

# Associated Baptist Press

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October 31, 1995

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## Louisiana pastor Lowery turns down New Orleans Seminary presidency

By Greg Warner

NEW ORLEANS (ABP) -- Fred Lowery, a Louisiana pastor and member of the committee seeking a new president for New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, was the committee's nominee for the post but withdrew suddenly Oct. 31.

Lowery, pastor of First Baptist Church of Bossier City, told his congregation two days earlier that he had been offered the presidency. The search committee, without confirming Lowery as the nominee, scheduled a special meeting of trustees Nov. 8-9 to present its recommendation and vote.

But in a one-paragraph statement faxed to Associated Baptist Press Oct. 31, Lowery said he had decided against the move.

"Yesterday [Oct. 30], God confirmed in my heart that I was not to go to New Orleans," the statement said. "At that time I called the chairman and shared what I felt in my heart. Today I formally withdrew my name from further consideration."

Lowery's statement came less than an hour after he was shown an ABP story announcing his nomination and quoting both supporters and critics of the committee's choice.

Search committee chairman Morris Anderson, who earlier in the day would neither confirm nor deny Lowery's selection, told ABP Oct. 31 that Lowery "is not a candidate for the presidency of New Orleans Seminary."

Anderson, who had requested ABP not divulge the nominee's identity before the Nov. 8-9 trustee meeting, added: "If you had only waited a week like I asked, the story would not have needed to be done. If you had only waited, I would have given you an exclusive."

Anderson would not say if the trustee meeting would be cancelled or if the committee would have a nominee. "That's all I'm going to say."

Even before Lowery's name was announced, the recommendation drew complaints from alumni and others -- including a former trustee chairman -- primarily because Lowery lacks an accredited doctoral degree and has alienated some Louisiana Baptists with his leadership style.

Lowery, 52, a New Orleans trustee since 1989, has served on the 11-member committee seeking a successor for Landrum Leavell, who retired last December after 20 years but has remained as interim president. The committee offered the job to Orlando pastor Jim Henry, current Southern Baptist Convention president, but was turned down in July.

Lowery likewise was offered the job and reportedly told his church he turned the committee down three times before agreeing to be nominated.

New Orleans is the last of the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries to elect a president since conservatives gained control of the denomination's agencies in the 1980s. The election of Lowery, a prominent conservative, at New Orleans would have placed all six SBC seminaries under conservative leadership -- a key goal of the movement that wrested control of the SBC from moderate Baptists.

Lowery, pastor of the 6,500-member Bossier City church since 1983, was president of the Louisiana Baptist Convention 1989-90, a vice president of the SBC in 1990 and president of the SBC Pastors' Conference in 1993.

Lowery holds a bachelor's degree from Samford University, a master of divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, an SBC school, and a doctor of ministry degree from Luther Rice Seminary.

According to the admissions office at Luther Rice Seminary in Atlanta, the doctorate of ministry is a correspondence degree. When Lowery was awarded the degree in 1978, the seminary was not accredited. Luther Rice since has been accredited by the Transnational Association of Christian Schools, a conservative agency founded in 1979 to accredit schools committed to biblical inerrancy.

Robert Magee, former chairman of New Orleans' trustees, said Lowery's education is inadequate for the post of president.

"A reputable doctor's degree has recently been considered a prerequisite by other Southern Baptist seminaries in their selection of a president," Magee, pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Ruston, La., said in a prepared statement. "How can he effectively supervise those who have the ultimate degree when he does not have comparable preparation?"

Almost all of the seminary's faculty members have academic doctorates. Of the 1,799 students enrolled in New Orleans Seminary, 10 percent are pursuing doctoral degrees.

All but one of the six current SBC seminary presidents -- Bill Crews of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif. -- hold academic doctorates, as did most former presidents of New Orleans Seminary.

Search chairman Anderson said the group set no minimum academic qualification for the new president. "We wanted to find the very best man we could find," said Anderson, pastor of First Baptist Church of Pigeon Forge, Tenn. "We determined we would not put any stipulations on God's man."

Other supporters of Lowery's nomination said they were not troubled by the nominee's Luther Rice degree. "Some of our greatest Southern Baptist leaders and pastors have received their degrees from there," said David Hankins, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La.

