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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-8919
CompuServe ID# 70420,17

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522, CompuServe 70420,250
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232, CompuServe 70420,115
NASHVILLE Linda Lawson, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300, CompuServe 70420,57
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151, CompuServe 70420,72
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223, CompuServe 71173,316

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Nashville, Tennessee

**BWA, S. Africans discuss
post-apartheid healing**

By Wendy Ryan

**Baptist Press
11/22/95**

WASHINGTON (BP)--While they share the same Savior and Lord, black and white Baptists in South Africa were pulled apart along the racial fault lines of apartheid. While that system has fallen, the damage it inflicted on relationships among Baptists remains.

With a goal of healing some of those hurts, six leaders from each of two key Baptist bodies in the country -- the Baptist Union and Baptist Convention of South Africa -- received a seven-member delegation of Baptist World Alliance leaders, led by General Secretary Denton Lotz, Nov. 14-18 in Johannesburg.

Some of the issues discussed with Des Hoffmeister, general secretary of the predominantly black Baptist convention, and Terry Rae, general secretary of the predominantly white Baptist union, were theological education, property and movement of churches from one group to another.

One particularly sensitive issue was that of repentance and an apology for its part in the apartheid system from the union to the convention. In 1987, the convention, once part of the union, was formed with mostly black South Africans.

The BWA delegation listened to both sides and encouraged all to work until they are truly reconciled. The BWA leaders promised to stand with and do all it can to help Baptists in the country in their commitment to work together to spread the gospel and bring transformation to their newly freed country.

At the end of the meetings, convention and union participants in the sessions agreed to continue to meet with the hope of a common agreement, and to hold a service of celebration for the complete reconciliation they trust will happen.

"After listening to both sides, we came away of the deep rift the tragic system of apartheid brought to Baptists in South Africa," Lotz said. "We rejoice that both black and white Baptists have both determined in Jesus Christ they must learn to walk together.

"I came away with joy in my heart and hopeful the Holy Spirit is bringing our brothers and sisters together, and rejoice at the openness on both sides.

"Baptists around the world must pray for South Africa," Lotz said.

BSSB apologizes for problems with church profile software

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Delays in providing updated computer software for the 1995 Annual Church Profile (ACP) have caused problems and frustrations for state convention, associational and church leaders, the Baptist Sunday School Board has acknowledged.

The ACP, formerly known as the Uniform Church Letter, is a statistical tool churches use in reporting statistics on attendance, stewardship, numerical growth and participation in church organizations. After completing the ACP, a church sends the information to its associational office, where the information is recorded and passed on to Baptist state convention offices and eventually to the Baptist Sunday School Board where nationwide statistics are compiled.

According to Cliff Tharp, supervisor of the board's strategic information unit, a small portion of the ACP was still being compiled manually in 1994. The BSSB redesigned the software in 1995 not only to update it, but to enable churches, associations and state conventions to complete the entire process electronically. Problems in completing the redesign delayed diskette distribution to churches, he said.

At a Nov. 18 meeting, the Alabama Baptist Conference of Associational Directors of Missions voted unanimously to send a letter to BSSB President James T. Draper Jr. expressing their "strong disapproval of the 1995 version of the Annual Church Profile."

The DOMs, according to an article in The Alabama Baptist, complained about the difficulty of using the software (including the inability to print out "Part B" of the report or use it on a computer network); the board's delay in distributing it; and BSSB response to the problems.

The Sunday School Board had admitted and apologized for problems with the '95 software in an article in the October issue of Facts & Trends, the agency's corporate newsletter which is mailed to pastors, church staff and other denominational leaders, including DOMs.

In that article, Tharp said the redesign process proved to be a project where "everything that could go wrong did go wrong." He listed problems that caused the delays:

- 1) The time frame for producing the software was shortened. Major redesign work on 1995 software did not begin until February 1995, after the 1994 ACP was completed and feedback received in January.
- 2) Determining the elements and functions required for a totally electronic process took longer than anticipated.
- 3) Adding needed items to the software required working within a complex set of constraints -- required memory, size of program, wide range of computers in use by those who would use the software and issues related to various operating systems. Addressing these and other constraints required a major redesign in the software programming. The deadline for software distribution was delayed from June 15 to July 15.

4) On July 15, the software did not work reliably and lacked some needed features. A decision was made to hold release until these problems were resolved. Additional changes were made and the software was completed Aug. 16. Distribution began the next day, and associations and state conventions received letters of apology with the software release.

