackney said.

While most Baptist groups are searching for a common identity, black Baptists for the most part are an exception to this, he said.

Brackney gave black Baptists high marks for a strong sense of racial and cultural identity and a sense of leadership and principles which have had national and international impact.

"Whatever revisionist historians will do with Martin Luther King's religious leadership in books to come, he is unmistakably the symbol of black Baptist achievement, an international personal profile of human rights and a virtual personification of black preaching style," Brackney said.

"Our nations need us now as much as ever for what we historically spouse," Brackney said. "Let us not shrink or subdivide from the task."

**Speakers hold out hope, need
for common Baptist identity**

By Wendy Ryan

WASHINGTON (BP)--Do Baptists in North America have a common identity? Or care?

Leading North American Baptist historians, theologians and leaders said yes to both questions during the April 24-25 meeting of the North American Baptist Fellowship at the First Baptist Church in Washington.

Ten Baptist denominations in North America form the NABF, one of six regional groups of the Baptist World Alliance.

"What makes a Baptist?" asked William Brackney, principal at McMaster Divinity College in Ontario, Canada. "There is no particular birthplace to the movement ... no one founder ... there is no one set of Baptist principles."

However, the NABF speakers agreed Baptist identity historically centers around believers baptism, religious liberty, separation of church and state, and dissent.

Along the historical way, missions, evangelism, voluntarism, fundamentalism and leadership also became part of Baptist identity.

"In many ways, we are so different," said Daniel E. Weiss, general secretary of the American Baptist Churches, USA, "how can we find an identity?"

But being different is what appeals to many African American Baptists.

"Diversity and inclusiveness has the best opportunity in the Baptist family," said Wallace Charles Smith, senior minister at Shiloh Baptist Church in Washington, "and black Baptists are still positive to dissent."

"We are struggling to find our new identity," said John Binder, general secretary of the North American Baptist Conference, made up mostly of German immigrants.

"I always believed being a Baptist meant we were regenerate believers, baptized by immersion, believed in religious freedom and, for us, had a strong German identity," Binder church. "But with our church planting strategy, we have a strong multiethnic group and we are struggling with our identity.

"But," Binder said, "I never want to give up asking those questions and trying to answer."

Timothy George, dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala., said he believes there is a theological answer and identity for Baptists, though he agrees that a common identity for Baptists "is a complex issue."

George, who spoke on "Affirming Baptist Identity in Denominational Life," quoted Baptist historian Winthrop Hudson who said Baptists have had a consistent theology maintained by most Baptist leaders.

Starting from the middle of the 19th century, "Baptists had a remarkable theological unity of vision and mission that even cut across the seismic faultline of slavery," George said.

Historically, George said, Baptists were a "communal" and "covenanting" people who "confessed" their faith, "but all three are marginalized today."

He said he believes "soul competency, where every man has his own church," and an "anti-intellectual pietism which polarizes sound doctrine and holy living" characterize much of Baptist life today.

Baptists' confessional structures, orthodox convictions, evangelical faith, Reformed roots and free church identity "are five strands among which we may unify," George said.

Among the things Baptists confess, George said, are:

- Baptists are not creedal people and only God is Lord of the conscience.
- There is no creed equal to the Bible.
- There is no creed beyond revision, although this does not mean Baptists do not approve positive statements of faith.

"Our theology is done in community," George said, and "this brings us together in affirmation and witness. We need to recover the stronger aspects of community.

--more--

"We do have orthodox convictions," he said, as "Baptists stand in continuity with the dogmas of the early church in the confession of faith of the canonicity of Scripture, the Trinitarianism of God and the Christology of Christ."

Baptists are evangelical and affirm the doctrines of the Reformation of justification by faith and "Scripture alone," George said. "Baptists believe in conversion and repentance."

In the 18th century, "Baptists were identified with the evangelical awakening with the emphasis on conversion and repentance, and leading Baptists such as Billy Graham, Carl Henry and Charles Colson are leaders in 'the post-fundamentalist renaissance,'" George said.

"Grace, transcendence, salvation, God-centered worship -- how we understand the world and our relation to it" are all part of the Reformation which has strong roots in Baptist life, George said.

While a free church identity "is not unique to Baptists, Baptists stand centrally in that position," George said.

Even though the struggle for Baptist identity today "is the strongest," George challenged NABF leaders to carry on the faith given to Baptists.

"While the purposes of God are not tied to any denomination, God has used the Baptist denomination," George said. "We dare to hope, because we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have left us a precious legacy."