Hankins described Lowery as a proven leader who "has the right kind of spirit." "He's the kind of aggressive, forward-looking leader Southern Baptists have been selecting in the past several years," Hankins said.

But others described Lowery as arrogant, intolerant and vindictive. "I just can't see somebody of that temperament, demeanor and disposition running my seminary," said one Louisiana pastor, a New Orleans Seminary alum, who asked not to be identified.

Magee, who served as trustee chairman at New Orleans for eight years, from 1975 to 1982, said Lowery's "leadership style" became apparent when he served as state convention president. "Rather than demonstrating a spirit of love toward all Louisiana Baptists, he harped on the controversy and worked to politicize and polarize the convention," he said.

Magee and others complained to Ed Johnson, current trustee chairman, and asked that the search committee withdraw its recommendation. Johnson declined to comment on the nomination to ABP.

Later, after Lowery withdrew, Magee said he was pleased. "This news will be most gratifying to many members of the alumni," he told ABP. "We very prayerfully support the presidential search committee as they now move in a different direction."

Search chairman Anderson, speaking before Lowery withdrew, defended the committee's choice "as a very fine, godly pastor."

He denied the nominee's role in denominational politics was a factor in his selection. "The main thing was just to get the will of God. This is not a political situation. Everyone wants to make it political."

Lowery, a native of Alabama, was pastor of First Baptist Church of North Spartanburg, S.C., from 1976 until moving to the Louisiana pastorate in 1983. He served as president of the Pastors' Conference in South Carolina. He and his wife, Leigh, have two children.

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## **Samford dedicates building for Beeson Divinity School**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Samford University dedicated the new Beeson Divinity Hall with a week of festivities Oct. 23-27.

The building is the permanent home for Samford's Beeson Divinity School, established in 1988 by a bequest from the estate of philanthropist Ralph Waldo Beeson. Beeson, an insurance executive, left more than \$20 million in his will to begin a non-sectarian, evangelical divinity school at the Baptist university in Birmingham, Ala.

In a dedicatory address, Beeson Dean Timothy George consecrated the hall "to the glory of God, for the service of his church and to the furtherance of his kingdom."

Highlights of the week-long celebration included a Tuesday evening banquet honoring Southern Baptist patriarchs Herschel Hobbs and W.A. Criswell.

Hobbs, 88, long-time pastor of First Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, Okla., built a reputation as a leading authority on Baptist doctrine, in part by chairing the 1963 study committee which drafted the Baptist Faith and Message statement of consensus views. Criswell, 85, earned fame for his fiery expository-preaching style during 50 years as pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Southern Baptists' largest congregation.

The two departed from an evening of mostly light-hearted story telling to lament division in the Southern Baptist Convention, including the 1991 formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship by disaffected moderates.

Major points of contention could have been resolved, Hobbs said, if conservatives controlling the SBC had heeded recommendations of the 1987 Peace Committee calling for balancing leadership in the convention between the two groups.

"If those recommendations had been followed -- balanced appointments, balanced faculties, boards -- we would never have had a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," Hobbs said.

Another speaker, Jerry Rankin, president of the SBC Foreign Mission Board, said he sees signs that the anticipated Second Coming of Jesus might be near.

Rankin noted that more nations are open to missionaries and more previously unreached people groups are responding to the gospel message, developments described in Scripture as signaling the end of the world.

"Suddenly the end-times have become an awesome reality," Rankin said. "God is moving in his providential power to fulfill his purpose. Could it be that he has given us the privilege of being the last generation of witnesses?" he asked.

Other speakers included David Hubbard, president emeritus of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., who led an interdenominational worship service, and Charles Colson, president of Prison Fellowship, the closing speaker. Two presentations celebrated the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a young German theologian who was martyred in prison in the closing months of World War II.

The new building includes a newly completed 400-seat Divinity Chapel with a muraled ceiling featuring 16 figures from Christian history by artist Petru Botzatu. A classroom wing, completed earlier, has been in use since 1994.

The Beeson Divinity School currently enrolls more than 200 students in its master of divinity, master of theological studies and doctor of ministry programs.

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-- By Bob Allen. Based on reporting by Mary Wimberley.

## **Statesman says CBF would not exist had moderates been included in SBC**

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist Convention leaders could have prevented formation of the rival Cooperative Baptist Fellowship had they heeded a 1987 recommendation to include moderates in leadership positions, according to elder statesman Herschel Hobbs.

