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November 21, 1994

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**Baylor regents reject Corts
as Reynolds' successor**

**Baptist Press
11/21/94**

WACO, Texas (BP)--Baylor University's board of regents adjourned their two-day meeting Nov. 18 without naming a successor to retiring President Herbert Reynolds at the 12,000-student university.

A show of support for nominee Thomas Corts fell short of a required majority, according to a report in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram quoting Baylor regent Nancy Thurmond of Fort Worth. Corts is president of Samford University, Birmingham, Ala.

Baylor's office of communications and marketing issued a one-paragraph announcement after the meeting, making no mention of the regents' vote. "The Baylor University Board of Regents has adjourned its special two-day meeting after receiving a report from its Presidential Succession Committee," the statement said. "There will be no news conference and no statement from the board or from Baylor University."

Corts has led 4,300-student Samford since 1983 and earlier was president of Wingate College in North Carolina nine years.

Thurmond, in the Star-Telegram article, was quoted as voting against Corts, basing some of her objections on his family's ties to conservatives who dominate the Southern Baptist Convention, namely his brother, Mark, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C. Corts is a conservative leader in the state and former trustee chairman of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

"Dr. (Tom) Corts is a very erudite person, a very substantial person," Thurmond said. "But my conferences with people that I trust in the denomination who know his family caused some doubts."

Thurmond noted, "I have a real fear of a fundamentalist takeover."

An article in the Waco Tribune-Herald also mentioned the same concerns about Corts' brother and other links to conservatives, but did not quote specific regents.

The regents' two-day session adjourned at 5:30 p.m. Nov. 18, according to a reporter at the scene. Earlier in the day, a spokesperson in the office of communications and marketing had said a news conference was planned sometime between 2:30 and 4 p.m. Nov. 18.

No announcement was made of any further special called meeting of the regents; their next regular meeting will be in January.

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The Birmingham Post-Herald reported Nov. 18 Baylor's Faculty Senate had voted Nov. 15 to request more input in naming Reynolds' successor.

One of the paragraphs in the article stated: "... Faculty Senate members have a laundry list of complaints ranging from Baylor officials' lack of consultation with faculty members to Corts' administrative history to the fact that Corts is not a Texan."

According to the Star-Telegram report, Corts met with representatives of the Baylor Faculty Senate, and William F. Cooper, dean of the college of arts and sciences, was quoted as saying, "From what I heard, he answered all of their questions satisfactorily."

Thurmond, meanwhile, echoed concern that Corts is not a Texan, saying, "Understanding Texas Baptists has a lot to do with whether a person can be a good president of Baylor University."

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EDITORS' NOTE: The following story should be substituted for a story with the same headline sent Nov. 18 by Baptist Press. It contains updated information about a new outbreak of violence in Gaza which occurred since the original story was written. A news advisory follows the story below with fuller information on the latest violence.

Southern Baptist surgeon:
Gospel worth risk in Gaza

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press
11/21/94

GAZA (BP)--Imagine you arrived at work and had to follow a trail of fresh blood from the parking lot into your office.

This has been a repeated occurrence for Dean Fitzgerald, a Southern Baptist representative in Gaza who works as a surgeon at Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City. Fitzgerald and his wife, Dona, have lived in that sliver of land beside Israel since 1978.

As the Palestinian people have fought for rights and for better lives, violence has routinely grabbed the world's headlines. It has been a land where hatred seems as much a part of the land as the dusty sand that predominates.

Conditions improved and spirits soared after Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed a self-rule pact May 4. Still, the peace that followed has been delicate as Palestinian factions have argued among themselves over who would lead.

Violence shattered Gaza City Nov. 18 after Palestinian police clashed with militant demonstrators. Fifteen people were killed and more than 150 were injured; 26 of them were treated at Fitzgerald's hospital.

Recently Fitzgerald recalled the many nights and days of white-knuckles tension when his quick surgeon's stitches guided by Christian compassion hung onto life for many who would have died otherwise.

Between 1987 and May 1994 the Palestinians carried out the "Intifada," an active resistance to Israel's occupation of Gaza. Often for weeks at a time curfews kept the Fitzgeralds mostly indoors; strikes closed shops and businesses. Anyone on the streets illegally risked being attacked by bands of roaming Palestinians.