Tharp said reports indicate most churches and associations have been able to effectively use the '95 software. Information on responding to the most common questions received at the BSSB was sent to state conventions for their use. A supplemental program allowing Part B information to be printed in a variety of formats also was distributed Oct. 10 to all state conventions and to any association which requested it.

Tharp said BSSB personnel "made every effort to respond to callers the same day or within 24 hours."

"Our desire is to provide timely, quality service for the ACP," Tharp said. "We have not met this standard in 1995 and we apologize to all those we have inconvenienced. We have gained technical knowledge this year that will help us achieve our goal in 1996."

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Compiled by Art Toalston, with reporting by Linda Lawson, Chip Alford and Keith Hinson.

Spirit of worship marks
EBC'S 32nd annual meeting

By Judith Lynn Bloomer

Baptis Press
11/22/95

BRACKLEY, England (BP)--A spirit of harmony, unity and worship presided at the 32nd annual meeting of the European Baptist Convention. "I didn't know you could worship at a convention meeting," one participant noted.

Approximately 80 church members representing 37 congregations were in attendance, Oct. 26-27, in Brackley, England. Guests and EBC staff members brought total attendance to nearly 100.

Encompassing 60 English-language churches in 20 countries in Europe, the EBC is associated with the Southern Baptist Convention and supports the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions.

The annual meeting's sense of unity undergirded the launch of a move forward into a new era, as the convention, under the leadership of the missions endowment fund committee, began an effort to raise its endowment fund to \$1 million. The fund currently stands at \$465,000.

Challenging each church to give or increase its giving, committee chairman C.W. Bess said the goal could be reached by the end of 1996.

Bess and the committee, with assistance from the EBC's partnership with Arkansas, hope to contact each of the nearly 20,000 former EBC members now in the United States. The committee plans to challenge them to contribute to the fund in appreciation of John and Elizabeth Merritt and their 23 years of service with the EBC.

Ten years ago, John Merritt had a vision for establishing a fund that would allow EBC churches to own their own buildings. This would free up much-needed resources to help in ministry and outreach. On May 2, 1987, the Merritts' son, Mark, was killed in an automobile accident in Ketchikan, Alaska. In lieu of flowers, the Merritts asked that contributions be sent to the EBC to establish an endowment fund. The fund has been growing ever since.

In other business, Race Lariscy, pastor of Rhein Valley Baptist Church in Walldorf, Germany, was elected EBC president. Lariscy had been serving as president since former president Tom Hill's resignation in July. Scott Stearman, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Paris, France, was re-elected vice president. Also elected were Mary Bess, clerk; Ron Coker, treasurer; Jepy Hendrix, EBC Women's president; Herb Grover, Brotherhood president; and Howard Clark, historian.

The convention also approved a budget of \$387,900, including \$48,000 to meet the staff support goal. This budget reflects an 11-12 percent increase over the 1995 budget. Finance committee chairman Calvin Hogue noted that giving for 1995 was up 15 percent over last year.

The convention also approved the following recommendations from the executive committee:

- naming a committee to study the feasibility of moving the annual summer assembly from Interlaken, Switzerland, to a less-expensive location.
- designating 25 percent of the funds contributed by EBC churches to the European Baptist Mission for administrative expenses and 75 percent to be escrowed for the support of missionaries at such time that one is appointed from an EBC church.

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-- entering a three-year partnership with the Baptist Union of Bulgaria.
 -- establishing a trustee agreement with the German Baptist Union of up to five years. The EBC currently has no legal status of its own. The trustee agreement with the GBU will allow the EBC to own property and do banking in its own name, have contributions deducted from tax schedules and employ its own personnel.

-- welcoming into membership the Bamburg Baptist Fellowship of Bamburg, Germany, and the International Baptist Fellowship of Kiev, Ukraine.

Upon the recommendation of the EBC Women, the convention also adopted a goal of \$90,000 for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions. Last year approximately \$82,000 was given toward the Lottie Moon goal of \$100,000.

Surrounding the business, Ron and Patricia Owens, music evangelists from Atlanta, set the mood for each session with music of reverence, praise and joy. The theme of "Joy," taken from Psalm 126:6, was echoed in each of the four messages presented during the two days.

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Bloomer is the convention's press representative.