Conservative leaders of the SBC regard the Fellowship, formed by moderates in 1991, as a nemesis, saying it competes for missions funding in Baptist churches. Most recently leaders have pressured Woman's Missionary Union, an SBC auxiliary, to back off from plans to offer curriculum promoting Fellowship missionaries.

However, Hobbs, 88, long-time pastor of First Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, Okla., said moderates formed a rival organization only after conservatives controlling the SBC ignored recommendations of the SBC Peace Committee calling for balancing leadership in the convention between the two factions.

"If those recommendations had been followed -- balanced appointments, balanced faculties, boards -- we would never have had a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," Hobbs said.

Hobbs offered the observation Oct. 24 during a week-long dedication of a new Beeson Divinity Hall at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. A Tuesday evening banquet honored Hobbs and another SBC patriarch, W.A. Criswell. Both men departed briefly from a program of light-hearted story telling to lament division in the SBC.

Criswell, 85, longtime pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, blamed moderates for the schism.

"The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is such a strange development to me," Criswell said. "For churches and pastors to leave our convention because of what someone in the convention believes -- I don't understand that."

"If I am of a certain turn in my devotion and worship and another man is of another turn, let him preach what he believes and expound that, and we stay together," Criswell said.

The Peace Committee, appointed in 1985, brought moderate and conservative leaders together in a last-ditch effort aimed at healing a growing rift in the nation's largest Protestant body. Most observers said the 1987 report favored conservatives and contributed to greater polarization, culminating in the formation of a separate moderate Fellowship in 1991.

Among the committee's recommendations was that future presidents and committees of the convention select nominees for leadership roles "in a balanced fashion from the broad spectrum" of Southern Baptists.

Implementation of the report, however, focused on other recommendations calling for a narrowing of theological parameters at Baptist institutions.

Hobbs, a member of the committee, said he opposed last-minute changes in the document that he feared would cause it to be used as a creed.

"Someone had proposed four examples of the 'Bible as truth without mixture of error,'" the phrase in the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message describing the nature of Scripture, Hobbs said. "The examples stated Adam and Eve were real people, that the miracles in the Bible were true. I had no problem with that," he added.

In an all-night meeting just before the report was presented, however, there was a proposal to move those examples from a "findings" section of the report into the "recommendations."

"That was the only time I stood up to talk," Hobbs said. "I said they were where they belonged, in the findings of the committee. If you put them into the recommendations, they would become creedal. Another member said we should have the guts to move them. I said it's not a matter of guts; it's a matter of brains."

"Southern Baptists have never been a creedal people. Sometimes we have trouble living with the results of that," Hobbs said.

Criswell was identified as a leader in the conservative juggernaut which gained control of the SBC during the 1980s. Hobbs, a popular authority on Baptist doctrine, endorsed neither side in the long-running battle.

Another guest of honor invited to the banquet was Duke McCall, a moderate leader and long-time president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. McCall was recovering from recent eye surgery and unable to attend.

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-- By Bob Allen. Based on reporting by Mark Baggett.

## **Extraterrestrials, if they exist, are tainted by sin, scholar says**

ROME (ABP) -- A Roman Catholic priest and theologian has called on his church to consider the possibility of evangelizing extraterrestrials, according to published reports.

After two Swiss astronomers announced they had discovered the first planet in a solar system similar to Earth's, Piero Coda, a theology professor in Rome, said any beings living on the planet would be in need of salvation.

"If life were to be found on the planet, then it would also have been contaminated by original sin and would require salvation," Coda told the Vatican, according to Ecumenical News International.

According to mainstream Christian theology, all human beings are born in original sin inherited from the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

However, another Catholic scholar said extraterrestrials might not need salvation.

"We know that earthmen sinned, but we know nothing of beings in other worlds," the unnamed professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University said.

In early October Michel Mayor and Dider Queloz, two Swiss astronomers of the Geneva Observatory, said they had discovered a planet about the size of Jupiter in the constellation Pegasus. The planet, named 51 Pegasus, is 40 light-years away from Earth.

Press reports said a team of California astronomers confirmed the discovery, but the scientific community remains skeptical about 51 Pegasus. The only previous confirmed evidence for planets has been in solar systems unlike the Earth's.

