



# Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Bob Allen  
Executive editor: Greg Warner

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

August 21, 2001

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Nashville, Tennessee

(01-65)

AUG 27 2001

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- Baptist school marks anniversary of landmark voluntary integration
- New book finds faith in Simpsons
- Church leaves CBF over anti-gay policy
- Church restoring Christian mural that brought peace to neighborhood

### **Baptist school marks anniversary of landmark voluntary integration**

By Teresa Young

PLAINVIEW, Texas (ABP) -- This summer marks the 50th anniversary of a small Texas Baptist college's decision to integrate, making it the first four-year liberal arts college in the former Confederate South to take the step.

Annie Taylor's decision to apply to Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, Texas, wasn't about race but convenience. But her acceptance by the school affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas drew international media attention as an early blow to segregation.

Taylor, then a 48-year-old black teacher from Floydada, Texas, needed a few classes in order to keep her teacher certification. Her alma mater, Prairie View A&M College, more than 600 miles away, was one option. A school in Austin, about 400 miles away, was the closest option open to African Americans. Wayland College, meanwhile, sat just 30 miles away.

But it was 1951, a time when laws still separated blacks from whites in restaurants, restrooms, drinking fountains and public transportation. It was three years before the landmark case *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against segregation in public schools.

"The legislature had just passed the Gilmer-Aikin Bill, which increased requirements for public-school teachers. In order to keep their jobs, they had to take classes and get certified," explained Wayland professor Estelle Owens, who serves as the university's official historian. "She just walked in the door and asked [then-registrar] Audrey Boles what people would do if she applied at Wayland."

It's unknown whether she thought she'd be accepted. Owens said Taylor, a Baptist herself, likely felt that permitting her to enroll was the Christian thing to do.

As it turned out, she encountered a white college president who felt the same way.

As Wayland's president since 1947, J.W. "Bill" Marshall had already made a name for himself as a visionary. In 1948, he'd led the school to senior-college status. He also initiated a ban on smoking, drinking, dancing and playing cards either on or off campus, gaining national attention and prompting many to predict Wayland's demise. The opposite had proved true; enrollment increased.

So when Taylor presented herself as a potential student, Marshall saw it as an opportunity for the college to take another stand.

"He had thought about [integration] before and wasn't afraid of it," Owens said. "He was very loving and had already led the college in accepting Hispanics, students from South America, Asians and Native Americans. He knew if someone serious came and applied it should happen."

Owens said Marshall's childhood in Indian territory -- now Oklahoma -- made him open to all people, and "racism was something he could never understand."

"Marshall said, 'Jesus reckons with a person's soul, not his packaging,' and he saw that [Wayland] was doing the right thing," she added. "He said later, 'This is maximum Christianity applied as well as advocated, because nothing less would be acceptable.'"

In Owens' opinion, Marshall's push for integration wasn't based on a desire to make waves, but it was a bold step in the culture of the day.

"It was definitely going out on a limb," Owens said. "There was no tax money for support, just hundreds of sweet little ladies from places like Clarendon who sent in \$2 a month. He had to have the support. It was a very bold, brave thing to do."

After receiving Taylor's request, Marshall spent the next few days gauging campus opinion on integrating. At the urging of trustee Hope Owen -- then pastor at First Baptist Church of Plainview who later went on to become president of the university -- Marshall presented a secret ballot to the faculty on the question, "Should Negroes be admitted to Wayland College?" The faculty voted unanimously in favor.

The same secret ballot was posed to Wayland students gathered for chapel services late in the spring semester of 1951. Of the 274 students polled, nine voted no.

With this information in hand, Marshall approached the final decision-makers, the college's board of trustees, in a called meeting. Also attending the meeting were the pastors of First Baptist Church and College Heights Baptist Church, both of which had large numbers of Wayland students as members. Both churches had agreed that they would allow black students to join their congregations.

After a favorable hearing in the special meeting, a formal meeting was scheduled for May 31 to take a final vote.

Before the vote, trustees engaged in a lengthy discussion, with some arguing for integration and others arguing against it.

The minutes record of board president W.A. Mayes of Amarillo: "The color line has already been erased at Wayland College, and he wants to be one that is counted for it because he feels that is the board's place and position to back the president."

Yet others warned about intermarriage, "mixing of the races" and suggested the need to have separate facilities for races. One trustee predicted doom for the university, stating, "The parents of students from my town would try to get their students out of Wayland if Negroes are accepted."