EDITORS' NOTE: The following two stories can be used in tandem with the (BP) story titled "Christian community developers hold 7th annual conference," dated 11/20/95.

Suburbanites give testimony
 of value of urban ministry

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press
 11/22/95

LEXINGTON, Ky. (BP)--When 200 members of suburban Atlanta's Powder Springs Baptist Church labored in a New Orleans housing project last year, they brought God's love to the inner city. But the volunteers went home with even more, said Harold Wilcox, co-chairman of the church's missions ministries committee.

"It has made us a missions-minded church," said Wilcox, a consultant to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and former director of its church and community ministries department.

Powder Springs members erected two basketball courts, a softball diamond and kiddie playground at New Orleans' Florida Housing Project, along with planting 30 palm trees and 50 trees of other varieties, painting and tackling various repairs for the project's residents.

A "defining moment" of the trip, said Powder Springs pastor Mike Woods, came when some members accompanied the director of New Orleans' Friendship House to an AIDS ward.

Although many had been reluctant to go, they were warmly received, Woods said. "To a person it was one of the most moving experiences of their lives, where they went in to a place not feeling comfortable and found comfort," he said. "Our people now are thinking more of helping others and giving that cup of water in Jesus' name."

The Powder Springs representatives shared their experiences during a recent "Church Breaking Out" conference. Co-sponsored by the Home Mission Board and the Kentucky Baptist Convention, it is part of a continuing series of seminars held around the nation.

Attended by pastors, missions directors, seminary students and laypersons, the conferences call for churches to reach beyond their walls and minister to America's rapidly changing communities. They primarily focus on multi-housing ministry, a mushrooming mission field, said Tony Hough, an associate in Kentucky Baptists' direct missions department.

For example, in Kentucky about a third of the state's 3.6 million residents lived in multi-housing units in 1980. But by the year 2015, demographic studies project that percentage will rise to more than 50 percent.

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"The days w can open the church doors, hang out a sign and expect people to come are over," Hough said during th Oct. 26-28 sessions. "The ministry of the early church is the ministry to which we are called. We're only reaching 4 to 5 percent of 80 million people in multi-housing. They're not going to come to us. We have to go to them."

The power of going out can be seen from the lasting impact Powder Springs' visit to New Orleans, said Marshall Truehill, executive director of Faith in Action (FIA). He said the murder and crime rates at the Florida development, once among the highest, remains at low levels.

One reason is residents now take pride in what they have, he said. Afflicted by powerlessness, poverty and disillusionment, many of those who live in the "projects" develop an attitude that they have nothing to gain or lose, he explained.

"Love is a powerful tool," said Truehill, also co-pastor of First United Baptist Church. "Public housing is a subculture. The only way you can accomplish anything is by relationships. People are suspicious and mistrustful. They say things like, 'You churches come in here to make your spiritual quota and then you leave us.'"

That sentiment was echoed by Jim Queen, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Baptist Association. He recalled one volunteer who got upset at a food kitchen when he saw an inner-city resident stuffing extra food in his pockets. Queen replied many in dire circumstances don't look beyond today.

That is why churches that plan to go into a low-income apartment building or housing project must commit to a long-term relationship, he said. Because so many have lied to or abandoned them, low-income housing residents must have a sense of security "you will be there tomorrow," he said.

Formerly pastor of Chicago's Uptown Baptist Church, the crowded area just north of downtown where he grew up, Queen said Christians are the only ones who have answers to the tough problems of the cities.

But, he said, the church must remember several key points:

-- People must come before buildings. The Chicago association hopes to start 400 churches by the year 2000, he said. But mainly by starting congregations in high-rises instead of the standard "bricks and mortar" approach.

-- Ministers must see themselves as pastoring the whole community, not just th congregation.

-- It is vital to develop relationships with social service agencies and managers of apartment buildings, who can help open doors with residents.

"If you come with a sense of humility and ask how you can help, they'll let you help," Queen said.

Larry Martin, director of Kentucky Baptists' missions and evangelism division, add d missions workers must have determination to succeed.

"You've got to have 'fire in the belly,'" he said, "a passion that won't let you quit. That will make breaking-out ministries possible. It doesn't take a lot of people, but when there is that kind of passion God will make it happen."

Using passages from Luke and Matthew, Martin said Jesus clearly spelled out his ministry: preaching good news, healing the sick, feeding the hungry and aiding the less fortunate.

