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Class on world religions  
sparks interfaith witness

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press  
11/15/94

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--As the 20th century draws to a close, the United States has become as much a melting pot of faiths as nationalities. Many Southern Baptists fail to appreciate this pervasiveness of non-Christian faith groups, even in the traditionally-staid Bible Belt, said Bill Gordon, a regional director for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department.

Speaking to a class studying world religions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C, Wednesday, Nov. 9, Gordon said the Home Mission Board now is forced to do foreign missions work in the United States.

"There are literally more false religions and cult groups out there than any one department can keep track of, much less communicate to Southern Baptists," Gordon said.

George Braswell, Southeastern professor of missions and world religions, agreed saying: "The church on the whole is not aware of all that is going on within other religion groups. Christians need to be aware of this growing religious pluralism and to be equipped to give their witness."

Eldon Reich, a third year master of divinity student at Southeastern, knows firsthand the presence of faiths which are decidedly not Christian. Reich's sister-in-law is a Jehovah's Witness who no longer practices that faith, but retains many of its beliefs.

"This is not just another Christian denomination like Methodists or Presbyterians," he said. "These believers have a basis for their worldview that is very different from a Christian worldview."

The interfaith witness department, which takes the lead in witnessing to other faith groups, does not have the manpower or resources to educate Southern Baptist congregations nor reach out to these other faith groups to the degree the HMB would prefer, Gordon said.

The interfaith witness associate program was developed to train laity and pastors to lead conferences on these groups at a church and association level.

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As part of the HMB's effort to reach out to other faith groups, Gordon informed the students their completion of the seminary class could be a part of their being certified as interfaith witness associates in Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Jehovah's Witness, or Mormonism.

He said while the HMB has held interfaith awareness workshops on other SBC seminary campuses, "this arrangement within an actual seminary course offering is a unique means of cooperation between the interfaith witness department and Southeastern Seminary."

Braswell is pleased the HMB is renewing the arrangement with Southeastern: "A seminary setting is an ideal place for pastors to get this kind of training. It is important that men and women are able to give both a positive witness of their faith and an apologetic to people of other religious groups."

David Hicks is a student in the class and says he is looking forward to being certified as an interfaith witness associate. He said: "It is upsetting to see what we as Southern Baptists do not know about other faith groups. It is very difficult to witness to these people if we have no understanding of their religious beliefs."

Gordon said the requirement that people must make contact with different faith groups is the one thing that prevents many people from being certified as an interfaith witness associates. He said a personal encounter is necessary both to better understand their religion and to give the interfaith witness associate credibility when teaching a conference.

There is a hesitancy to meet face-to-face with people from other religions that are so foreign to our beliefs, Gordon said. "Yet can you imagine the loss of credibility if you had to admit to a class you were teaching on the beliefs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that you had never really met a member of that faith?"

SEBTS senior Bob Wilson took the challenge to meet a member of another faith group seriously -- he invited two Mormon missionaries who knocked on the door of his seminary apartment back to talk with him further. Wilson says he is not considering converting, he only wants to know what the Mormons believe and why.

"Members of the Church of Latter-day Saints give every appearance of just being ordinary folks," Wilson said. "Yet their beliefs stand very strange against an orthodox Christian faith. They sincerely believe their faith is the ultimate truth and they are aggressive in sharing that story."

Gordon called on the students to join the interfaith witness department in making Southern Baptists aware of the different faith groups that exist, saying: "We have a scriptural mandate we can not ignore. We must reach out to everyone with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

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N.C. messengers OK 3 giving plans,  
alter theological education funding

By R.G. Puckett

Baptist Press  
11/15/94

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (BP)--Messengers to the 164th annual meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina approved a 1995 budget totaling \$29.4 million in three different giving plans available to churches.

Messengers also passed a motion instructing the convention's general board to adopt a plan that would fund Baptist students attending North Carolina Baptist colleges/universities equal to the amount sent to the Southern Baptist Convention for theological education.

All incumbent officers were elected during the experimental Nov. 11-12 weekend convention in Winston-Salem for the convenience of laypersons who might not be able to attend the traditional Monday-through-Wednesday sessions.