Rock-throwing clashes or shoot-outs between the Palestinians and Israeli troops were a deadly business: One three-month period of violence in 1988 left more than 100 dead, hundreds injured and thousands imprisoned. During those years virtually every wall space in the country became a bulletin board for Arabic language slogans urging Intifada allegiance, announcements of strikes or threats of what would happen to non-compliers.

Being in Gaza, period, was enough to guarantee a life ever on the edge of danger. But as a surgeon Fitzgerald virtually tip-toed on the knife edge between life and death as he ministered to those caught up in the periodic outbreaks of fighting.

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In a nine-month period between 1988 and 1989, he and other doctors at Ahli Arab Hospital treated more than 600 patients wounded by plastic bullets fired by Israeli soldiers. More than half the victims were under the age of 18.

During the strikes he could not drive his car to the hospital; an ambulance was dispatched to pick him up. Even that was no guarantee of safety; sometimes rock throwers attacked ambulances. Fitzgerald managed to avoid such attacks, but called them "unsettling."

He had other close calls with masked gunmen -- experiences he prefers not to share. Such gunmen killed some of his Palestinian friends and co-workers.

Even arriving at the hospital after Palestinian-Israeli clashes was traumatic. "Sometimes it was controlled chaos, sometimes uncontrolled," he recalled. Trails of blood led down the driveway, up the hospital steps and towards the operating room. Horns screeched as cars brought in more victims.

"Relatives would beat their heads on the wall, throw dirt in the air and tear their clothes as they grieved over someone who'd just died," he said. He had to get Palestinians to try to calm family members down as he, a foreigner conspicuous in a sea of Palestinians, tried to ease into the hospital.

"There were always a lot of people not seriously injured. They had a wound from a plastic bullet that had hit them, but it was not anything important. Then lots of people had been beaten or tear gassed. Sometimes they just needed to be reassured. If there were 100 casualties, usually 15 to 20 had to be operated on right away. It varied," he said.

Fresh clothes had to be found quickly for tear gas victims -- the gas stays in clothes. "Some people threw tear gas canisters back at the army. When they came in you could hardly get close enough to treat them," he said.

Fitzgerald became so expert at treating plastic bullet wounds that he and another doctor wrote an article for a medical journal about the subject. Plastic bullets are less life-threatening than the usual bullets emitted by a weapon such as an AK-47, he said. But they can be deadly.

"If you're going to be shot, you want to be shot by a plastic bullet. Lots of people were shot in the abdomen and had tears in their bowels. Even with plastic bullets, if they're shot into the great vessels, it's bad. We lost some of those," Fitzgerald said with a sad shake of his head.

"There were times I thought, man, I'm out of here. This is just too much," he said. "But for me personally, my Christian faith helped me maintain my sanity. I felt like I was doing the Lord's work. I'm sure it was hard on Jesus when people pulled on him and wanted him to do something for them. Sometimes I could imagine how he felt. I would remember that Jesus healed the people before trying to talk to them."

Dona Fitzgerald, who once worked as a nurse at hospitals in Oklahoma and Tennessee, also helped him. "Fortunately Dona and I were not down at the same time so we could keep each other going," he said.

"I think that's where faith comes in on a long-term deal," she said. "Long-term service takes faith and confidence and knowing why you're here."

Both the Fitzgeralds are Oklahomans; he's from Tulsa and she's from Bartlesville. They were appointed by Southern Baptists in 1966 and served in Jordan before transferring to Gaza in 1978. Their four children are grown.

When conditions improved in Gaza, they no longer had to sneak over to Bible studies at Gaza Baptist Church. They hope it stays that way despite the new violence. When emergencies allow, they teach and work in church.

Christian witness is never easy in a Muslim land. But Baptists have ministered in Gaza for 40 years through medical ministries and nurses' training.

They have stayed amid war and rumor of war, because they believe the Christian gospel is worth the risk.

