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In this issue:

- **Conservatives in Texas vote to form new state convention**
- **New convention not justified, Texas Baptist exec says**
- **Wade says conservatives misrepresent his Bible views**
- **One of IMB's 14 regional leaders resigns to join new mission ministry**
- **Voices growing for less Santa, more Savior at Christmas**
- **Accord ends long-running dispute among rival Bengal Baptist groups**
- **Entire Indian village responds to witness**
- **Jimmy Allen receives Maston award, cites those who shaped 'journey'**

Conservatives in Texas vote to form new state convention

By Toby Druin

DALLAS (ABP) -- Directors of Southern Baptists of Texas, the organization that has pushed for closer alignment of the Baptist General Convention of Texas with the Southern Baptist Convention, voted Nov. 20 instead to establish a new state convention.

Dee Slocum, pastor of Highland Baptist Church in Amarillo and vice president for the organization, said its 30-member board of directors voted unanimously to begin the process of setting up the new organization.

The directors and officers -- Executive Director Ronnie Yarber of Mesquite, president Miles Seaborn of Fort Worth and Slocum -- will serve as a "transitional team" to give it birth, Slocum said. He said no date has been set for an organizational meeting but that he anticipated it could come as early as spring.

Slocum said he had been appointed spokesperson by Yarber, who declined to answer calls from the Baptist Standard. Seaborn is traveling in the Philippines.

William Pinson, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said the reasons cited for establishing the new state convention "are not well founded and are not justification for such an act." He said Texas Baptist leaders have worked to prevent a split and to maintain "togetherness for the sake of the gospel."

Southern Baptists of Texas was first organized in 1991 as the Conservative Baptist Fellowship of Texas but changed its name two years ago.

Southern Baptists of Texas opposed passage of the Efficiency/Effectiveness report at the BGCT meeting in Austin last month because they contended it distanced the BGCT from the SBC, a claim denied by the committee which drafted it and by BGCT leaders.

Following approval of the E/E report, Yarber and Seaborn said the directors of Southern Baptists of Texas were almost unanimous in approving formation of a new state convention. The group conducted a written poll of some 400 persons attending a rally after the Monday night convention session in Austin.

Slocum said response to the poll was "overwhelmingly" in favor of beginning a new convention.

The purpose of the new body will be "to ensure and maintain a strong SBC presence in Texas," Slocum said.

"We saw that diminishing. We feel we have seen an erosion of the historic walk with the SBC on the part of elected leadership of the BGCT as far back as the last Amarillo convention" in 1994, he said. "That concerns Southern Baptists across the state."

News of the decision to start the new convention was released by Baptist Press in a story written by Dave Parker, assistant editor of the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger. The new editor of the Messenger is John Yeats, who came to Oklahoma from the editorship of the Indiana Baptist and who has been a longtime spokesman for the group now controlling the SBC. Yeats is now SBC recording secretary.

Slocum was quoted by Parker as saying that an additional factor in the decision to establish a new convention "was outgoing BGCT President Charles Wade's comments regarding the historical accuracy of Scripture. ... In an interview with the Austin American-Statesman, Wade said Texas Baptists 'will support Southern Baptist leaders if they focus on missions and evangelism instead of trying to force all Baptists to believe the Bible is factual and scientifically true.'"

Wade in fact had no interview with the Austin paper. The story carried by the paper was written from a manuscript provided to reporters by Wade. Wade's manuscript did not include the statement about the Bible being factual and scientifically true. The Austin reporter who wrote the story said the statement about the Bible's accuracy was not a quote but a paraphrase of the position of moderate Baptists on the Bible. But Wade said the paraphrase misrepresents his position.

In his speech Wade said: "Southern Baptist leaders will have our support if they will focus on missions and evangelism, but they will drive more and more Texas Baptists away if they focus on requiring uniformity as a condition of cooperation."

Wade said the use of the reporter's paraphrase by SBT leaders was worse than the reporter's mistake. "Those who claim they have an endless delight in the truth of Scripture are themselves guilty of deliberate misrepresentation of my remarks in the president's address to the Baptist General Convention of Texas."

