



Associated Baptist Press

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(01-20)

March 8, 2001

MAR 14 2001

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Supreme Court declines review of banned valedictory address

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Declining to intervene in the gray area between free-speech rights and the Constitution's ban on establishment of religion, the U.S. Supreme Court has turned down the appeal of a high-school student barred from giving a graduation speech deemed too religious by a California school district.

Left standing by the high court March 5 was a ruling by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that actions by officials from the Oroville Union High School District "were reasonably taken" to avoid excessive church-state entanglement.

The case involved a 1998 speech submitted in advance by a co-valedictorian that urged fellow students to accept Christ as Savior. School officials said the speech, as well as a prayer submitted in Jesus' name by a fellow student, were too sectarian for a public-school graduation. Both students refused to tone down the religious content of their messages, and the district prohibited them from being delivered.

Barred from delivering the messages, co-valedictorian Chris Niemeyer and Ferrin Cole, the student elected to lead the graduation prayer, filed suit in district court. The case subsequently was appealed to the 9th Circuit.

Citing the U.S. Supreme Court's 2000 ruling against organized school-sponsored prayer at public-school football games, the appellate court ruled in favor of the school district.

"We conclude the district officials did not violate the students' freedom of speech," the court said. Refusing the submitted remarks "was necessary to avoid violating the Establishment Clause," the court ruled.

Cole's invocation prayer would not have been "private speech," the court decided, because of school district's authorization and the fact that only a student elected by classmates was allowed to speak.

Whether Niemeyer's speech was private or school sponsored, the appeals court said, was a tougher call. "Nonetheless, we conclude the district's plenary control over the graduation ceremony, especially student speech, makes it apparent Niemeyer's speech would have borne the imprint of the district."

The case is Niemeyer v. Oroville Union High School District, 00-1074.

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Two faculty holding out from signing Baptist creed

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Two of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's 89 faculty members are resisting a requirement that they sign the revised "Baptist Faith and Message" statement.

Meanwhile, seminary trustees March 6 approved a new dean of students, hired a Texas pastor as associate professor of pastoral ministry, granted promotions to seven faculty members and elected a Fort Worth, Texas, pastor chairman of the trustee board.

The names of the two holdouts on signing the 2000 version of "Baptist Faith and Message" were not disclosed. But President Ken Hemphill said both teach in the School of Theology.

"They are men of integrity," he said, who are struggling with whether they can sign the faith statement in good conscience.

Though overwhelmingly approved by messengers to the 2000 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, the revised faith statement has been criticized by some Baptists for removing language about Jesus being "the criterion by which Scripture is interpreted" and insisting that females cannot be pastors.

Hemphill said he discussed the matter with trustees during their March 5-7 meeting on campus and now must go back to those faculty members for further conversation.

The bottom line, however, is "we will keep good faith with the Southern Baptist Convention" and "we will keep faith with our bylaws," Hemphill said.

Trustees previously amended the seminary's bylaws to require all faculty to sign the "Baptist Faith and Message" in whatever form it is adopted or changed by the SBC.

If the two Southwestern faculty members continue to resist signing the revised faith statement, that apparently would result in their termination.

Hemphill said all faculty are required to sign the faith statement and pledge to teach "in accordance with and not contrary to it." This requirement applies equally to new faculty, current faculty, adjunct faculty and retired faculty teaching adjunctively, he said.

"Nobody is grandfathered," Hemphill said. Trustees, however, "do have the ability to permit anyone to teach," Hemphill said in response to a question about whether some retired faculty have been exempted. He did not indicate that anyone has received an exemption from signing the revised "Baptist Faith and Message."

David Crutchley, dean of the School of Theology, said the deadline for faculty signatures is before the start of next academic year, in August.

By that point, anyone who will teach at Southwestern must have signed the faith statement, he said.

During their March meeting, trustees named David McQuitty dean of students. He succeeds Lawrence Klemptner, who retired in December as vice president for student services. McQuitty will carry the same responsibility, but with the new title that in essence makes him a hybrid between a dean and a vice president.