Despite some opposition, Marshall remained firm in his position, calling on common sense and Christian decency.

"We are coming to a new age, a new generation," the minutes record him as saying. "Wouldn't it be fine for Baptists to be the leaders? The best thing to do is to open the doors to our schools to all races."

In the end, the vote was 13-2 in favor of complete integration without any limitations, evidence of Owens' belief that Marshall had quite a following at the university.

The news of Wayland's voluntary integration reached far and wide. Local and regional papers carried the news, as did Time magazine. The November issue of Ebony magazine featured a six-page spread about the decision.

Taylor's application was processed, and she was enrolled in two classes when the school's summer term began June 4. Three other black students started the same day. A fifth enrolled for the second term.

Ernest Dykes, now a retired teacher and minister living in the Dallas area, said Wayland's acceptance of blacks meant he didn't have to travel for needed classes.

"I was teaching in Plainview and got a better job in Lubbock," he said. "They told me I needed some science courses. I tried up at [West Texas State University,] but they wouldn't accept us. I was told we had the right credentials but the wrong color."

Located just eight blocks from their home, Wayland was a much more convenient place for Dykes and his wife, Vera, to pick up a few summer courses. He remembers that summer as a positive experience, where he learned a little something about zoology and botany, as well as something about the goodness of others.

"I learned that there were all kinds of abilities and all nationalities and backgrounds," he said. "Some people feel that some races are above others academically, and you find that in all races. But people were very accepting of us."

Taylor went on to earn a master's degree and taught 49 years in Floydada schools before retiring in 1972. She died May 28, 1992.

-30-

-- Teresa Young works for Wayland Baptist University.

## **New book finds faith in Simpsons**

By Mark Wingfield

ORLANDO, Fla. (ABP) -- Don't have a cow, man, but Bart Simpson is about to hit bookstores nationwide as a poster child for American religion.

"The Gospel According to the Simpsons," to be published Sept. 1 by Westminster John Knox Press, devotes 164 pages to an examination of the spiritual lessons from the long-running animated TV series.

The show, once branded sacrilegious by many conservative Christians, offers a unique look at how the average American actually lives out a religious faith, claims Mark Pinsky, the new book's author.

Watching the show with his children to make sure it was appropriate for their viewing brought an epiphany for the religion reporter for the Orlando Sentinel. He was surprised by "the favorable way religion, in its broadest sense, was presented in the series, and what a central role faith played in the lives of the characters," he wrote in the book's introduction.

More than any other prime-time television series (except maybe "Touched by an Angel" or "Seventh Heaven"), "The Simpsons" presents an American family that experiences religious faith like many real American families, Pinsky said.

The Simpsons attend church every week. They pray. They seek God's help in times of crisis. They believe in a literal heaven and hell.

Try finding any of that in "Friends."

"The Simpsons are more like what most Americans do with their lives," Pinsky said in an interview. "They are most reflective of the habits of people on the other side of the screen. This is a reality show in a way that few other shows on television are reality shows."

And although it is just a TV show, its impact on how people think about religion may be more significant than most Christians would suspect, Pinsky argues.

"For all those folks who have argued that repeated exposure to sex and violence on the screen has a coarsening effect on more impressionable viewers, those folks ought to look at the corollary offered by the Simpsons," he said. "If repeated exposure to a family that believes and prays, . if you watch them week in and week out, might that not have a salutary effect in the same way?"

It's not that the Simpsons are ideal Christians, Pinsky readily acknowledges. Their failings, in fact, are part of what makes their religious experiences so real, he suggests.

His book examines these religious connections thematically, ranging from Homer Simpson's view of God and prayer to the influence of next-door neighbor Ned Flanders, an evangelical Christian, to the treatment of Catholics, Jews and other religious groups on the show.

Pinsky is an unlikely candidate to have drawn public attention to the connection between the Simpsons and Christianity. He describes himself as a middle-aged Jew who thinks most television programming is "of the devil."

Nevertheless, after watching a few episodes of the show and reading scripts from previous episodes, the veteran religion reporter quickly saw a surprising theme in the Simpsons' world. He wrote a piece about this for the Orlando Sentinel, one of the first published articles to point out the connection between religion and the Simpsons. That article was so well received that it inspired Pinsky to keep digging.

The result is this book. Pinsky already is considering writing a companion book of Sunday school lessons on the topic.