Thus, there is no way a church can claim to be a New Testament body and fail to meet the needs of the community, he said. In addition, he said the church must equip its members to take the gospel to the marketplace.

"Many laypeople in our churches are lonely because they have a deep urging inside," Martin said. "They see people they work with every day, but they've been taught the only ones who can minister are people on a church staff or paid missionaries. They need to be set free."

Inner-city ministry workers
tell of miracles, challenges

By Ken Walker

LEXINGTON, Ky. (BP)--They have seen thousands of people saved and thousands of dollars miraculously provided to start medical clinics, expand Baptist centers and feed hungry people. Yet they have also encountered plenty of frustration.

Nevertheless, those who direct ministries in America's metropolitan areas credit their faith with enabling them to build relationships and bring the gospel to economically deprived neighborhoods.

Among those who addressed a recent "Church Breaking Out" conference about rewards and challenges was Terry Moncrief of Atlanta. Appointed by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in 1972 to work in Techwood, he said Lord has brought renewal to the nation's oldest public housing project.

"We had a \$30,000 miracle in three weeks," he said of a computerized literacy program that recently helped four adults get their GED. And that's not all.

Today the Techwood Baptist Center operates a medical clinic in an 8,500-square-foot addition opened in 1993. The clinic was part of an \$850,000 renovation, funded mostly by foundation grants that Moncrief never expected to obtain.

Among other miracles, Moncrief recounted in the Oct. 26-28 conference, are a turning back of plans to displace the community to make room for Olympic facilities and housing adjustments that encourage long-term residency. The conference, held in Lexington, Ky., was sponsored by the HMB and the state Baptist convention.

"If people come and see what God is doing and meet people, that is the best way to begin the process," he said of stimulating member involvement in missions. "Two people came in 1987 and kept going back to their church, and now we have more volunteers and giving from that church than anywhere else."

Still, it was a hard road getting to this point, the missionary said. Forty volunteers left his first year and a young man broke into the Baptist center 12 times in one month. However, 15 years later the man's mother came to salvation; she credited it to her son's problems.

There have been other disappointments, one which nearly led Moncrief to quit.

After nine years there, a retarded boy nurtured at the center became one of 20 victims of a serial killer. But in the aftermath of the tragedy, churches around Atlanta began responding to the community's needs. That led to the formation of a day-care ministry and the salvation of 95 teens.

"Out of the absolute worst events came tremendous advances," he smiled. "God said, 'You're not alone.'"

Jim Queen, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Baptist Association, said the Lord has presented the church one of its greatest opportunities ever to make an impact.

The key to reaching any community is knowing those around you, he said, recalling a pastor asking him once for ministry ideas. When Queen asked if they could help the elderly, the pastor said he didn't know how, although a senior citizens high-rise sat across the street.

Although the challenges are great, Queen said one of the greatest places for training church leadership is in multi-housing units.

For example, an association missionary is enjoying great success at Chicago's crime-ridden Cabrini-Green housing development, he said. At one high-rise, Southern Baptists have established a medical clinic, laundromat grocery store and the city's largest Little League.

Now officials of the federal Housing and Urban Development agency are asking the association to go into the other 27 units, the director said.

"We know how to do it; we've got the theology. The agency that helps people is the one that has the credibility to give them the gospel."

When Argentina's Ed Mansilla completed his degree at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky, he decided to stay in Louisville because thousands of Hispanics are pouring into the state.

"Who's going to preach to them?" asked the executive director of the city's Americana Community Center. "If we lose touch with the people, with those who have needs, what are we doing? We have wonderful buildings and sanctuaries but we are doing nothing."

Breaking into Americana is difficult, said Mansilla, who also directs Hispanic ministries for Louisville's Highland Baptist Church. The development's 2,500 residents are primarily of African American, Asian and European descent, though there are many other ethnic groups as well.

This eclectic mix speaks 14 different languages, and because there are so many different groups and religions, Bible classes aren't taught at the center.

That doesn't mean Mansilla doesn't try to evangelize them, though. He recently baptized his church's first two Cuban members. He also has begun the area's first Spanish-language ministry program, which airs on Sunday afternoon.

"I get calls every week from people who want to know what Jesus says or what the Bible says about certain things," he said.

Outreach takes a practical side. The center offers such activities as classes in English as a second language and computers. A women's club, Vietnamese men's club, youth club and neighborhood block watch are among the social events.