McQuitty, 56, is a graduate of the University of Northern Colorado, Dallas Baptist University and Southwestern Seminary. He has been director of student financial aid at the seminary.

Larry Ashlock, pastor of Crestview Baptist Church in Midland, was elected associate professor of pastoral ministry.

Ashlock, 46, is a graduate of Baylor University and Southwestern Seminary. He has served five Texas Baptist churches as pastor and has been active in associational and denominational work.

Two Southwestern faculty members were named distinguished professors -- preaching professor Al Fasol and theology professor Bert Dominy. Others receiving promotions included Doug Blount, Karen Bullock, Paul Gritz, Stephen Stookey and Allen Lott.

Trustees also elected new officers.

Michael Dean, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, succeeds Miles Seaborn, a retired Fort Worth pastor, as chairman. Dean was elected without opposition.

Seaborn was a founder of the new Southern Baptists of Texas Convention formed in opposition to the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Dean's church, however, remains aligned with the BGCT and is not reported by SBTC to be an affiliated church.

David Allen, pastor of MacArthur Boulevard Baptist Church in Irving, Texas, was elected vice chairman. Matthew McKellar, pastor of Sylvania Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas, was re-elected secretary of the board.

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Seminary projecting budget growth despite Texas funding reduction

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary does not anticipate a reduction in funding from Texas Baptist churches as a result of changes adopted by the Baptist General Convention of Texas last fall.

Seminary trustees, meeting in Fort Worth, Texas, March 5-7, adopted a 2001-2002 budget for the Southern Baptist Convention seminary that is 3.43 percent larger than the current year's budget. The budget projects a 1.5 percent increase in Cooperative Program income.

President Ken Hemphill explained in an interview after the vote that he does not anticipate losing money from Texas, despite a change in the Cooperative Program budget recommended to Texas churches by the BGCT.

BGCT messengers in October voted to cap undesignated gifts to the six SBC seminaries at \$1 million, a move designed to free up to \$4.3 million in additional money for three BGCT-related theology schools.

According to the formula adopted by the BGCT, the bulk of that \$1 million would go to Southwestern because the Fort Worth seminary enrolls by far the largest number of Texans. Even so, if all Texas churches followed the new giving plan, the total amount sent to Southwestern through the BGCT would be decreased.

Texas Baptist churches still have the option of giving however they desire, though -- which could be along the recommended budget lines or could be unchanged from the past. Hemphill acknowledged no one knows yet how many churches will choose the various options.

"I do not believe 100 percent will go with the new designated plan," he said. "Some will stay with the traditional plan. Some will identify with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention." Still others, he suggested, might follow the BGCT's defunding of other seminaries but give designated money to Southwestern.

While trying to budget conservatively, "we feel very confident God is going to supply our needs," he said.

The seminary's \$29.6 million budget for 2001-2002 projects \$10.34 million in Cooperative Program income, \$7.45 million in student fees income, \$4.24 million in income from invested funds, \$260,786 in income from gifts and grants, \$2.75 million in student aid income and \$134,982 in income from other operating sources.

Business Vice President Hubert Martin explained to trustees that the budget includes a \$5 per semester hour fee increase for most master's-level students, bringing tuition to \$90 per semester hour. He reminded trustees this charge to students represents about 29 percent of the actual cost of their education, with the remaining 71 percent subsidized by the SBC Cooperative Program and other seminary donors.

By comparison, for example, tuition at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary is \$379 per semester hour. Baptist students with no academic merit scholarships actually pay about \$150 per semester hour at Truett.

One of the rationales for funding changes offered by the BGCT Seminary Study Committee last fall was to create a more equal playing field between the six SBC seminaries and the three Texas schools -- Truett, Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University and Hispanic Baptist Theological School. Texas students ought to be able to attend one of the BGCT schools for the same expense of attending an SBC school, they contended.