The budget, adopted by at least a 70-30 percent margin according to those on the platform, offers three choices to churches:

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-- Plan A is the traditional approach, with 68 percent of the undesignated gifts retained by the Baptist State Convention for its missions and ministries with 32 percent allocated to the Southern Baptist Convention for national and international causes.

-- Plan B retains the 68 percent for the state but provides that the remaining 32 be divided 10 percent to the SBC, 8.4 percent for theological education in North Carolina Baptist universities and 13.6 for special foreign, home and other missions.

-- Plan C retains the 68 percent for the state but provides 10 percent to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship rather than the SBC with the other same provisions as Plan B.

A challenge goal of \$500,000 is not included in any of the above allocations. All funds received at the Baptist Building for either of the three plans will be regarded as Cooperative Missions Giving which includes the traditional Cooperative Program system.

James Langford, a Tabor City pastor, moved to amend the budget to eliminate Plan C. His amendment failed after discussion.

Ted Stone, a Durham layman and unsuccessful candidate for the convention's presidency, had announced prior to the sessions through the Biblical Recorder, the state convention newsjournal, he would offer a motion for himself and in behalf of others that both Plans B and C be eliminated. In the flow of discussion and parliamentary procedure, Stone's motion never got to the floor.

"It's a sad day for North Carolina Baptists when we no longer allow messengers from our churches an opportunity to speak on major issues," Stone said in a handwritten statement given to the Recorder after the convention.

"There are many loyal Southern Baptists at this convention who feel our leadership has told us that they don't love us anymore," Stone wrote.

Stone said he discussed his proposal on Wednesday morning with the convention officers and parliamentarian and they had agreed to recognize him immediately after the budget was presented.

However, Joey Faucette, pastor of First Baptist Church, Forest City, spoke first in favor of the budget and when Langford was recognized he offered his motion to amend which was essentially the same intent as the Stone proposal except Langford's proposal would have eliminated Plan C whereas Stone's proposal would have retained only Plan A.

All incumbent officers were re-elected: Alfred T. Ayscue, pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church, Mt. Airy, president; Kathryn H. Hamrick, an insurance executive, Boiling Springs, first vice president; Jack Glasgow, pastor of Zebulon (N.C.) Baptist Church, second vice president; and Marian G. Grant, Raleigh, recording secretary.

Only Ayscue was challenged for re-election. In a three-way race, Ayscue prevailed on the first ballot, with 2,208 votes. Stone, a motivational speaker and conference leader on substance abuse, ran against the incumbent with a platform based on opposition to the three-plan budget. He received 754 votes.

Lynn R. Buzzard, professor at Campbell University's Norman A. Wiggins School of Law at Campbell University, was nominated for the presidency by Coy C. Privette, a former president of the convention and an unsuccessful candidate for the presidency in 1993. Buzzard, who has never attended a convention annual meeting and was not present this year, drew 675 votes.

The announcement in October of the creation of the Southeastern Baptist Theological College by the trustees of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, prompted an emergency meeting of the convention's Council on Christian Higher Education. The CCHC is composed of representatives of the seven Baptist-affiliated colleges/universities, members of the general board and at-large members.

The council drafted a motion to be presented to the convention by Campbell University President Norman A. Wiggins. The text of the motion by Wiggins, which was overwhelmingly approved by the messengers, is:

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"The Council on Christian Higher Education is concerned over recent action of the Southern Baptist Convention which now permits our seminaries to offer baccalaureate level education in which the seminary study is subsidized through Cooperative Program funds at approximately \$6,000 per student while students at our six Baptist colleges are subsidized at a rate of approximately \$350 per student.

"The Council, therefore, moves that the Baptist State Convention meeting in session at Winston-Salem this 12th day of November 1994, directs the general board to meet at its earliest opportunity and adopt a plan within a reasonable time that will fund Baptist students attending our six North Carolina Baptist colleges in an amount that will not be less than that being provided by the North Carolina Baptist State Convention Cooperative Program gifts to the Southern Baptist Convention for theological education."