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

NEWS ADVISORY: This advisory accompanies (BP) story released Nov. 18 and updated Nov. 21. titled "Southern Baptist surgeon: Gospel worth risk in Gaza"

Southern Baptist surgeon
tends to Gaza's wounded

By Marty Croll

GAZA (BP)--Southern Baptist surgeon Dean Fitzgerald operated on several people who were shot during a violent clash between Palestinian police and militants Nov. 18.

Recent terrorist activities by militants against Israel have triggered demands by Israeli authorities that Palestinian leader Yassar Arafat crack down on extremist groups of Palestinians. Violence erupted after militants organized a street march that had been banned twice by Arafat's police.

Neither police nor leaders of the militant groups accepted blame for firing the first shot, but before it was over 15 people were dead and more than 150 were wounded.

"We've got a few guys wrestling on the edge of the cliff and they're trying to throw each other off, and they don't know they're hooked together," said Fitzgerald, who saw many of the 26 casualties rushed to Ahli Arab Hospital where he works.

The Palestinian-on-Palestinian violence raised questions about the future of Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization, which Israeli leaders recognized in offering limited self-rule to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

"It looks like the whole (peace initiative) has slid off into the abyss," Fitzgerald said. "I don't know how they'll be able to resolve this." Fitzgerald's day at the hospital recalled the days before the accords, when Palestinian militants took to the streets to protest the rule of Israelis in Gaza. They called this uprising, which lasted from 1987-94, the Intifada.

"When I was on my way to the hospital the ambulance was surrounded by a mob that stretched from one side of the street to the other and several blocks long, and they were furious," he said. "They were waving their fists and carrying a coffin -- I don't think there was anything in it -- and they were really upset.

"We jumped the median in the street to go down a side street. There wasn't anything to do but sit there until they swirled all around us and finally we were able to inch our way through and get to the hospital, where we had several casualties."

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Baptist prisoners freed,
sent home by Saudi Arabia

Baptist Press
11/21/94

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (BP)--Two Baptists jailed for holding a Bible study in Saudi Arabia were released and sent home to the Philippines Nov. 16, church workers report.

The two Philippine Baptists, Joel Cunanan and Jun Moya, were freed unharmed after nearly three months in custody.

Five other Filipinos were released shortly after the Bible study was broken up Aug. 26 by Saudi Muslim "religious police."

The fate of another Philippine Christian, one of eight detained by the Saudis, remains unclear.

The eight were arrested for conducting a private home Bible study attended only by Philippine Christian contract workers. Saudi Arabia strictly forbids the evangelizing of Saudi Muslims, who can face death for converting to Christianity, along with those who influence them to convert.

After his arrest, Cunanan was placed in solitary confinement for 17 days for preaching to other prisoners. He told of being interrogated and asked if he believed Jesus Christ was God. When he answered yes, a guard lifted his weapon to hit him. But the interrogator, he said, put out his hand and stopped the guard.

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Other Philippine Christians have experienced beatings or even death for practicing their faith in Saudi Arabia.

Cunanan is a member of Magalang Baptist Church in the Mount Pinatubo area of the Philippines. While in prison, he wrote to his non-Christian parents and adult brothers and sisters, asking them to attend a Bible study led by his pastor. On returning home, he found his parents and three siblings had accepted Christ as Savior.

Many Philippine Christians and missionaries are calling the release an answer to prayer. The case attracted international attention. The American Center for Law and Justice offered to assist the Philippine government in seeking the release of Cunanan, Moya and other Philippine Christians held for practicing their faith in Saudi Arabia. The center is a public interest law firm that defends the rights of religious believers in the United States.

Religious prisoners in Saudi Arabia, especially those from developing nations like the Philippines, have long suffered physical and psychological torture, according to human rights groups.

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S.C. messengers strengthen
ties with Baptist institutions By Scott Vaughan

Baptist Press
11/21/94

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--Messengers to the 174th annual meeting of South Carolina Baptist Convention approved changes in the convention constitution and bylaws that clarify relationships with convention agencies and institutions.

Messengers also elected Jerry Lethco, pastor of Clear View Baptist Church, Charleston, as the 1995 convention president, approved the 1995 convention budget of \$23.4 million, and they extended a missions partnership with Kenya through 1996.