Whether this is perceived as a threat to Southwestern's enrollment was not openly discussed during the trustee meeting, although several trustees and administrators made strong appeals for student-recruitment efforts. However, those comments were made in the context of citing increased competition from three other SBC schools -- Southeastern Seminary in North Carolina, Southern Seminary in Kentucky and Midwestern Seminary in Missouri.

Southwestern's positive budget outlook in light of potential loss of funding from some Texas churches stands in contrast to the reaction of at least one other SBC seminary. Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., has blamed the threatened loss of Texas funding as the reason for staff reductions and no faculty pay raises.

Southwestern trustees also heard positive reports on development efforts from Vice President Jack Terry. The seminary has set new records for donations in recent years and appears to be on track toward surpassing the \$7 million mark in donations this year, he said.

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Minister views today's youth as a 'generation of hope'

By Ken Camp

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Today's young people -- the so-called "millennials" -- represent a "generation of hope" in contrast to their older siblings and parents, says a veteran student minister.

Jerry Hendrix, student minister at Pioneer Drive Baptist Church in Abilene, Texas, drew upon his 23 years of experience in youth ministry to identify for state Acteens leaders the distinctive qualities of "Generation 2K." Hendrix led a seminar titled "Who are these kids?" for missions leaders March 2-3 at Baylor University.

The millennial generation, variously identified as those born since 1977 or 1981, was part of a second baby boom and the group numbers 72 million. That makes it the second-largest generation in United States history.

"They will be the dominant adult group of the next century," Hendrix said. "They will have the kind of influence on this new century that the baby boomers had on the last one."

Hendrix noted key characteristics of the millennials:

-- "They thrive on change," he said. Whether it is the rapidly changing images of a music video or computer screen, or whether it is changes in society and its norms, the current generation of young people draws energy from that constant change.

-- "They live in a multi-cultural world," he noted. The millennials have grown up with ethnic, racial and cultural diversity, and they are accustomed to it. At the same time, they have experienced the counter-trend of a growing sense of racial and ethnic division.

-- "They come from diverse families," he added. Fewer than half of the millennials spent their childhood with both parents.

-- "They make spontaneous decisions," he said. The millennials watch and participate in "extreme sports," and they thrive on the challenge of making quick, intuitive decisions and taking risks.

-- "They believe in almost any expression of a Higher Being or Higher Power. They resist any claim that one faith system is superior or exclusive," he said. The millennials readily accept the existence of God, but they tend to resist the exclusive message of the New Testament, Hendrix noted. They believe in God, but they have a hard time believing that Jesus is the only way to God.

-- "They resist absolutes," he said. They affirm many things as true, but they resist exclusive claims of unchanging truth. They accept fewer ethical absolutes or limitations on personal behavior and lifestyle choices. "They think 'True Love Waits,' but only 'til you're 18."

While not all these characteristics make the current generation of students prime candidates for Christianity, Hendrix maintained that in some respects they are closer to the kingdom than the generations before them.

Unlike the materialistic baby boomers or the cynical Generation X, the millennials have a strong altruistic tendency. They are willing to take risks, cross cultures and adjust to changing circumstances.

"I believe they are the next generation of heroes," Hendrix said. "They have a new openness to missions. They want to help the world and improve the environment in which people live."

The challenge for the church is to disciple a generation that wants to be actively involved in mission without any grounding in doctrine, he noted.

While students may resist classroom-style instruction, he said, "They respond well to accountability groups and mentoring relationships. Mission projects are one of the best places for this to happen. ... The key to mentoring is doing together, and asking the probing questions as we work."

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Speakers at NAE meeting discuss 'charitable choice'

By Marv Knox

DALLAS (ABP) -- Social-service programs that seek to evangelize their clients will not qualify for direct federal grants, the head of President Bush's White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives told a gathering of conservative Christian leaders.

But that policy could lead to discrimination against evangelicals, warned the strategist who coined Bush's "compassionate conservative" slogan.