He believes the book will appeal to die-hard "Simpsons" fans and to serious Christians who never have watched a single episode but are curious about the topic. And it should have a big appeal to older youth and college-age students, who constitute a large share of the series' fan base.

Pinsky said he's already been getting calls from youth ministers who've heard about the book and want to get it. They are hopeful, he said, of using the book to create opportunities for reaching young adults.

Meanwhile, he's started work on another book that will be of particular interest to Southern Baptists. That project, "The Gospel According to Disney," will examine the religious messages found in selected Disney animated feature films.

-30-

## **Church leaves CBF over anti-gay policy**

By Bob Allen

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- A former Southern Baptist church has left the moderate breakaway group Cooperative Baptist Fellowship over what congregation leaders called discrimination against gays and lesbians.

Members of University Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, voted Aug. 15 to withdraw from the Atlanta-based CBF over a new policy against hiring gays or funding organizations that "condone, advocate or affirm homosexual practice."

University Baptist is thought to be the first congregation to leave the CBF, which separated from the Southern Baptist Convention in 1991 over a variety of theological issues, because of the funding policy.

The policy, adopted originally by the Fellowship's governing board, survived a challenge at this summer's General Assembly when delegates voted 701-502 against rescinding it for a yearlong study of where CBF churches stand on the issue.

The policy doesn't exclude homosexuals from membership but disallows budgeting funds for pro-homosexual causes. CBF leaders describe it as "welcoming but not affirming" of gays.

But a letter to CBF officials, signed by University Baptist leaders on behalf of the congregation, said the policy doesn't speak for Fellowship-friendly churches that both welcome and affirm homosexuals.

"We most deeply regret the condemning message you have sent in the name of Christ to all gay and lesbian persons," said the letter signed by Senior Pastor Larry Bethune, moderator Ellen Bell and Anthony Chapple, deacon chairman.

"We cannot in good conscience support an organization which discriminates against our brothers and sisters in Christ on the basis of their orientation any more than we could do so if the CBF discriminated on the basis of race or gender," the letter continued.

A CBF spokesman wasn't immediately available for comment.

The 400-member church, one of a small number of traditionally Southern Baptist congregations to come out in support of full inclusion of gays and lesbians, in the past defended itself against challenges from its association and state convention for its stance.

The Austin Baptist Association voted to oust the church in 1995 after University Baptist ordained a gay deacon. The Baptist General Convention of Texas executive committee withdrew fellowship in 1998.

Members of the church were present when the CBF was founded in 1991. It also belongs to American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and the Alliance of Baptists, a smaller and more liberal SBC splinter group that formed in 1986.

Stan Hastey, executive director of the Washington-based Alliance of Baptists, said he hasn't heard of any other churches discussing cutting ties with the CBF over its anti-gay funding policy, but some congregations are said to be thinking about reducing their level of support.

Dispute over the issue has also energized voices on the other side who contend the relatively close vote against a study is being misused by political opponents to cast the CBF as soft on homosexuality.

They say only a handful of 1,800 Fellowship-friendly churches have taken action to ordain homosexuals or perform a same-sex union. Most of the 500-plus individuals voting for a study, they say, weren't necessarily pro-gay but merely sympathized with those calling for dialogue on the subject.

In July, a self-described "centrist" Baptist leader wrote an open letter labeling a "fundamentalism of the left" within the CBF.

David Currie, executive director of Texas Baptists Committed, compared a minority of CBF members who advocate full inclusion of homosexuals with fundamentalists in the Southern Baptist Convention who won't tolerate divergent views from moderates.

In a letter to Baptists Committed members, Currie predicted the Fellowship "will not grow unless it is a traditional Baptist organization and not led by fundamentalists of the left."

"Baptists are conservative, Bible-believing, Jesus-following people," Currie wrote. "CBF must reflect that, as well as the Baptist General Convention of Texas."

Former CBF Coordinator Cecil Sherman told the Texas newspaper Baptist Standard that he also ran into rigidity from the left on issues of homosexuality and women in ministry.

Sherman said there were individuals more willing to destroy the CBF rather than compromise, a position he found reminiscent of conservatives who now control the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Fundamentalists were willing to tear up the SBC if they couldn't control it," Sherman said. "Fundamentalists of the left are willing to tear up CBF if they can't control it."

Hastey agreed there is nothing new about tension within CBF between its centrist and more liberal constituencies.