Steve Hardy, a Burlington pastor and trustee of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, spoke against the motion, calling it "extraordinarily dangerous" because it would require large amounts of money to implement. Hardy, a prominent leader in the Carolina Conservative Baptists organization, suggested a study committee rather than the action proposed.

The motion, however, passed with little opposition. The general board will meet in January 1995 at Caraway Conference Center, Asheboro.

In other actions, messengers adopted three resolutions: a traditional one expression appreciation for the hosts, the convention leaders and program personalities; another which affirmed the North Carolina Baptist Way of relationships to each other and to other Baptist entities; and a third resolution opposed to the use of alcohol and commending University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, coach Dean Smith for his opposition to beer advertising during Atlantic Coast Conference athletic events.

Messengers voted to meet again in the Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Winston-Salem Nov. 13-15, 1995, on the traditional convention days of Monday through Wednesday.

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Chaney: God not 'hamstrung'  
by America's secularization

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
11/15/94

LAUGHLIN, Nev. (BP)--The secularization of America does not make God "hamstrung and helpless," the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's vice president for church extension told those attending a conference on planting churches in gaming communities.

"The 90's may prove to be more anti-Christian than any other period we've experienced thus far," Charles Chaney said during the November meeting. "We seem to work harder and harder, and we win fewer and fewer people to Christ."

Nevertheless, Chaney said, God is still at work and Christians should not be afraid to work with him. He compared secular America to Corinth during the apostle Paul's missionary trips.

Corinth was influenced by multiple religions, and organized, indigenous religion was dead, he said. "They were both a 'right now' and a 'me' generation."

Drawing from Acts 18, Chaney offered five steps to help spread the gospel in secular America and in gambling-impacted communities:

-- Count on common Christian men and women. Chaney noted when Paul got to Corinth he found and worked with local residents Aquila and Priscilla.

"The solution will be found in local churches and lay men and women who are inside and outside the structures of gaming-impacted communities making a difference," he said. "We must find them and train them and let them see their ministry."

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-- Recover courage. God had to tell Paul to not be afraid while he was in Corinth, Chaney noted. "Our lives may be noble, pure and compassionate, but if we are afraid we will not be effective in evangelism," he said.

Courage comes from the realized presence of Christ, Chaney said, which emboldens Christians to be like the 300-pound canary who says "here kitty, kitty, kitty."

"When we realize the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives, that transforms us into 300-pound canaries and we can say to all the cats of hell, 'Here kitty, kitty, kitty.'"

-- Relearn evangelistic essentials: clarity and consistency.

"The Lord said to Paul, 'Speak out, don't quit,'" Chaney said, adding a secular age demands new words to convey the timeless message of the gospel.

-- Rediscover the indwelling, empowering Spirit.

Many Christians spend too little time listening to or learning about the Holy Spirit's power to work in their lives, Chaney said. "We will make no impact -- certainly no lasting impact -- without the power of the Spirit of God."

-- Rediscover confidence that people will respond to evangelism. God told Paul he had many people in the city, Chaney said.

"The reason we can go and offer help in the name of Jesus Christ and know that some are going to come to know Christ is because he has many people in every city and it's our job to call them out."

God's mission applies even to casino towns, he noted. "He has many people in these gaming-impacted communities," he said. "Our task as men and women whom he has called is to become his instruments to awaken those who are called according to his purpose."

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Southern Baptist chaplains  
endorsed in record numbers

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press  
11/15/94

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist chaplains are being endorsed in record numbers, despite a decreasing number of military personnel and overall corporate downsizing.

Currently, a record 2,343 Southern Baptists are endorsed chaplains, serving in the military, health care, institutions and businesses, said Huey Perry, Home Mission Board chaplaincy director.

Chaplains are endorsed by the Southern Baptist Chaplains Commission, a group enlisted from the directors of the Home Mission Board. Some chaplains serve as volunteers; others are paid by the organization they serve.