John DiIulio, head of the new White House office, and Marvin Olasky, editor of World magazine, both addressed the annual meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals March 7 in Dallas.

"Religious organizations can include specifically or strictly religious activities in their programs, but they cannot use public funds to pay for such activities," said DiIulio, who left a professorship at the University of Pennsylvania to take the White House job.

Olasky, however, contended that such a policy would discriminate against "Christ-drenched" programs that seek to change people's lives by leading them to salvation.

Olasky, a journalism professor at the University of Texas, advised Bush during his presidential campaign. Olasky described himself as "five-sixths a supporter of faith-based initiatives." The potential problem with the program, he said, is "the likelihood of discrimination against strong Christian programs."

"A strong Christian school is not just a strong school with a chapel tacked on," Olasky said, adding that what is taught in history, biology and math "show God at work."

"A strong anti-poverty program is Christian through and through," he said, explaining such programs affirm human worth, denounce sin and stress "the need to have a relationship with the heavenly Father."

A program ripe for discrimination is Teen Challenge, which insists the only cure for addiction is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, Olasky said. He cited a recent news story that reported DiIulio had said Teen Challenge could not qualify for federal funding.

"I hope John will clarify his position for us today," Olasky said.

DiIulio clarified, but apparently not the way Olasky had hoped.

"Under charitable choice (the umbrella program for government funding of social programs), community-serving organizations, both religious and secular, can seek federal support on the same basis as any other non-governmental providers of those services," he said. "Sacred places that serve civic purposes can seek federal -- or federal-state -- funding without having to divest themselves of their religious ... symbols."

Federal laws still apply, however, he added. "Faith-based providers that receive penny-one of public money cannot discriminate against beneficiaries on the basis of race, color, gender, age, national origin, disability or religion."

Religious organizations can "take religion into account in their employment decisions," he conceded, but they cannot discriminate "in hiring, firing or promotion decisions based on race, color, national origin, gender, age and disability."

The laws also dictate the range of programs in which government funds can be used, he said.

"Charitable choice flatly prohibits federal funds from being used 'for sectarian worship, instruction or proselytization,'" he explained.

One answer to this dilemma is for faith-based organizations to create "segregated accounts," he suggested. This structure would separate the religious and social functions of an organization so that "walled-off government funds" could be channeled to the non-religious components of the agency's work, but not to the religious functions.

Another answer is use of government vouchers, which actually would be accorded to the beneficiary of the services, not directly channeled to the faith-based organization, DiIulio said.

This would allow a person to receive the religious agency's services without crossing constitutional lines, he said. It can be an option when secular organizations that provide the same services also are available, he added.

"The indivisibly conversion-centered program that cannot separate out and privately fund its inherently religious activities can still receive government support, but only via vouchers," he said.

Olasky affirmed vouchers. "Let beneficiaries choose from a variety of faith-based and secular programs," he said. "Vouchers avoid problems of discrimination, government entanglement and church-state relations."

DiIulio's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is taking on three challenges, he told the religious leaders.

"First, we aim to boost charitable giving, both human and financial," he said. This goal includes tax-code provisions that would permit 80 million non-itemizers, or 70 percent of all taxpayers, to deduct charitable contributions.

Second, the office is forming centers to monitor programs in five U.S. cabinet agencies -- Justice, Labor, Education, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development, he reported.

These centers will work to ensure that federal programs are "as accessible, open and hospitable to faith-based groups as possible," he said.

"Our third goal is to seed or expand selected model public/private programs that involved community-based organizations in meeting civic needs," he reported.

He told a news conference the office will work with several pilot programs this year and then make funds available to applicant organizations next year.

President Bush's faith-based initiative has drawn concern from two of his strongest allies within the Religious Right.

Both TV preacher Pat Robertson and preacher/political populist Jerry Falwell have expressed strong reservations.