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New convention not justified, Texas Baptist exec says

By Toby Druin

DALLAS (ABP) -- Published reasons for establishing a new state convention among Texas Baptists "are not well founded and are not justification for such an act," Texas Baptist Executive Director William Pinson said.

If a new convention is formed, Pinson added, it will not be because leaders of the Baptist General Convention of Texas have encouraged it. "In fact, just the opposite will be the case," he said. "Written and spoken appeals have been and will be made for togetherness for the sake of the gospel."

Pinson said he had not been given the courtesy of being informed of the decision of the board of directors of Southern Baptists of Texas to begin forming a new convention, but had been apprised of it through a news story released through Baptist Press.

"Neither I nor any officers of the BGCT have been supplied information directly from the SBT about any new convention to be formed by them," Pinson said.

"Therefore, we do not know any details of what is proposed and cannot evaluate the matter."

While any Baptist group is free to do what it wills, Pinson said, "I pray that all Southern Baptists in Texas will find a way to continue to serve together in the power and direction of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Great Commission given us by the Lord Jesus Christ."

Pinson said that the BGCT "as a family of Baptists in Texas," has attempted to remain true to "God's written word, the Bible, and to God's living Word, Jesus."

"While we may not agree on the interpretation of the Bible in every regard, we agree on essentials. We believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe in Jesus as the virgin-born Son of God who lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sins, rose from the grave, ascended to the right hand of the Father and is coming again.

"We believe the Bible is truth and the sole authority for faith and practice. We believe in salvation by grace through faith; in believer's baptism; in the priesthood of the believer; in a regenerate church membership; in the governance of a church by members under the headship of the Lord Jesus; in autonomous churches which cooperate with one another and voluntarily for missions, evangelism, education and ministry; in religious freedom and soul competency."

Some believe a second convention would be best, Pinson said, but added that he is not one of them who hold that opinion.

He noted that churches in the BGCT have access to the convention staff and resources, regardless of political persuasion, and flexibility in directing distribution of their Cooperative Program gifts.

"Churches related to Southern Baptists of Texas have utilized this freedom extensively," he added. "Persons from SBT serve on boards, committees and commissions of the BGCT. To depart would be to abandon Texas Baptist institutions, resources and ministries"

He reminded Southern Baptists of Texas of the "terrible disruption caused by having rival state conventions that led to unification in 1886 and the forming of the BGCT."

"As I have prayed about various possible options, I believe that continuing to cooperate for the sake of the gospel would be most in keeping with the New Testament appeal to unity and to the prayer of Lord Jesus for us as recorded in John 17."

Russell Dilday, new president of the BGCT, also read of the new convention in the Baptist Press story. He said the reasons given for its formation are founded on serious misunderstandings of the BGCT and gross misstatements about Charles Wade's position on biblical authority.

"Some of those misunderstandings were statements that approval of the E/E report in Austin made the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship equal to the Southern Baptist Convention.

"What the report did was open up free choices, not a narrowing of them at all," Dilday said.

He said he prayed that all Baptists in Texas would be challenged by the significant ministries in the state and would not allow differences to keep them from joining together for the sake of the gospel.

"The BGCT is not a game to be won or lost," Dilday said. "This is serious business. This is of eternal significance. I would hope that political control wouldn't be the important thing. Of course, they have the right to form a new convention, but I am sorry they have chosen this direction."

Morris Chapman, president of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, was traveling and unavailable for comment.

If a second convention is formed, it will be the second in recent years. In 1996, a group in Virginia dissatisfied with the Baptist General Association of Virginia formed a second group known as Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia. So far 107 Virginia Baptist churches have chosen to be aligned exclusively with the new SBCV and about 40 others are dually aligned with both conventions. The total -- about 150 churches -- is about 10 percent of the 1,550 churches in the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

Wade says conservatives misrepresent his Bible views

By Toby Druin

DALLAS (ABP) -- If Southern Baptists of Texas decided to form a new state convention in part because of remarks attributed to Charles Wade, they are building a future based on a lie, Wade said.