Revisions in the constitution and bylaws change the convention's legal status, un-incorporating the general board and incorporating the convention. On Jan. 1, 1995, the general board becomes the board of directors of the convention and will be referred to as the executive board.

Messengers approved charter revisions for the convention's seven institutions, all in keeping with the convention's revised bylaws and the new South Carolina Nonprofit Corporation Act. The institutions include Anderson College, Charleston Southern University, North Greenville College, Connie Maxwell Children's Home, South Carolina Baptist Ministries for the Aging Inc., Baptist Foundation and Baptist Courier.

Executive Director-Treasurer B. Carlisle Driggers said changes occurring through the new structure include clarification of the convention's legal status, protection of convention messengers from liability for convention acts and debts, and clarification of the legal relationship between the convention and its seven institutions.

On Wednesday, Lethco was elected the 1995 president in a run-off with Ronald Davis, pastor of North Side Baptist Church, Greenwood, 638-475. Other presidential nominees on the first ballot included Terry Duvall, pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church, Gaffney, and Ernest Carswell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Taylors.

Lethco, 58, convention first vice president in 1994, said the legal restructuring of the convention, the new convention building and the "Empowering Kingdom Growth" emphasis have "made this the most historic year of this century."

He said the biggest challenge ahead is getting more churches to be involved in Empowering Kingdom Growth, the 10-year convention emphasis encouraging churches to plan and develop strategies that will help win the unchurched to Jesus Christ.

Lethco called himself a mainstream Baptist, neither ultra-conservative nor moderate, and he said lines separating state Baptists are diminishing.

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Other 1995 convention officers Ron Jackson, pastor, East Gaffney Baptist Church, Gaffney, first vice president; Joe Mack, a layman at First Baptist Church, Columbia, second vice president; Ross Robinson, minister of education, Northside Baptist Church, West Columbia, registration secretary; and Brancie Stephens, pastor, Corinth Baptist Church, New Ellenton, recording secretary.

Messengers approved the 1995 convention budget of \$23,446,667, only \$41,667 more than the 1994 budget. Approval came without discussion.

The only increase in the 1995 budget is in the Cooperative Program capital section of \$25,000 to Charleston Southern University as approved by the 1992 South Carolina Baptist Convention. The increase was part of the 1993-1995 Cooperative Program Capital Schedule. Because of this increase in the state convention portion of the budget, the adjoining SBC allocation was increased by \$16,667 to maintain the 40 percent distribution to Southern Baptist Convention causes.

The convention's budget committee encouraged churches to affirm their giving to the Cooperative Program.

Since 1981, the average giving by churches to the Cooperative Program has declined from 9.36 percent to 7.38 percent in 1993. A 1 percent increase to 8.38 percent in 1993 would have increased gifts by \$3 million.

Messengers also approved a recommendation from the general board extending the missions partnership with Kenya through 1996.

Convention President Steve Hogg closed Tuesday's morning session with his address, calling on Baptist churches to adapt to the 1990s, reach out to new people and accept the changes they may bring.

Hogg's address was titled, "When The Unchurched Come To Church."

"We have to remember that we can't have church growth without a willingness to change from procedures that were effective in the 1960s," he said. "We give the impression that doing church in 1994 like we did it in 1964 is more important than winning people to Jesus.

"Most of our Baptist churches are plateaued or are declining," Hogg said. "Only new people mean growth, and growth means change."

Other convention news included:

- The South Carolina Christian Action Council urged state Baptists to continue opposition to legalized gambling legislation;
- A general board report about construction and completion of the new South Carolina Baptist Convention Building in Columbia, and how the building allows general board staff to better serve churches.
- Resolutions of appreciation for the city of Columbia and those who worked to plan the annual meeting, affirming Empowering Kingdom Growth, affirming "Here's Hope. Share Jesus Now.," the Southern Baptist Convention emphasis for simultaneous revivals in 1995, and supporting the Cooperative Program.
- A visit by South Carolina Governor-Elect David Beasley, a former convention parliamentarian and member of Shandon Baptist Church, Columbia.
- Recognition of Louise Kinghorn Smithwick as the 1994 recipient of the Edward A. McDowell Award for achievements in applying the gospel in public life.
- Performances by Cynthia Clawson and Ragan Courtney and an address by James Draper Jr., president, Baptist Sunday School Board, on Wednesday evening.