"I really don't know what to do," Robertson, president of the Christian Coalition, told his "700 Club" TV audience. "This thing could be a real Pandora's box, and what seems to be a great initiative can rise up to bite the organizations as well as the federal government."

He expressed concern that public tax dollars could be channeled to religious groups he opposes, such as the Hare Krishnas, the Church of Scientology and Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

Falwell echoed those sentiments.

"I have deep concerns about the faith-based initiatives, but I am in support," he told the Beliefnet Internet news service. "My problem is not with the Bush presidency. My problem is where it might go under his successors."

Falwell specifically mentioned the Church of Scientology, Jehovah's Witnesses and Islam as being unworthy potential recipients of federal aid.

He also expressed concern about possible government intervention in ministries that receive public funding.

"I'm saying ..., 'Be careful,'" he noted. "That's how it works in most of the socialist countries. Be very careful that you don't surrender any of your freedoms, any of your liberties."

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Diverse groups agree to disagree in charitable-choice statement

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Groups on opposite sides of the debate over whether to provide tax dollars to religious ministries issued a joint statement on Feb. 27 listing points of agreement and disagreement over "charitable choice" initiatives.

The statement was the culmination of more than a year of discussions convened by the American Jewish Committee and the Feinstein Center for American Jewish History at Temple University.

The document -- "In Good Faith: A dialogue on government funding of faith-based social services" -- includes a list of about 10 non-financial ways government can support faith-based groups, such as inviting faith community representatives to join community task forces.

The group also listed 12 areas of agreement concerning government funding of certain religious organizations to provide social services. They said that organizations that are affiliated with a house of worship but are separate institutions performing only secular functions should be able to continue their long practice of eligibility for tax dollars.

Beneficiaries of such services should not be discriminated against on the basis of their religion in admitting them to the program, agreed the signers. Also, beneficiaries should be made aware about the religious nature of the program and notified of other secular alternatives, they said.

Other areas of agreement on funding were reached, but the group also made clear their disagreements.

The signers said groups in the discussion "remain deeply divided about 'charitable choice.'" The document includes a section "in favor" of and one "opposed to" charitable choice.

Supporters call it "an innovative and carefully crafted means to expand government financial collaboration with religious organizations to meet critical social needs." Opponents say it "undermines governmental neutrality toward religion and promotes government funded discrimination."

Among the document's 14 drafters was Melissa Rogers, former general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee. Groups signing the document included the BJC, American Jewish Committee, Call to Renewal, Catholic Charities, Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, National Association of Evangelicals, American Baptist Church's National Ministries and the Salvation Army.

At an event to release the document sponsored by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, religious leaders from faith-based social-service organizations weighed in.

Lynn Bergfalk, formerly pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., is now heading the church's separate social-service arm, City Gate. He said as director of a separate nonprofit arm he could say yes to government funding with certain caveats. "But as a pastor of a church, I think I would still have to say no," he added.

Bergfalk, a board member of the BJC, said that for a "pervasively sectarian" organization, like a house of worship, government funding continues to be a "bad idea."

"Those of us who come out of free-church and dissenting religious traditions know that there are centuries of history that warn us of the mischief that can come out of collaboration -- and certainly an alliance -- between church and state," he said.

Bergfalk also warned about the church losing its unique ability to critique systems of injustice within society. "When you're part of the system, it's easier to be conformed to it than to change it," he said.

Another service provider -- Donna Jones of the Cookman United Methodist Church in Philadelphia -- was more open to the new funding initiative.

"Our basic issue with charitable choice is that it opens a door for us that in the past had been closed, and also it recognized the work that community-based churches have been doing for decades, if not centuries, to enable their community to step up," she said.

"It provided us resources to do what we were already doing, and provided greater capacity for us to meet the needs of our people," Jones added.

Lieberman calls for respect for religions, not mere tolerance

By Jeff Huett

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Describing a "new spiritual awakening" in America, Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., said there is growing respect for the "multiplicity" of faiths that, unlike previous revivals, is not merely an expression of tolerance.