New Orleans native Marshall Truehill knows how vital missions is -- were it not for Christ coming into his heart as a young man, today he would be a statistic, he said.

"The story of what happened to me is being repeated over and over in inner-city America," said the executive director of Faith in Action, which works in four New Orleans housing projects.

"To an extent, all of us in the church are responsible. God has called us out, to be in partnership with him to reach the world. It's necessary we break out. We become so comfortable in our safety zones we don't want to go out."

Although he grew up in one, Truehill said when the Lord directed him to reach out to 10 projects it scared him to death.

They are tough places to reach, he added. Demographic studies show 84 percent of the families are headed by a single mother, nearly 60 percent are unemployed and 79 percent are on some form of government assistance. Another 96 percent claim no church affiliation.

"These people need affirmation," said Truehill, who is co-pastor of First United Baptist, an interracial church. "They need to know we love them, God loves them and they are worth loving themselves."

He outlined four reasons churches should go into housing projects:

1) Residents are open to them: "They don't care what color you are if you're identified with Jesus Christ."

2) Public officials often encourage it. For example, New Orleans is cooperating with a Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission World Changers project next summer.

3) It is part of God's plan that everyone hear the gospel and be saved.

4) The Lord has already gone before you.

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**Baptist theologians defend
traditional view of children**

By Ferrell Foster

**Baptist Press
11/22/95**

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (BP)--There is a long Baptist tradition of belief regarding the eternal destiny of children. That tradition, however, received a jolt during the annual meeting of Illinois Baptist State Association this year.

Baptists traditionally have believed children who die before they reach an unspecified "age of accountability" will be covered by the grace of God and spend eternity in heaven.

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During the Illinois convention's annual meeting in Collinsville, pastor Dennis Shaw said Christians must bring those children to God through prayer in order for them to spend eternity in heaven. The implication, Shaw later acknowledged to the Illinois Baptist newsjournal, is that children not brought to Christ would be sentenced to hell, but "I don't want to say it that negatively," he added.

"The Bible teaches that infants are lost because they are born in sin," Shaw, pastor of Como First Baptist Church, Sterling, told the Illinois Baptist. "The positive aspect is that we can protect them."

Four Baptist theologians contacted by the Illinois Baptist indicated their belief in the traditional position regarding the eternal destiny of infants. None had heard of a position such as Shaw's, as it was related to them by the Illinois newsjournal.

William Hendricks, visiting professor at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in the San Francisco area, said, "To affirm that anyone could automatically be brought to God by prayer is to deny the need for all people to come to God individually by deciding for Jesus Christ as Savior."

Hendricks affirmed the value of praying "that children would receive Christ as the Spirit enables them to do so." But, "if one means that our prayers will automatically bring them to Christ without some decision of their own, that is a denial of salvation by faith."

L. Russ Bush, academic vice president and dean of the faculty at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina, said, "I don't think anybody's saved because I pray for them." To say that a person could be saved by prayer "would not be authentic gospel teaching," he stated.

Baptist views on an "age of accountability" are central to understanding their beliefs regarding the eternal destiny of young children.

Hendricks defined age of accountability as "that time when a person is aware that they have intentionally disobeyed God or the laws of God and put oneself in estrangement in an individual and conscious way."

Millard Erickson, research professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Texas, described it as "an age before which the child does not have the intellectual or mental capacity" to distinguish between right and wrong.

The age varies from child to child. "We could say generally 8 or 9 years of age is when most people reach that age," Bush said, but it varies with maturity of the child.

Baptists generally affirm children prior to that age are in a state of innocence or under God's protective grace, Bush indicated.

In his sermon, Shaw questioned such belief. "If a child is covered until they reach that age of accountability because there's no such thing as sin in their life, then there's no reason for Jesus to have been born of a virgin."

Shaw said children are born in sin, which comes to the child at conception, not at birth, thus requiring unborn infants be brought to God through prayer as well as those who have been born.

Shaw's statements have reference to what has been called "original sin" or "Adamic sin."

Many Christians, but not all, believe "all persons begin life, not in a state of innocence, but involved in sin, because of Adam's sin," Erickson has written in a draft chapter for a new book, "How Shall They Be Saved," to be published in March 1996 by Baker Book House.

This sin results in guilt and corruption, Erickson notes. "The problem centers especially upon the matter of guilt," he writes. "If all infants are by nature guilty and incapable of believing and thus of receiving the provision God has made for cancellation of sin through the atoning death of Jesus Christ, how can it be that such infants are not condemned?"