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Tennessee Baptists focus
on missions, evangelism

By Fletcher Allen

Baptist Press
11/21/94

CORDOVA, Tenn. (BP)--Tennessee Baptists approved new missions partnerships and closed their 120th annual session Nov. 15-16 with a dramatic missions/evangelism program.

Despite a low messenger registration of 1,359, the entire meeting was upbeat, with little discussion of agenda items.

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Assisted by the drama department of host Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn., suburban Memphis, the TBC executive board staff presented a six-part mini-series to open each session. Under the theme of "Cooperative Program Dollars Making a Difference," the program traced the life of a typical-but-fictional Tennessee Baptist pastor and his family.

The mini-series emphasized the many aspects of programs and ministries of the TBC and the Southern Baptist Convention. Each of the six segments depicted how those programs and ministries benefit Tennessee Baptist families through the Cooperative Program.

The Wednesday night missions program drew the convention's largest audience at any of its annual sessions. Approximately 4,500 people viewed the program in the 7,000-seat auditorium. Local churches had been asked to dismiss Wednesday night programs to join in the missions emphasis. A 240-member youth choir from Shelby Baptist Association joined Bellevue's adult choir and orchestra for the occasion.

Messengers elected Frank Hawkins, pastor of First Baptist Church, Kingsport, as president. With only 815 messengers voting, Hawkins won by 103 votes over Don Long, pastor of Chamberlain Memorial Baptist Church, Chattanooga.

M.B. Howard, well-known layman from Covington, was elected first vice president and Wesley Pitts, Cumberland Baptist Association director of missions, was chosen second vice president. There were only two nominees for each of these offices.

In an interview, Hawkins stressed partnership missions and evangelism as two elements to strengthen the unity of Tennessee Baptists.

The convention winds up a three-year partnership with Chile Dec. 31. On Jan. 1, three-year missions agreements begin with Poland and the four western provinces of Canada (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba), and the current 15-year partnership with Michigan is renewed. Celebrating the agreements at the concluding service Wednesday night, Jerry Rankin, president of the Foreign Mission Board, challenged messengers and several thousand visitors, after representatives of the three partners reported.

In major business, the budget was approved with little discussion. The \$26.1 million CP budget is slightly less than the 1993-94 budget. The budget retains the same percentage as last year of 62.5 percent for Tennessee Baptist causes and 37.5 percent for SBC causes.

Key among proposed TBC bylaws change was a measure to allow three additional trustees for their three colleges and academy. This means that Belmont University, Union University, Carson-Newman College and Harrison-Chilhowee Academy can nominate three additional trustees from outside Tennessee, who are alumni of the schools and active in Southern Baptist churches.

After an amendment failed to delete the expanded number of trustees, the bylaws changes were approved by a substantial majority.

There were no major resolutions.

Next year's annual meeting will be Nov. 14-15 in Chattanooga.

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Lower budget but higher CP
adopted by Wyoming Baptists

Baptist Press
11/21/94

GREEN RIVER, Wyo. (BP)--Messengers to the 11th annual session of the Wyoming Southern Baptist Convention approved a smaller budget for 1995, but voted to increase the percentage of budget designated for Cooperative Program gifts to the Southern Baptist Convention by .5 percent.

The convention's overall budget for 1995 was set at \$983,046, compared to just over \$1 million last year.

The Cooperative Program budget for anticipated gifts from Wyoming churches was set at \$335,015. The percentage-of-budget increase for SBC national and international missions, from 27.5 percent to 28 percent, marks the 11th straight year of increased CP giving by the convention.

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Meeting Nov. 9-10 at the Hilltop Baptist Church in Green River, messengers elected Wayne Spencer, pastor of the College Heights Baptist Church, Casper, as president. The other nominee for president, Buddy Sirman, pastor of Wright Southern Baptist Church, Wright, was then elected first vice president. Gordon Roe, pastor of Sunrise Baptist Church, Casper, was elected as the only nominee for second vice president.