The increased number of chaplains shows Southern Baptists see chaplaincy "as a viable place for Christians to fulfill their call to ministry" and institutions "see the valuable contribution chaplaincy makes to the accomplishment of their mission," Perry said.

One area of growth for chaplains is Hospice, an organization which provides home care for terminally ill patients. The number of Southern Baptist Hospice chaplains has doubled from 20 at the first of this year to 41 currently.

More chaplains also serve in correctional institutions, Perry said. As voters approve anti-crime measures such as mandatory length of sentences, the prison population, and consequently the need for chaplains, increases, he noted.

Military downsizing has had a minimal impact on Southern Baptist chaplains, Perry said. "Our chaplains are well-educated, experienced and trained. They're competing successfully for the positions that are available."

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Drama is both art,  
ministry, leaders say

By Chip Alford

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Church drama directors have no reason to be apologetic, according to Wayne Johnson, director of media ministries at First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla.

Christians with dramatic gifts sometimes face a not-so-subtle disapproving attitude from other church members who see their work as too worldly, said Johnson, urging a large group of church drama directors who gathered Nov. 11, just before the start of the National Drama Festival at Two Rivers Baptist Church, to take pride in their work.

"We are those unusual 'Christian theater artists.' Some people see that as an oxymoron," Johnson said, laughing. "But the Christian businessman is no more influential than the (Christian) performing artist. There are just fewer of us.

"Don't be a living apology for what Christ has given to you," Johnson, who has served in his present position 21 years, said. Just like the minister of music, dramatists possess a talent which can be used for ministry in the church, he said.

"If you're a Christian, you're a minister. And because you usually work more closely with groups of people, you have an opportunity to form relationships. We have multitudes of ministry opportunities.

"I came to realize that God did not curse me with this," Johnson said of his dramatic gifts. "If God made me this way, then I mustn't argue with it."

He joked "all theater folks are just a little off-center ... but we understand each other. We've come to celebrate our wonderful warts and weirdness."

Three other speakers also addressed the symposium: Darrell Baergen, director of the Center for Christian Communication Studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas; Barbara Hall, director of dramatic arts at First Baptist Church, Atlanta; and Dennis Parrish, assistant professor of communication arts at Southwestern.

Just like painters, composers and sculptors, Baergen said directors are artists who must think "in terms of this business of pictures." They must take responsibility for controlling "the big picture" of a play or pageant by arranging resources such as costumes, sets, make-up, lighting and sound, as well as the actors themselves.

"Directors are the objective ingredient in any production team. It means we have to communicate to our cast how this thing looks," he said.

Hall, who has spent 14 years directing drama at First Baptist, Atlanta, said church drama directors should view themselves as "believer-artists" who "must first focus on God, not themselves."

"As directors, we need to impart that to our actors. The most important thing about them isn't their talent, it's their relationship to the Lord," she said.

"It's amazing what God can do when we get out of doing things in our own strength. ... The best thing to have is an actor who knows he cannot do it in his own strength."

Church drama directors will struggle at times with a lack of commitment from actors, Hall said.

"In professional theater, you get paid for it. In community theater, that's probably (the actors') social life," she said, adding actors in church-related performances are almost always volunteers.

The key to motivation, Hall said, is to help the actors understand what they are involved in is ministry.

"It's our job to facilitate that folks," she said.

Parrish discussed spreading the gospel through the work of drama traveling teams. He founded "The Company," Southwestern Seminary's traveling troupe of student-artists, 10 years ago. Since that time, the group has performed across the United States and in several foreign countries.

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Students who become a part of "The Company" are required to follow five mandates, Parrish said, including the need for: 1) honesty, 2) humility, 3) speaking of greater things, 4) revelation and 5) disciplined training.

"You have to get ego out of the way. You cannot have an ensemble when there is competition involved."

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Worship can be multi-sensory,  
conference speakers explain

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press  
11/15/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A multi-sensory approach to worship makes the experience more meaningful and memorable, conference leaders at a National Drama Festival maintained.

"We experience life through the five senses," said Harold Bryson, preaching consultant for the Baptist Sunday School Board's pastor-staff leadership department. "We cannot just massage the ear or appeal to the eye."