Lieberman made this observation at the March 1 project launch of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Lieberman, the first Jewish candidate to run on a major party presidential ticket, referred to a recent Public Agenda survey that found most people who want religion to play a larger role in the public square are keenly aware of the consequences of doing so.

"It suggests that pushing out the boundaries between church and state to pull the best forces of faith into our public life need not become a pitched, Promethean struggle," Lieberman said.

Lieberman offered qualified praise for President George W. Bush's proposed faith-based initiatives that would make pervasively religious organizations able to compete for billions of tax dollars. "I think the president has made a convincing case for the constructive contributions that faith-based groups can make to meeting real social needs," he said.

However, he raised questions about how religious groups will be selected to receive funds, the problem of discrimination in hiring in federally funded projects and the church-state issues involved in funding pervasively religious groups.

In a panel discussion that followed, Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said that religion has always been a part of American life. During political campaigns, Saperstein said, discussions of religion "can help explain who candidates are and what they are about." He said candidates should express their opinions on religious policy debates and let the public know how their own religion will inform their policy views.

Saperstein warned, however, against lawmakers supporting or opposing legislation solely on religious grounds. He also said legislators and candidates for office should minimize their use of divisive religious language.

"As long as it's not a political tool, then religion in public and government life should not be feared," Saperstein said.

Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Texas, said the issue should not be whether religion should be kept out of government but whether government should be kept out of religion. "God was left out of the U.S. Constitution by intention, not by mistake," Edwards said. "Madison and Jefferson understood that politicians could not resist the temptation to use religion for their own benefit."

The panelists also discussed Bush's faith-based plans. Rep. Mark Souder, R-Ind., said "charitable choice" initiatives are a way "to get passionate people involved in the government process." He said the program is targeted at faith-based groups who are not part of the "traditional structure" and may not be experienced in writing funding grants.

White House faith-based officer gave 10 percent of income to charity

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- John DiIulio, head of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and his wife have given about 10 percent of their after-tax income to charitable organizations, according to the Associated Press.

He called the \$125,000 in donations since 1996 not enough. He and his wife hope to increase their giving to 25 percent of their income, stated the news report.

"I don't think this represents any kind of a model for anyone," said DiIulio. "Everybody should do the best they can do, and I'm sure I can do better."

DiIulio released the information about his contributions after The Associated Press asked about them. The AP stated, "He is not required to release the information and was initially reluctant to do so, but he said he concluded that it was an appropriate question given his new job."

DiIulio currently earns no salary for his White House job, he said, but beginning April 1 will make about \$130,000 to \$140,000 per year. He noted that this is a pay cut.

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-- By ABP staff

Students from Baptist college dig for clues about ancient Israel

By Lacy Thompson

PINEVILLE, La. (ABP) -- Beth-Shemesh, a town mentioned in the Old Testament, lay in the foothills of Judah, about 15 miles southwest of present-day Jerusalem.

Families lived in simple but ingeniously designed homes built with mud bricks. Pillars divided the center living area -- where cooking and weaving were done -- from areas on either side for animals, who were kept under roof with their families.

Sleeping areas were on a second level.

Homes contained everyday items, like pottery water jars, a weaving loom and cooking items. But there were also prized items. A pottery bowl used to carry meat from animal sacrifices back to the house for eating would have been marked "kadosh," the Hebrew word for "holy." It was used only for this purpose; any other use would render it unclean.

How do we know? Written records about daily life almost 3,000 years ago are scarce. However, a different kind of record lies buried in Israeli soil. A group of students from a Baptist college in Louisiana spent part of last summer uncovering important clues.

Louisiana College in Pineville, La., last summer launched a program of sending a small group of students and professors to "the ideal classroom," a six-week archeological dig in the Middle East.

The group visited historical sites in Israel and Jordan the first two weeks. They spent the next four working intensively on the excavation of Beth-Shemesh, a city destroyed by Assyrians in 701 B.C.