Southern Baptists of Texas say the principal reason they are forming a new state body is to ensure a close association of Texas Baptists with the Southern Baptist Convention. However, Dee Slocum, vice president of SBT and pastor of Highland Baptist Church in Amarillo, was quoted in a Baptist Press story as saying that "an additional factor" in their decision was remarks attributed to Wade, outgoing president of the Texas convention, in a story in the Austin American-Statesman following Wade's presidential address to the annual convention last month.

The Baptist Press story said Wade, in an interview with the Austin paper, said Texas Baptists "will support Southern Baptist leaders if they focus on missions and evangelism instead of trying to force all Baptists to believe the Bible is factual and scientifically true."

The story added that Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church of Arlington, also told messengers he supports ordaining women as senior pastors.

In fact Wade had no interview with the Austin paper -- the story was written from a text of his address given to reporters -- nor did he say anything about the SBC forcing "all Baptists to believe the Bible is factual and scientifically true." And while he did say he defended women who say they have been called by God to be ministers, he did not mention ordaining them as senior pastors.

"How can people build a future by telling a lie?" Wade questioned. "An unfortunate mistake by a reporter for the Austin American-Statesman has been shamefully used by [Southern Baptists of Texas] leaders who know better to justify the starting of a new convention in Texas. Those who claim they have an endless delight in the truth of Scripture are themselves guilty of deliberate misrepresentation of my remarks in the president's address to the Baptist General Convention of Texas."

Wade said that a check of both his printed text and a tape recording of his message revealed that he said the following:

"I have appealed to Southern Baptist leaders not to chide Texas Baptists for our determination to give our churches and their leaders freedom to make the decisions they believe are best for them in reaching out to do mission work in the world. Southern Baptist leaders will have our support if they will focus on missions and evangelism, but they will drive more and more Texas Baptists away if they focus on requiring uniformity as a condition of cooperation."

Kim Sue Lia Perkes, the American-Statesman reporter who wrote the story in question, told the Standard she had included the statement about the Bible being factual and scientifically true because she felt it summarized the moderate Baptist position.

However, when it was repeated in the Baptist Press story it was presented as a direct quote from Wade rather than as Perkes' paraphrase.

Wade said that while Perkes may have thought she was making a fair attempt to paraphrase what she thinks is the difference between moderates and conservative/fundamentalists, "she is wrong."

"Texas Baptist leaders believe the Bible. I believe the Bible to be true and trustworthy, and every attempt to misrepresent our confidence and joy in the Bible is a vile thing to do.

"I did not say, never have said, and don't now believe that the Bible is not factual or scientifically true. The Bible is God's inspired and written word to us and is true and trustworthy.

"I don't know a Texas Baptist leader who does not believe the Bible. The conservative/fundamentalists may start their own convention, but the members of Texas Baptist churches need to be aware that they do so based on outright misquotes and misrepresentation."

Ironically, Wade added, "as bad as the mistake by a secular reporter, the pastors and leaders who know better have enlarged the false report and done damage to the cause of Christ by so doing. I regret that most of all."

Wade said that not one of the persons reporting the Baptist Press story called him to check the quotation or to ascertain the facts.

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One of IMB's 14 regional leaders resigns to join new mission ministry

By Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Mark Morris, who oversees work in one of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board's 14 administrative regions, has resigned to join an independent ministry recently established by four other former IMB missionaries.

Morris, regional leader for central and southern Asia, and his wife, Cindy, submitted their resignations Nov. 22. They become the fifth and sixth IMB missionaries in less than a month to resign and affiliate with All Peoples, an organization that will help local congregations send missionaries abroad.

Heading up All Peoples is Michael Stroope, a 20-year veteran of the IMB who directed the board's Cooperative Services International, a program initiated in the 1980s to share the gospel with people in countries where a traditional missionary presence is not possible.

Stroope and his wife, Kay, announced their resignations in mid-November, as did missionaries David and Mary Carpenter, who served with Morris as field workers in the central and southern Asia region, a vast area that encompasses Bangladesh, India, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Cooperative Services International, which virtually changed the face of Southern Baptists mission endeavors by targeting "unreached people groups," was dismantled as a separate entity in an IMB reorganization last June. Now administrators in each of the board's 14 regions around the world -- including Morris' -- employ CSI methodologies "as appropriate."