The Lord's Supper and baptism are examples Bryson cited for tying words and visuals together to make worship meaningful and memorable.

Cyndi Grace, drama coordinator for First Baptist Church, Clewiston, Fla., concurred, "We are a visual society, so drama ministry puts a visual light on what the Word says. The message in the Bible has been done through drama from its beginning. The Bible is full of drama, and Jesus was the best storyteller in the world."

Bryson said he believes trends in worship indicate drama is assuming a significant role as drama replaces the sermon on some occasions in worship services and as pastors are increasingly using dramatic monologue to portray biblical figures.

"We can have a play as well as a point," he observed.

Bryson said he believes sermons need more pictures, and the use of drama to prepare the congregation for worship means drama can raise a question that is answered in the pastor's sermon.

Just as some churches use media, such as slides, pictures and other visual aids to augment sermons, drama-augmented sermons can add visual impact to the spoken word.

Grace said she believes Jesus used stories to make his point with "a society that didn't understand."

Later in history, she said, theater began in the church to teach persons who didn't have personal copies of Scripture.

Today, she maintained, drama serves as a non-threatening way to involve the whole person -- intellectually, spiritually, physically and emotionally.

Drama as an imitation of real life and as symbolic of life can cause the worshiper to reflect and to learn.

The National Drama Festival was sponsored by the pastor-staff leadership department of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

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Direct attention to Jesus,  
Baptist dramatists urged

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press  
11/15/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--More than 2,000 people attending the Nov. 11-13 National Drama Festival were urged to have as their purpose bringing people to Jesus rather than calling attention to their performances.

The festival, which offered a wide range of hands-on classes, as well as sessions dealing with the theological and philosophical aspects of drama in the church, was sponsored by the pastor-staff leadership department of the Baptist Sunday School Board and held at Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn.

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Calvin Miller, professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, and a keynote speaker, sounded a caution to participants, echoed by leaders of individual conference sessions.

"Call attention to Christ," Miller urged the congregation of Southern Baptist artists, including actors, directors, producers, clowns, puppeteers, jugglers and mimes. "Don't absorb it (attention) all for yourself. Sometimes God redeems by art. He is always honored by artists who bring the congregation to salute Jesus Christ."

Ragan Courtney, free-lance writer from San Antonio, Texas, agreed. In a session on poetry and worship, Courtney said, "When poetry points to God, it becomes a different vehicle. We're not about doing little ditties for the Deity," he declared, "but we write about the cost of being a disciple of Christ."

In a session on pageants, Wayne Johnson, minister of media at First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., urged conferees not to let the spectacle of a production overshadow the message.

"Don't ever sacrifice the story," he admonished. "When you lose the story, it is wrong. You design the story, and out of that all the other elements grow. Cute isn't what we are about."

Producers of religious pageants can create the illusion of spectacular biblical events, he observed, but "there are some things you can't do. Only God can do those."

Barbara Hall, drama director at First Baptist Church, Atlanta, said drama directors should view themselves as "believer-artists" who "must first focus on God, not themselves."

"As directors, we need to impart that to our actors. The most important thing about them isn't their talent, it's their relationship to the Lord," she said.

Cyndi Grace, a drama coordinator for First Baptist Church, Clewiston, Fla., said she believes, "If God tells you to do it, it is going to be a successful thing. Keep your focus on the Word of God and keep your ego in check. Ego stands for Edging God Out."

Drama is not something done in church just for fun, Claudia Hatfield, a conference leader and drama director from Emmanuel Baptist Church, Alexandria, Va., concurred.

"Drama is an offering," she maintained. "It is to make people think, to make the message come alive."

"If you are going to succeed as a drama group, you have to know what you believe," she continued. And in the smallest congregation attempting to use drama on a limited budget, she said having the right motive means "you have the greatest resource there is: the power of the Holy Spirit."

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(BP) photo story with cutlines is posted in the SBCNet News Room. Filename is drama.txt. A list of drama resources is posted in the SBCNet News Room under the filename list.txt.



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