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-- By ABP staff

## Take God's power to work, author urges

By Marv Knox

LEXINGTON, Ky. (ABP) -- A computer programmer is just as holy as a preacher, and the work of a truck driver is just as sacred as the ministry of an evangelist, says Mike Rogers.

"God wants to be at work in the worker," stressed Rogers, pastor of Chevy Chase Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky. "It's not the work that makes a vocation holy; it's the relationship between the worker and God.

"People need to see God at work in their lives when they go to work -- wherever they go to work."

That's why Rogers wrote "The Kingdom Agenda," a book and conference study designed to help Christians see the role of God in their workplaces. It's also why he's teamed up with Claude King, co-author of the popular "Experiencing God" discipleship materials, to develop a six-week small-group study based on kingdom agenda principles.

Unfortunately, most Christians separate their lives into what they do on Sunday and how they live the rest of the week, Rogers said. As a result, they have turned their workplaces over to secular forces, forcing God out of the picture.

"What would happen if Christians learned to see and experience God in the workplace?" Rogers asked. "That's the one place where there are more lost people than anywhere else."

Rogers' strategy is to enable Christians to participate in God's redemptive agenda in their workplaces, unleashing a huge and powerful mission force into the commercial avenues traveled by virtually all people.

The workplace -- whether it's a construction site, insurance office, factory or any other place where people work -- is an open mission field, Rogers said. Furthermore, every Christian ought to be a missionary, he thinks.

"God rules over his kingdom," Rogers stressed. "He has a kingdom agenda and ... has chosen to work through his people to accomplish his kingdom purposes."

Originally, God intended for believing workers to recognize God's sovereignty in the world and cooperate in doing God's initiatives, he explained. Unfortunately, the worldly workplace was corrupted. People focused on themselves rather than on God, rejecting God's involvement in their lives.

The good news is that God wants to redeem every workplace, Rogers added. Jesus "seeks to restore the workplace to God's original intention, where work is sacred and fruitful," he said.

This concept holds ramifications for every Christian worker, Rogers insisted. Potentially, it could impact every location where Christians work.

"God does not give jobs just so workers can earn a paycheck," he explained. "God has a redemptive mission that he intends to accomplish through his workers.

"Every job has a 'kingdom job description' that reflects God's purposes in the context of work. The kingdom worker develops a prayer strategy to receive assignments and join God in his work."

Consequently, Christians in the marketplace who take on God's job assignment develop "redemptive relationships through which God works to reconcile people to himself," he noted. "The kingdom work even brings about change in the social, moral and ethical fabric of a workplace."

For example, Rogers told about published suggestions from the early 1970s that indicated thousands of lives would be saved if auto manufacturers would install airbags in vehicles. Nevertheless, car makers resisted, fearing the cost of the airbags would diminish profits.

Meanwhile, 150,000 people needlessly perished in automobile accidents, because their deaths could have been prevented by use of air bags, he said.

The absence of God from that workplace -- the silence of Christians who should have valued lives over dollars -- contributed to those deaths, he insisted.

Christians who follow God's kingdom agenda will make an impact in their workplaces, he predicted. Their sensitivity to God's care and God's plan for people will make them aware of the implications of their work and

business practices on the spiritual and physical welfare of others. And their character, competency and integrity will bear witness to God's presence in their lives and in the places where they work.

This notion is as ancient as the Old Testament, Rogers claimed. "The vast majority of the (biblical) people God touched were laity who had a relationship with God in the real world," he said.

However, with their emphasis upon professional clergy, modern Christians have "colored out the possibility that laity may be working for God's glory," he said. "The kingdom agenda restores the dignity of God's call on their lives in the marketplace.

"But we work for God's glory. All we do is 'as unto the Lord.' Work is like an opportunity to worship God." Such an attitude actually changes lives, Rogers reported.

As an illustration, he told about a young accountant who became distressed by the cutthroat atmosphere of her company.

She was at the point of quitting her job when she began to consider how God's kingdom agenda might apply to her. When she accepted the challenge to accept God's sovereignty in her office and to cooperate with God in her job, she began to see that God had a mission for her in that place. She was there to be a voice for integrity, to build redemptive relationships among her co-workers and to help change that office for God's glory. Although the circumstances of her work did not change immediately, she continued on with optimism, recognizing that she was a co-worker with God.