But Morris, 39, who spent eight of his 14 years of IMB service as a CSI representative, said his resignation is "not a reaction to anything or anyone."

"This is what God is calling us to do," he said. "We're not moving away from something. We're walking toward something."

During his recent furlough in Memphis, Tenn., Morris said he noticed "churches are coming forward and are saying, 'We want to live out the mission God has given and we want to be involved in it ourselves.' I haven't seen a mechanism in place to serve those churches.

"There are ways the IMB is trying to meet some of those needs," he added. "But what you'll see in All Peoples is a niche or ministry to assist that particular kind of church to be more directly involved."

Morris has been regional leader in central and southern Asia for less than six months, assuming the post when the IMB created 14 administrative regions in last June's reorganization. His resignation took IMB administrators by surprise. Officials at the Richmond, Va.-based board declined to comment.

"I did not plan to move in this direction, but when I looked at this opportunity, I recognized that what this is about provides me a chance to fulfill what God has given me," he said. "My wife and I both have followed a calling to go where others have not gone and to reach those not being reached. That calling is the same. I believe we are responding to a need that addresses the issues churches are facing, and we can do that very effectively through All Peoples."

The Morrises will continue to live in Memphis until a permanent location for All Peoples is selected. The Stroopes are based in Arlington, Texas, and the Carpenters will leave London for Waco, Texas, in mid-January.

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Voices growing for less Santa, more Savior at Christmas

By Ken Walker

LEXINGTON, Ky. (ABP) -- While America's Christmas retail sales were hitting \$450 billion last year, Roderick Cyr headed in the opposite direction.

In cards to family and friends he announced a halt to gift-giving so he could increase offerings to mission causes.

This Dec. 25 will again be a day of quiet contemplation for Cyr, part of what he sees as God's call for him to redirect his holiday observances.

Cyr, a member of Chevy Chase Baptist Church in Lexington, Ky., said he thinks Christians have become so wrapped up in seasonal consumerism that they fail to recognize what their actions say about their faith.

"What message are we sending to the non-Christian community about our true priorities?" he asked. "Moreover, what lessons are we teaching our children when love is measured by the gifts given?"

Cyr's questions represent a movement that appears to be gathering steam. In the past year, several writers and columnists have advocated a simpler Christmas.

Supporters report tangible progress too. Bill McKibben wrote "Unplugging Christmas," the cover story for last December's issue of Christianity Today magazine. McKibben's article suggested limiting overall Christmas spending to \$100, as well as turning off the television to participate in more Christ-centered and family activities.

Some readers were suspicious of his advocacy of reducing purchases to help save the environment, he said, but many readers have reported adopting his tips on a church-wide or community-wide basis.

"Every church [simplifies] in different ways," said McKibben, a resident of Johnsbury, N.Y., a tiny community in the Adirondack Mountains. "Last year ours said we'll take the money we're not going to spend on Christmas and spend it on missions. We raised \$5,000 for the Heifer Project, which sends livestock and other animals to developing countries.

"I think it's fair to say we were pretty proud of ourselves," he said, noting the Methodist congregation averages between 45 and 50 on a Sunday. Despite its size, the congregation influenced the multistate Methodist conference in its area to adopt a resolution favoring simpler Christmases.

The desire for a simpler Christmas can be reflected in different ways. In Atlanta, Don Hammonds said his family never got into Santa Claus, even when his children were growing up.

"Years ago I rebelled and said, 'I'm not going to participate,'" said Hammonds, a retired Southern Baptist executive from the former Home Mission Board. He admitted, however, that he did relent six years ago and agreed to a single-gift family exchange featuring mostly homemade presents.

"Early on we decided we would celebrate the birth of Christ, and the big day for ourselves was going to be our birthdays. We never did stress Christmas. Everyone called me Old Scrooge."