We have "precious cargo," the hope of the world, and "that's why we persist in staying together and coming together," George said.

--30--

Baptists, despite diversity,
can work together, speakers say By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
5/4/94

WASHINGTON (BP)--In varying ways, a consensus was spoken during the North American Baptist Fellowship meeting:

Baptists in North America have enough in common to work together and Baptists still have a contribution to make to national life, even in an increasingly pluralistic society.

Baptist leaders from 10 groups in the United States and Canada comprising the North American Baptist Fellowship met around the theme, "Affirming Baptist Identity in National Life" April 24-25 at the First Baptist Church in Washington.

The gathering reflected the commitment of many North American Baptist leaders to work together, in spite of differences among their groups.

"Could we imagine that this quiet, loose association of churches called the North American Baptist Fellowship might model new approaches for the church in terms of mission and cooperation?" asked William Brackney, principal of McMaster Divinity College in Ontario, Canada.

"We have been left a precious legacy as Baptists and carry precious cargo, the hope of the world," said Timothy George, dean at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala. "We must carry it onward and that is why we persist in staying together and coming together."

"If I were not committed to this, I would not be here," said Harold C. Bennett, NABF president who led the meeting, attended by 60 Baptist leaders. "I am committed to bringing Baptists together for the cause of Jesus Christ."

"Baptists in North America are the largest Protestant group in North America, but are the most divided," said Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance. "Baptists in North America must come together so that the world might believe."

The NABF leaders agreed there was much they had in common from their historical roots and present emphases to bring and keep them together.

Some of these are baptism by immersion, separation of church and state, and religious liberty and dissent.

--more--

Describing Baptists in the Colonies, Brackney said Baptists suffered for antagonizing the authorities over infant baptism and taxes to support ministers and other religious institutions. "In Virginia, Baptist preachers were imprisoned and suffocated with gunpowder," he said.

Theologically, Baptists in North America have had historically much in common, said George. "Baptists have always stood in continuity with the dogmas of the early church in their confession of faith."

George said Baptists also are "firmly rooted" in the 16th century Reformation themes of justification by faith; Scripture alone; repentance; God-centered worship; how to understand the world and Christians' relation to it.

Today, Baptists also are leaders in the evangelical movement in North America. George said evangelist Billy Graham, theologian Carl Henry and Charles Colson of Prison Fellowship are leaders in what he described as "the post-fundamentalism renaissance."

However, today Baptists must witness to their belief in an increasingly pluralistic society.

"Witness for the Baptist is inseparably and intentionally associated with the affirming of the right of all peoples to their own religious freedom," said Horace O. Russell, dean of the chapel and professor of the history of Christianity at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

"But this has increasingly become difficult with the rise of the new religious movements and the renaissance of some older historic religions," Russell said.

While "witness among Baptists also is related to the right to persuade, this is not made any easier in a state which affirms 'a marketplace of ideas' as an essential part of its culture," Russell said.

Russell who spoke on, "Affirming Baptist Identity in a World of Religious Pluralism," gave four guidelines for Baptist witness in a pluralistic society.

Russell called for a "dialogue of life" where "the religious values of each might enrich the other in mutual interest and harmony."

Second, and on a more "academic" level, Russell called for "a dialogue of views, where Baptists share their views with others to arrive at 'a community of ideas.'"

Third, Russell called for "a dialogue of spirituality."

While some may ask whether Baptists should enter such a dialogue, Russell said they should, "with caution, bearing in mind the insistence on the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the strong Christological focus."

Some of the world's other religions do ask some of the same questions Christians ask, Russell said, and "religious pluralism demands the respect for the integrity of other religions."

Fourth, Russell said there should be "a dialogue of actions" where Baptists join with others in actions that protect the interests of all.

--30--

CORRECTIONS: In (BP) story titled "Committee nominates SBC seminary trustees," dated 4/27/94, please make the following corrections: under Golden Gate Seminary, Fredrick T. Corbin, who is nominated for a second term, is from Raleigh, N.C., not Barton; under the Historical Commission, John F. Caudle, Richmond, W.Va., should be Jon F. Caudle, Richwood, W.Va.

In (BP) story titled "Ed Young names members of Credentials Committee," dated 5/2/94, under Oklahoma, Steve Bass is a director of missions, not a layman.

In (BP) story titled "Tellers Committee named by SBC President Young," dated 5/2/94, also under Oklahoma, Clayton Spriggs is assistant pastor, not pastor, of First Baptist Church.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

HOUSE MAIL

(BP)

BAPTIST PRESS
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, TN 37203

Southern Baptist Library and
Archives