In another example, Rogers described an insurance agent who felt called to ministry and was considering selling his business to enter the clergy.

After he began to consider the agenda God had for his business, he understood that he had been in the place God wanted him all along. Through his business, he could minister to hundreds of people who might never consider attending church or telling a minister about their needs.

These stories confirm the importance of recognizing God's kingdom agenda in the workplace, Rogers believes.

"We've got to recognize the key of influence" that comes with acknowledging God's strategy for the workplace, he said. "It's not the specific job we have. It's about being in right relationship with God and trusting him."

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## **Venezuelan soldier inspired author's 'life message'**

By Marv Knox

LEXINGTON, Ky. (ABP) -- A Venezuelan soldier dictated the "life message" written on Mike Rogers' heart.

Rogers, a Southern Baptist missionary at the time, was driving across the South American country to pick up a team of mission volunteers.

"I was making pretty good time, when I came to a military checkpoint," he recalled. "Things went well. But when I started to leave, they 'requested' I give this soldier a ride for the next 50 miles. When you're an American missionary deep in the heart of Venezuela, you don't turn down a military 'request.'"

As they drove, curiosity overcame the soldier. "Why is an American like you out here in the sticks?" he asked.

"I'm here to help people come to know Christ," Rogers explained.

"I can't be a Christian and also a military guard," the soldier confessed, subtly acknowledging the graft and corruption that accompany low pay and overt power among Venezuelan military. "It wouldn't be right to Jesus."

Down the road, the soldier asked Rogers, "Can Christ forgive me for what's happened in my life?" The missionary assured him Christ would forgive, and although their journey ended before the soldier accepted Christ as his Savior, their conversation seared into Rogers' memory.

"That was a God moment," he reported. "This man out in the sticks of Venezuela had a better grasp of the gospel than many Christians in our country."

The soldier's attitude contrasted sharply with the cultural Christianity Rogers experienced in the United States.

"He caused me to think about growing up in Danville, Ky.," he said. "I knew so many people who didn't think a thing about being one person on Sunday morning and a completely different person the rest of the week."

As Rogers pondered his encounter with that Venezuelan soldier, he developed what he calls his "life message" -- the idea that God is sovereign over all of life, including -- or rather, especially -- over the workplace and other non-church areas.

The message stuck with Rogers, even when illness forced him to leave the mission field and return to the States. It stuck with him when he became pastor of Chevy Chase Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky., where he now serves.

"I wondered about being a layman and also a minister in the marketplace," he said. And Rogers is one pastor who has experience dealing with that concept.

Rogers, 45, grew up in Danville and was baptized at age 9. He joined the Marines at age 19 and spent seven years in the Corps, time enough to graduate from college and spend a year in Vietnam.

He returned to Kentucky and spent three years working for a tire company. Afterward, he moved to Tampa, Fla., and worked for three years in corporate training and development.

"That's where I came into a relationship with the Lord," he said. "I became a Christian and felt called by God, but I didn't realize I had been given a divine call right there. I thought I had to be a pastor or missionary."

That thought led him to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., into the pastorate, to Venezuela and then to Lexington and Chevy Chase Church.

Back in Lexington, "I started thinking about that 'life message' again," he said. Several experiences and relationships -- including friendships with Avery Willis, author of the MasterLife discipleship/witnessing program, and Henry Blackaby and Claude King, authors of the Experiencing God equipping materials -- prompted him to study the message more closely.

For the past three or four years, Rogers has worked on preparing the kingdom agenda, an attempt to translate his life message into a word from God for other Christians in the workplace.

Rogers intentionally decided not to study other materials regarding marketplace ministry. "I just focused on Scripture and on what I had learned in corporate life," he said.

Assisted by his wife, Debi, Rogers has written a "Kingdom Agenda" manuscript. Collaborating with King, he's developing a workbook to help small groups of Christians implement the kingdom agenda in their own lives.

Rogers has begun to lead kingdom agenda weekends in churches, and they are followed by participants' involvement in six-week small-group meetings, in which they progress through the workbook, learning how to import God's kingdom plan into their own places of work.

The idea is to empower Christians to experience God at work and glorify Christ in the marketplace, he said.