He said his inspiration for reducing gift-giving came from what he saw as advertisers' increasing appeals to guilt. Namely, expensive presents are promoted as the best way to prove someone's love, he explained.

Instead, Hammonds recommends taking action to show Christ's love, such as serving food at a soup kitchen or visiting shut-ins and nursing home residents.

This conflict between spending money or giving of one's time illustrates the perennial battle between culture and religion, said Tom Erich, a former Episcopal priest and columnist for Religion News Service.

Society and Christianity have opposing values that are played out in Christmas observances, Erich said, such as:

- Promoting self and insisting on one's "rights" vs. selflessness and yielding to another person.
- Seeking and exercising power vs. giving it up.
- Getting caught up in the frenzy of gift buying and parties rather than quietly reflecting on the meaning of Christ's birth.

While Erich agrees the holiday needs a simpler profile, he cautioned against outlining the issue in black and white.

Christmastime provides employment for many low-income families, he noted. It also promotes family get-togethers and increases church attendance, he said.

"It also can be a lot of fun if you avoid the hype and frenzy," said Erich, the father of three children. "We make it clear we're not giving a lot of lavish gifts and we won't go into debt to buy gifts.

"You can't expect children to turn away from the commercial pressure. But parents have an obligation to explain Christmas to their children, to tell the rest of the story."

In his latest newsletter, Christian financial adviser Larry Burkett advocates reserving a Christian tithe for Christian causes. If regular church-goers set aside 10 percent of Christmas purchases for orphanages, abortion alternatives and missions causes, he wrote, it would generate several billion dollars.

Besides those following McKibben's lead, Cyr and the church missions committee led Chevy Chase Baptist to increase last year's goal for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Southern Baptist foreign missions from \$2,000 to \$5,000.

"Rodney is very serious about his commitment to missions," said pastor J. R. Lawson. "We have seen a renewal on missions because of the emphasis he and others are placing on it."

While Cyr is concerned about lessening Christmas commercialism as one method of increasing missions support, he said simplifying lifestyles is a topic that deserves year-round attention.

"This is not a conservative message and this is not a liberal message, this is a biblical message," he said. "I think this is a message that God's been wanting to get through to people's hearts for a long time. There are some things that God will do as people respond to him."

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Ideas for a simpler Christmas:

- Read a book to your grandchildren on tape.
- Give "gift certificates" for back rubs, shoveling snow, stacking wood or tilling a garden, in which you provide the labor.
- Spread sunflower seeds outside on Christmas morning so birds can celebrate too.
- Print favorite recipes on cards and give to friends.
- Bake bread and give it to needy people.
- As a family project, adopt a nursing home resident and establish an ongoing relationship.
- Assemble a photo album, draw up a family tree or record your recollections of family history.
- Create your own game of family trivia.
- Clean old jewelry and give it away.
- Go Christmas caroling.
- Wrap Christmas presents in old pillowcases, wallpaper or fabric scraps.
- Attend church and sit together as a family.
- Read the story of Christ's birth to your children or grandchildren.
- Serve food at a soup kitchen or deliver food to shut-ins.

- Schedule a daily time during Advent for Bible stories and sharing your favorite Christmas memories with your children.
- Arrange for an old friend to call your parents and share memories.
- Collect letters from friends and relatives about your mother or father.

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Accord ends long-running dispute among rival Bengal Baptist groups

CALCUTTA, India (ABP) -- A seed planted by the Baptist World Alliance four years ago bore fruit Nov. 8 when three Baptist groups in the region of Bengal in India celebrated their reconciliation and unity after 25 years of bickering.

More than 500 guests from across Bengal participated in a joyful reunification service at St. Paul's Cathedral in Calcutta, which featured a choir made up of youth from each of the former factions.

In 1993, when Bengal Baptists celebrated the 200th anniversary of the arrival of pioneer Baptist missionary William Carey in Bengal, Denton Lotz, general secretary of the BWA, issued a call for the fighting factions to come together.

The clashes among Bengal Baptists were not over theology but property. Those conflicts led to court cases before secular judges, as well as leadership conflicts, pitting two Bengal Baptist Unions -- both affiliated with Carey's British Missionary Society -- against the Bengal Baptist Fellowship, an independent group that is an offshoot of both of those unions.