A strategic border town, Beth-Shemesh felt the influence of Canaanite, Philistine and Israelite cultures. It was in the land of Samson, who fell for the femme fatale Delilah, who lived not far away in Timnah.

First Samuel 6 reports that it was there the Philistines returned the captured Ark of the Covenant. A decisive battle at Beth-Shemesh took place between the kings of Israel and Judah when those kingdoms were divided.

Students from Louisiana College worked at the dig with students from two other universities in the United States. Religion professors Fred Downing and Carlton Winbery accompanied them.

Winbery is chair of Louisiana College's religion department. Downing is a veteran of archaeological digs.

The summer dig was designed as a field school -- complete with training sessions, workshops and lectures. Some informal lectures took place over the course of an afternoon while students cleaned and sorted their daily finds.

Excavations have gone on at the current site since 1990. There have been two previous digs there, but this is the first in about 60 years. Actual digging is completed during four weeks in the summer. Discovered artifacts will be studied and reported in coming months, in preparation for more digging next summer.

The work was exhausting and sometimes tedious. Days began with a wake-up call at 4 a.m. At 4:45 the group stumbled onto a bus for a 15-minute ride to the excavation site through the Valley of Elah, where the Bible says David fought Goliath and farmers today grow watermelons alongside shepherds who tend their sheep as they have for centuries.

The group "moved dirt" in a remarkable fashion, Downing reported. In fact, directors of the dig agreed this was the best year ever for the decade-long project.

"The Louisiana College students gained the reputation of a hard-working group who quickly learned some of the important techniques required for archaeological field work," Downing said. "The rigor with which they worked paid off in the quality and quantity of the finds."

By the end of the dig, the Louisiana College group had excavated 23 of the 40 layers recorded for the summer. They moved 7,802 buckets of dirt, weighing a total of about 309,000 pounds. Of 99 new artifacts found, the Louisiana students accounted for 65.

Some were significant finds. Students found loom weights, which were used by women for work in the home. They found figurines used in worship of ancient gods. They found pottery, grinding stones and jug stoppers.

They also found what is known as a lamelech jar, a storage jar inscribed with "lamelech," which meant "to the king." The inscription identified the jar as coming from the king's storage room. It likely was used to transport food to troops.

Anything with writing is an exciting find, Downing and Winbery said. Especially the "kadosh" writing found on fragments of an ancient bowl. It is extremely rare, they said. Only two or three such fragments had ever been found before.

Add one more to the total, thanks to Louisiana College students who found one this summer. "This would have been one of the family's prized possessions," Downing said.

Not only did the students find the home's prized possession, they found the house itself. They uncovered evidence of the pillars that divided the sections and cobblestone pavement marking the areas for holding animals.

It was an important discovery, Downing said. "Until this season, no architectural remains had been found in [this particular area]. Important finds had been made, ... but there were no buildings to go with the finds. The discovery of the 'pillared' building by the Louisiana College students was, therefore, quite significant."

Zvi Ledermann, the project's co-director, agreed. "The excavations gave us a rare view of an eighth century B.C.E. domestic house, dug in modern, careful method," he noted.

"This is one great contribution," he continued. "If that is not enough to make one happy, what can? I am already so excited about next summer."

Ledermann and other leaders were so impressed with the work that they invited Louisiana College to become a sponsor for the dig. Downing and Winbery described it as a high honor for the college, noting that few Baptist schools are sponsors for excavations. The school can accept the invitation, however, only if it is able to raise enough funds.

Meanwhile, Winbery and Downing are planning for a second expedition next summer. The professors say the experience is important both for the students and for what the work reveals about the ancient world.

"What it does is recreate a context in which events took place, ... and that helps us understand those events better," Winbery said. "At a site like Beth-Shemesh, you rake the grass off the top of the ground and take the sod off the top of it, and you're back in pre-Christian times."

"And in terms of biblical archaeology," he continued, "you're in the center of the world."

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