The convention approved a bylaw change to allow the president to be elected for a second one-year term. Previously a president could not be re-elected.

Messengers heard reports on their partnerships. Larry Thomas, Missouri Baptist Convention director of church services, reported 74 Wyoming churches and missions now have link-ups with Missouri churches. Ernie and Donna Haste, furloughing missionaries to Paraguay, spoke on the Paraguay/Wyoming partnership.

The convention adopted resolutions supporting the sanctity of human life, affirming Wyoming voters for defeating a statewide initiative allowing gambling and reaffirming the convention's opposition to gambling, and reaffirming prayer for spiritual awakening. Messengers adopted another resolution recommitting themselves to mission opportunities through volunteerism and their partnerships with Missouri and Paraguay Baptists.

The 1995 meeting will be Nov. 15-16 at First Southern Baptist Church, Casper.

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ANALYSIS

'Santa Clause,' '34th Street'
among Hollywood's Yule fare

By Phil Boatwright

Baptist Press
11/21/94

HOLLYWOOD, Calif. (BP)--Even during the Christmas holidays, it's wise to become informed of even the most seemingly innocent fare from Hollywood.

A writer's warning in the Los Angeles Times in September is good year-round caution: "Experts who fault the Motion Picture Association of America's film rating system for being of little use say that in order for parents to better judge which movies might be harmful, they need much more information than PG, PG-13 and R."

In this column, by giving the synopsis and content of each release (plus video alternatives), The Movie Reporter is attempting to aid both moviegoers and those who wish to combat Hollywood's influence over our society.

NEW IN THEATERS

THE SANTA CLAUSE. Tim Allen. Fantasy. PG (Santa falls off a roof). When Santa is incapacitated, a divorced man trying to win back his estranged son takes over and soon finds himself the new Santa. It's both funny and imaginative and I found nothing objectionable as long as you don't have a problem with movie struggling to convince the young ones of the existence of the big fat man in the long white beard.

THE MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET. Richard Attenborough, Mara Wilson. Fantasy. PG (1 expletive, Santa is provoked into violence by the film's villain, but he later repents). The manager of a New York department store hires Kris Kringle to be the store Santa. Soon the old fellow has to convince the woman and her precocious daughter that he truly is Father Christmas. A true delight and a rarity as one of the few worthwhile remakes. Full of laughter, poignancy and charm, it is noteworthy for containing both visual and verbal Christian metaphors, pointing out that Santa is a symbol and acknowledging God as the Supreme Being. There's even a Thanksgiving prayer -- when's the last time you saw that in a Hollywood production? Although Edmund Gwenn and Natalie Wood have nothing to worry about, this newest Miracle is destined to become a classic. The scene where a little deaf girl sits on Santa's knee is worth the price of admission. Perhaps the most gratifying movie of the season.

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THE SWAN PRINCESS. Animated Musical Fairy Tale with the voices of John Cleese, Jack Palance, Sandy Duncan, Steven Wright. G (Sorcery, the death of a parent, a couple of scary scenes -- but tame compared to several recent films aimed at kids). In this review, I will refrain from mentioning the "D" word (you know, the first initial of the studio renown for animation.) There is no need for comparison, although I'm sure my colleagues in criticism will do so anyway. The Swan Princess stands on its own as a classic good vs. evil tale with love and honor rising triumphant. In hopes of reuniting their kingdoms, two monarchs bring their heirs together each summer, expecting them to fall in love. Naturally, they do, but only after the ambivalence of childhood and adolescence. Just when the happy ending seems upon us, the nasty nemesis gums up the romance by kidnapping the pretty princess and turning her into a swan. Will true love conquer the magician's evil deeds? No surprise here, but it enchants us with music, humor, excitement, a good story (based on Swan Lake) and romance. And at no time does it condescend to children or their accompanying grown-ups. John Cleese (A Fish Called Wanda) and Steven Wright (best known for his deadpan stand-up routines) each lend comic moments. Jack Palance is delightfully menacing as Rothbart, the evil enchanter. Songwriters David Zippel and Lex de Azevedo produce a memorable score, complete with six top-notch tunes, including a show-stopper, "Princess on Parade."