After ten meetings of the Ad-Hoc Reconciliation Committee formed after the Carey celebrations, the final process for reconciliation began a year ago in Calcutta. At that time, J. H. Mohanty, committee chair, said, "Unless we come together, we are not fit to work."

At the Nov. 8 reunification ceremony, Bengal Baptist leaders submitted their resignations and agreed to elect new leaders next March for the newly formed Bengal Baptist Union.

Lotz congratulated Bengal Baptists on behalf of Baptists around the world. "We rejoice with you in the magnificent way in which the Holy Spirit has moved to bring it together," Lotz said. He said the worldwide Baptist family is praying that their unity "will be an impetus to further evangelize your great city and country."

"May the unity and reconciliation which is now being celebrated not only be a one-time event but indeed might be the aroma of Christ spread throughout the city of Calcutta," Lotz said.

Bony Resu, general secretary for the Asian Baptist Federation, one of six regional bodies of the BWA, reported Bengal Baptists who had overwhelmingly supported the move to unity traveled all night by bus to attend the historic meeting. "Their faces were radiant with joy at the reconciliation and merger," Resu said.

Reconciliation among Baptists is one of the goals of the BWA, which brings Baptists from 191 member bodies together.

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Entire Indian village responds to witness

By Robert O'Brien

SECUNDERABAD, India (ABP) -- An entire village of 60 "untouchables" in India embraced Christianity after a visit by two Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionaries last spring, the missionaries report.

Missionaries James and Robbi Francovich visited the remote tribal village in March. The missionaries shook hands with and embraced the Yanadi villagers -- who are considered "untouchable" in India's traditional caste system. The missionaries also told the Yanadi about Jesus Christ and invited them to a Good Friday religious service and meal.

Two days later, on Easter Day, a Yanadi band traveled by foot to another village to deliver surprising news. After the Francoviches left, the tribe met and decided in one accord to reject their Hindu "idols" and follow the God of the missionaries, reported Ramadu, the village's 80-year-old elder.

Never before, Ramadu said, had anyone helped or loved them -- much less touched them. The Yanadi pledged to go to church every Sunday, the Francoviches reported.

Each Sunday since Easter, the new Christians have worshiped at Dayspring Church, part of an independent Baptist ministry with which the Francoviches cooperate. The Yanadi have become an inspiration to the congregation and the community for their firm stand against temptation, say the Frankoviches, whose ministry is supported by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's Global Missions Offering.

One test came when many Dayspring members began to skip church to work in a harvest paying 70 rupees (\$2) a day. "That was a great bonus for poor people," says Robbi Francovich. But the Yanadi, who catch and sell fish for 10 rupees each or kill rats for farmers for a two-rupee bounty, refused to join them.

"The pastors urged senior Christians to learn a lesson from their Yanadi 'babes in Christ,'" Robbi Francovich said.

Another test came when two men returned to their tribal custom of drinking "kallu," a beer brewed from the palm tree. They became drunk and abusive but repented in tears after others reminded them of the miracle of their Easter conversion. One Yanadi scolded the men, reminding them that the Francoviches "hugged and kissed us even though we were shabby and had a bad smell," the missionaries reported.

The Fellowship, a moderate Baptist organization based in Atlanta, focuses on "unreached people groups" in its global missions program.

This year's \$4.5 million Global Missions Offering goal will test the level of support for the CBF approach, says Global Missions Coordinator Keith Parks.

While overall giving to the Fellowship has leveled off in recent years, support for the Global Missions Offering has continued to grow. The 1996-97 offering raised \$3,984,810 -- less than the \$4.25 million goal but 12 percent above 1995-96. Parks acknowledged reaching \$4.5 million in 1997-98 will be a challenge but said it is needed if the Fellowship is to expand its 143-missionary force.

"Early in CBF's history, we had money coming faster than missionary candidates," Parks said. "That created a false impression that we had plenty and may have reduced the urgency of giving. Now candidates are coming faster than money. We're waiting for income to catch up so we can seize the opportunities."