That appears to be the question Shaw sought to answer in his sermon.

In the upcoming book, Erickson deals with various approaches to understanding the destiny of infants who die. Three of those accept a belief in original sin. They are:

-- Baptismal regeneration. This is believed by Catholics and Lutherans. It requires a belief in the "sacrament" of baptism which transmits God's grace to the infant. Since Baptists reject that view as inconsistent with a biblical understanding of baptism, another explanation must be sought.

-- Probation of the infant. This says, "the infant must be brought to a state of maturity" within an intermediate state between life on earth and in heaven, and then allowed to "settle its own destiny by its own free choice and upon its own responsibility." There is, Erickson concludes, "no real biblical basis for such a post mortem opportunity."

-- Calvinism. This view stresses salvation comes through the "regenerating work of the Holy Spirit," Erickson says. It says repentance and faith are results of regeneration, not the other way around. "These therefore are not necessary in the case of the infant," Erickson writes. And all infants who die are viewed as being part of the elect.

Erickson espouses an explanation that "basically is Calvinistic." He says each person "participates in the first sin" and is guilty. But he cites Romans 5:12-19 and 1 Corinthians 15:22 in order to understand the concept. Those passages draw parallels between Adam and Christ.

He concludes: "Until the first conscious or responsible moral action or decision by a person, there is no imputation of the Adamic sin, just as there is no imputation of Christ's righteousness until there is a conscious acceptance of that work."

Regarding Shaw's reference to the virgin birth, Erickson said it suggests the only reason for the virgin birth was to avoid original sin. "What about Mary?" he asked. Is original sin transmitted only by the male? Catholics avoid that difficulty by teaching the "immaculate conception" of Mary, Erickson suggested.

Shaw said he challenged the traditional Baptist view regarding children because of what Scripture says.

During his sermon, Shaw said, "There is no passage of Scripture that will hold up our age of accountability." Later, when asked if he believed there is such an age, he replied, "Sure there is There is an age when we come to the place of responsibility What I was talking about was before that time."

He built the case for his position from Matthew 19:13, which tells the story of children being brought to Jesus, his disciples turning them away and then Jesus instructing the disciples to not forbid the children from coming to him.

The Baptist professors said such interpretation of the passage is faulty.

"That is a misapplication of that Scripture," Hendricks said. "He does not in that context speak about prayer as a means of bringing children to God."

"I do not think that is what Jesus is teaching there," said J. Terry Young, professor of theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. "I think he's teaching the importance of children, who in the ancient world were often overlooked."

Bush stated, "That passage is talking about exactly what we believe," that parents have a duty to bring children to church to hear about Christ.

While disagreeing with an interpretation of Scripture that says children must be brought to God through prayer, Erickson said: "Salvation of infants is one of the weakest points in Baptist theology. We really haven't worked through this very well."

Lutherans and Catholics believe in baptismal regeneration, Erickson stated. "That's clear cut." But, "we're in an area where Scripture really doesn't say a whole lot," although "we have to reject baptismal regeneration."

Young agreed Scripture says little regarding an age of accountability. "It is more the product of logic than of specific scriptural teaching."

He did note, however, Romans 5:13, which reads: "For before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law" (NIV).

"The young child has not yet encountered the law" and thus doesn't understand it, Young said. "One that does not have that perception, that awareness would not be held accountable."

Erickson cited three biblical passages to support the traditional view.

First, Deuteronomy 1:39 relates part of God's response to the Israelites before they entered the promised land. "And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad -- they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it" (NIV).

Second, Erickson cited Isaiah 7:15-16, a passage referring to the coming Messiah: "He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste" (NIV).

Third, Erickson noted Jonah 4:11: "But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (NIV).

Those three passages seem to be a "glimpse into the way God views children," Erickson said. "The actions they perform are not really considered sins."

Hendricks pointed out: "There is only one theology in Scripture, and that is how persons may be saved. There is not a special theology for children, so we need to affirm something about the mercy and justice of God. And the only logical way to do this is to express that there is a time when persons pass from an awareness of acceptance to awareness of estrangement."

"Either we must continue to teach this, or we must stop teaching our children that God is love and Jesus is their friend," he added.

Young put it this way: "Would a just God condemn to eternal punishment" a child who does not understand?

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