



# Associated Baptist Press

Editor: **Bob Allen**  
Executive editor: **Greg Warner**

Phone: 800.340.6626  
Fax: 904.262.7745  
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

March 28, 2000

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Nashville, Tennessee

(00-26)

## IN THIS ISSUE:

APR 12 2000

- Professor credits missions auxiliary as shaper of social ministry in SBC
- Texas WMU leader announces retirement
- Longtime pastor named to theology school faculty

### Professor credits missions auxiliary as shaper of social ministry in SBC

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- Woman's Missionary Union has played a primary role in engaging Southern Baptists in evangelistic social ministry over the last century, says a university professor.

From early in the 20th century, the Southern Baptist Convention auxiliary combined ideas from the "social gospel" movement with evangelistic zeal to create a unique emphasis on social ministry, said Carol Crawford Holcomb, religion professor at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, a Baptist-affiliated school in Belton, Texas.

Holcomb recently addressed a regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion. She presented a paper titled "The Kingdom at Hand: The Social Gospel and the Personal Service Department of Woman's Missionary Union."

The professor defined the social gospel as "an ethical/theological movement of the late 19th century that emerged in response to the challenges of industrialization, urbanization and immigration. It emphasized the social teachings of Jesus, social and individual salvation, the immanence of God and the perfectibility of humanity."

Many conservative Christians scorned the social gospel, arguing it would water down the call to Christian conversion and promote a theology of salvation by works instead of faith.

And while leaders of the WMU did not adopt a formal social-gospel theology, the movement influenced the women's organization started in 1888 from early on, Holcomb said, citing research published in her doctoral dissertation from Baylor University.

She traced the roots of that influence to Fannie E.S. Heck, a North Carolina native who served as national WMU president from 1892 to 1894 and again from 1906 to 1915. Heck was "singularly responsible for establishing a department within WMU that focused attention on social service," Holcomb maintained.

Unlike many of her contemporaries, Heck "found the impetus for social work within the mandate for missions," Holcomb said. "At no time did she consider social ministry to be separate from mission work or in competition with the goal of individual salvation."

While many other Southern Baptists insisted that social work was secondary to evangelism, Heck presented social service as "an intrinsic part of the missionary enterprise," Holcomb said.

The Personal Service Department established by WMU under Heck's leadership became a major force in involving Baptist women in social ministry, Holcomb said. "In 1912, personal service was added to the Standard of Excellence for WMU, requiring societies to participate in personal service in order to meet a rating of 'excellence' in WMU work."

Lulie Wharton, the department's first director, defined personal service as an effort to apply the religion of Jesus Christ to the social problems of the day, Holcomb noted.

Southern Baptists' interest in social work later became influenced by the work of other Christian denominations, particularly the Methodists, Holcomb said, and by social reformers from both the North and South.

The WMU organization led Southern Baptists to understand salvation to include not only life after death but improving life on earth as well, Holcomb reported.

She quoted WMU literature from early in the century that advocated this position. "The effort to bring people to 'salvation' meant more than a personal confession," she said. "Full salvation ... included both a changed spiritual condition and a changed physical condition."

Despite criticism, Southern Baptist women successfully shaped missions and ministry in the 20th century with their unique blend of evangelism and social ministry, Holcomb concluded. "The lasting influence of social gospel ethics on Baptist women is revealed in their commitment to social work."

This theology of service has again come under criticism from some quarters today, Holcomb said.

The WMU established a women's training school adjacent to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., in 1907. It later became part of the seminary and was renamed the Carver School of Missions and Social Work to honor W.O. Carver, the school's mentor and first professor who lectured nearly every student who attended until his death in 1954.

The seminary voted to close the Carver School in 1995 over philosophical differences about social-work education and recently returned nearly \$1 million in Carver School endowment funds back to control of WMU.

"History has come full circle," Holcomb said. "After 90 years, WMU is still invested in the vision of social service initiated by Fannie Heck in 1909."

-30-

## **Texas WMU leader announces retirement**

By Ken Camp

CEDAR HILL, Texas (ABP) -- Longtime Texas missions leader Joy Fenner has announced that she will retire early next year.

Fenner, 65, has been executive director treasurer of Woman's Missionary Union of Texas since 1980. Before that, she worked seven years as a staff member in the statewide missions organization.

Fenner said in a memo to the state WMU executive board that she plans to retire Feb. 28, 2001. Announcing her plans now, she said, would allow a personnel committee "ample time to review the profile and position description, to receive recommendations and evaluate them, and to prayerfully make the selection of a person to be nominated to the executive board."

Earlier in her career, Fenner and her husband, Charlie, were Southern Baptist missionaries in Japan 14 years.

-30-

## **Longtime pastor named to theology school faculty**

ATLANTA (ABP) -- A veteran pastor and former seminary professor has been named to the faculty of Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology.

Peter Rhea Jones announced his resignation March 26 after more than 20 years as pastor of First Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga. He intends to become professor of preaching and theology at McAfee school July 1, officials at the school in Atlanta announced the following day.

Jones, 62, taught New Testament interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., 11 years before coming to the suburban Atlanta congregation in 1979. He chaired Southern's New Testament department from 1972 until 1974.

He is widely regarded an expert on the parables of Jesus. He has written two books on the subject: "The Teaching of the Parables," published by Broadman Press in 1982, and "Studying the Parables of Jesus," by Smyth and Helwys last year.

"Dr. Jones is a premier preacher who has given strong leadership to First Baptist Decatur for two decades," said Alan Culpepper, dean of the McAfee School of Theology. "We are excited and grateful that he will now bring his experience and scholarship to the McAfee School of Theology."

Culpepper said Jones is "uniquely suited to teach the calling and craft of preaching."

Jones' appointment comes on the heels of a sudden resignation by another McAfee professor Jan. 31. Paul Duke, professor of preaching and worship for three years, stepped down for "personal reasons," according to Mercer officials, who refused further comment.

A native of Dyersburg, Tenn., Jones is a graduate of Union University with master's degrees from the University of Mississippi and Princeton Theological Seminary and both a master's and a doctorate from Southern Seminary.

He has previously held student and interim pastorates at more than a dozen Baptist churches in Kentucky, Tennessee, New Jersey, New York and West Virginia.

He and his wife, Ellen Miles Jones, are parents of three adult children.

The McAfee School of Theology was established in 1994. It is one of eight Mercer schools and colleges enrolling a combined 7,000 students. Most programs are located on the school's main campus in Macon, Ga., but a few, including the theology school, are at Mercer's Cecil B. Day campus in Atlanta.

-30-

-- By ABP staff

**END**

---