Jimmy Allen receives Maston award, cites those who shaped his 'journey'

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Honoring the legacy of T. B. Maston, a pioneer Baptist teacher of Christian ethics, speakers at an awards banquet recounted stories of other teachers who shaped their own faith journeys.

Jimmy Allen, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, received the T. B. Maston Christian Ethics Award, presented biennially by the T. B. Maston Foundation to recognize lifetime commitments to practical Christian living.

In a video tribute at the Nov. 21 dinner in Dallas, former President Jimmy Carter praised Allen as a "man of vision" and "volcanic energy" whom he characterized as "an excited and exciting Christian."

Carter called attention to the more than two dozen social ministries Allen led First Church of San Antonio to begin during his long pastorate there, as well as his denominational service, including ten years as president of Southern Baptists' Radio and Television Commission and his work with the Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University.

In accepting the award, Allen cited three people who influenced his life: Maston, the longtime professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; E. S. James, former editor of the Baptist Standard; and Earl L. Allen, Allen's father.

"We are to love folks just because they're folks -- because they are folks for whom Christ died," was one of the greatest lessons Allen said he learned from Maston during his doctoral studies under his direction.

Another enduring lesson came during a hallway conversation when Allen asked Maston to clarify his understanding of the Kingdom of God. "With the Maston twinkle in his eye and his forefinger tapping my chest, he said, 'Jimmy, I have the impression that the Kingdom of God and the God of the Kingdom are bigger than any of us can possibly understand,'" Allen recalled.

From editor James, Allen said he learned the importance of seeking and telling the truth.

From his father, who helped to restart McKinney Avenue Church in Dallas with just three cents in his pocket and reared his family in that downtown church building, he learned about the immediacy of God's presence and the personal nature of experiential religion. "The concept of God being present and active in human experience was not a theological proposition. It was a personal experience," he said.

Writer Will Campbell, who also spoke at the banquet, cited several people from whom he learned vital lessons about his own Baptist faith. Among them, a Jewish army buddy, civil-rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., and a "Baptist brother" who headed the "Maoist wing" of the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina.

When he was growing up in rural Amite County, Mississippi, Campbell said everyone he knew was Baptist. Campbell said he met a Jew for the first time during his service in the U.S. Army in World War II, and from him he learned that Baptists were not the only persecuted people who treasured religious liberty.

From King, Campbell said he learned the power of unconditional love and forgiveness in the face of hatred, injustice and prejudice.

"I learned a lot from that young Baptist preacher," he said.

While he was working as a civil-rights organizer in the South with the National Council of Churches, Campbell met and ministered to the family of a leader of one branch of the Ku Klux Klan. Campbell termed his Klan group the "Maoist wing" because all of the other splinter groups were revisionists and compromising moderates who weren't really serious.

Campbell asked him what the Klan stood for and he said "peace, harmony and freedom" for white Americans. Asked how his group worked toward those goals, he said by "any means necessary" -- terrorism, intimidation, guerrilla warfare or murder, if necessary. Then the Klansman took Campbell aback by saying it was the same means the U.S. military was using to achieve its goals in Vietnam.

"So I learned from my Baptist brother that we are a nation of Klansmen, a nation founded on violence and racism," Campbell said.

He also named other Baptists such as "Grandma Bertha" who taught him mercy and toughness, a country preacher who taught him about soul liberty, teachers at Louisiana College and Yale Divinity School who taught him Baptist history, and even those who have divided the Southern Baptist Convention.

"What have I learned from them?" he asked. "I have learned that if there is such a thing as a personal devil -- and the older I get the more convinced I am that there is such a thing -- what better way to give him full sway, what better way to destroy the Jesus movement, than to convince the masses that true Christianity is a movement of hate, deception and disruption."

The cause of Christ suffers when it is corrupted and compromised by "electronic soul molesters ... and mega-steeple apostates," he said.

"When the masses come to accept all that as the reason for God coming into human history, as the reason for our Lord's cross, ... you have not emasculated the Christian movement, you have killed it," Campbell said. "And the devil celebrates the victory."

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