JUNGLE BOOK. Disney's new version of the Rudyard Kipling tale of a young boy raised by animals. Video Alternatives: both the 1942 version with Sabu and Disney's own breezy 1967 animated musical version with the light-hearted voices of Phil Harris, Sabastian Cabot, George Sanders and Louis Prima.

RITCHIE RICH. Macaulay Culkin plays the comic book rich kid who demolishes bad guy John Larroquette. Sounds like "Home Alone"! It will be a big hit with the kids. Video Alternatives: "Home Alone" (caution: contains slapstick violence and one scene where a child is reading an adult magazine, but it presents positive messages about the need for family and looking out after one another).

LITTLE WOMEN. An update of the Louisa May Alcott classic about sisters coming of age. Written, directed and produced by women and starring Winona Ryder, Susan Sarandon and Trini Alvarado. Video Alternative: The 1933 version starring Katharine Hepburn.

COLONEL CHABERT. Gerard Depardier. Costume drama. Not rated at time of screening. (It contains some intense shots of dead soldiers after a brutal battle; later, there is a battle scene with lots of blood-letting.) Based on Balzac's 19th century tragedy about a Napoleonic war hero believed dead who returned to find his wife has remarried and confiscated his inheritance. The French film (with subtitles) is elegant, but don't attempt to view it after a heavy meal. You may find yourself napping through some of the best parts.

CHRISTMAS CLASSICS ON VIDEO

-- IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE. I know, I know, we've all seen it a million times, but won't you agree with me that it is one of the most important films Hollywood ever produced? This holiday chestnut reminds us that we touch so many lives and can have a real influence on those lives.

-- THE GATHERING. Ed Asner and Maureen Stapleton star in this Emmy-winning TV movie focusing on a dying man's efforts to reunite his family. It reinforces the importance of family and presents positive Christian images including a believable prayer, the Scripture reading of Jesus' birth and a child's christening.

-- A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS. Great dialogue, charismatic voice performances and an award-winning jazzy score. And how often do you hear cartoon heroes quoting from the Gospel of Luke?

-- A TIME TO REMEMBER. Ruben Gomez is a young boy with dreams of becoming an opera singer. Kindly priest Donald O'Connor and a true Christmas miracle help make that dream come true. Rated G.

-- A NORMAN ROCKWELL CHRISTMAS. Experience the magic of the season through the artist's heartwarming paintings.

-- RED SKELTON'S CHRISTMAS JOLLIES (New). Favorite Christmas sketches from the "Clown Prince of Comedy."

TV OFFERINGS

-- The Family Channel presents "The Greatest Story Ever Told." Presented in two parts, Dec. 5 & 6. The 1965 star-studded version of the story of Christ. Not as good as "Jesus of Nazareth," but worth viewing. Check local listings for times.

-- A&E presents BIOGRAPHY. The Dec. 19 episode features a fascinating look at the Santa Claus legend over the centuries.

INSPIRING VIDEOS AT CHRISTIAN BOOKSTORES

-- Gospel (New). Rejoice with Rev. James Cleveland, Shirley Caesar, Walter Hawkins and others.

-- Silent Night, Holy Night (New). This inspiring program traces the origins of the classic, "Silent Night." Features the Vienna Boys Choir.

-- The Other Wiseman. Starring Martin Sheen, this moving story tells of a man seeking the birthplace of Jesus, but, because of his duty to others, is delayed in the desert for 33 years only to see the Savior as he is being crucified.

ALSO NEW ON VIDEO

-- LASSIE (Dec. 21) Thomas Guiry, Helen Slater, Richard Farnsworth. Animal adventure. PG (4 or 5 expletives, Lassie's first owner is killed in a truck crash, the local bad guys try to steal a flock of sheep, three boys almost drown.) Standard dog drama with a lonely boy befriended by a perpetually clean collie. Video alternatives: Love Leads the Way, Old Yeller, 101 Dalmatians.

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Phil Boatwright is the editor and film reviewer for The Movie Reporter Newsletter and author of "How to Choose a Good Video Every Time." Further information available from 1-800-221-2648.

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