But Hastey disagreed that any left-of-center faction wants to control CBF. "The Texas influence dominates CBF life, in my opinion, and has from the beginning," he said. "There's always been, behind the scenes, a lot of talk about the relative conservatism of so-called moderates out there and what I have heard described as easterner elitism."

Years ago, Alliance and CBF leaders held conversations about the possibility of merging the two groups. Eventually those talks broke down, he said, because leaders from Texas felt "we were too far left of

center on women's issues and really off the charts when it came to homosexuality." That would keep CBF from attracting what one former leader "liked to call the tall-steeple churches in Texas," Hasteley recalled.

In their letter to CBF leaders, University Baptist representatives accused the organization's executive leadership of making "a political decision affecting theological identity," and then requiring membership to react by affirming or disaffirming its leaders.

The letter said the Fellowship "missed the opportunity to lead all Baptists on this issue" by allowing dialogue on the issue of homosexuals in the church. "We regret that the CBF Coordinating Council chose political expediency instead," the letter said.

The letter encouraged CBF leaders to "listen to voices of dissent among you in the days to come" and looked forward "to a day when all Baptists, including gay and lesbian Baptists, will feel welcome at the Lord's table and in the decision-making councils of our common Baptist life."

-30-

## **Church restoring Christian mural that brought peace to neighborhood**

By Michael Leathers

CHICAGO (ABP) -- The corner of Sheridan Road and Sunnyside Avenue on Chicago's north side used to be one of the most dangerous intersections in Uptown Baptist Church's neighborhood. Drug houses flourished. Eighteen rival street gangs roamed within a few blocks. Shootings claimed the lives of innocent children caught in crossfire.

Although life is still far from idyllic, the drug houses now have been rehabbed. Children play on the streets, seemingly without a care in the world. Gangs aren't as visible.

One of the few lingering signs of the neighborhood's violent past is its sidewalks, etched with gang graffiti years ago when the concrete was still wet. An occasional epitaph or the names of gangs is followed by the word "killer." Gangs would add that word to show disrespect for another gang. Offended rivals would often respond with deadly force.

According to Brian Bakke, Uptown's director of community ministries, it all changed because of a mural.

The "racial-reconciliation" mural -- a colorful collage stretching along the brick wall of the Unique Thrift Store -- first came together in 1995. That's when Bakke and artist Gregory King met with a half-dozen high school students twice a week for three months to brainstorm the design of a Christ-centered mural covering what at the time was a memorial to slain gang members.

Now, six years later, Baptist volunteers are working feverishly to save the mural, after a local official mistakenly gave another group permission to paint over it. Volunteers from the church, neighborhood and across the nation have been working six days a week since July to uncover and restore the original artwork.

Beginning from the left, the mural depicts God's creation of the earth, with plants and animals flowing from a starburst in the upper left corner. As eyes travel along the mural, they look up and rest on God's multicolored hand sprinkling silhouettes of different hues gliding through a blue expanse. A Bible verse tells people passing by that God said all of this was good.

The next section reveals humanity's sin -- symbolized by a medieval mace thundering down and shattering the earth. The words on the weapon's handle include "hatred," "lust," "racism," "envy." Shards from the broken earth fly to the right, where they recombine into a stained-glass Jesus surrounded by people of all

ages and races. Galatians 3:28, painted in bold letters from the top to the bottom of the wall, reminds onlookers that they are "one in Christ."

While steadily retouching a section of an earth demolished by sin, King said the mural delivers an important message to this community, where women are still abused by their husbands and boyfriends and racial tensions abound.

King, a Kentucky native who moved to Chicago in 1994 and began working on murals with Uptown Baptist from his first day here, moved to New York last year to further his career as an artist. He's been back in Chicago since July 10, after Bakke called to invite him to be part of the restoration process. The murals appeal to him, he said, because "I've always been interested in doing something beyond a studio experience with my art."

Other volunteer groups have joined King in the effort. About three dozen teens and young adults were on the job in late July, some perched on rented scaffolds and others seated with legs crossed on the sidewalk as they touched up scratches on the original mural.

Cans of open paint rested on tarps underneath the shade of five slender-trunked trees. Plastic ice-cube trays and muffin pans held different paint colors at bay in their compartments. Many painters were decked out in bizarre hats and sombreros that protected their faces from the sun and kept them in a jovial mood.

So far, Uptown Baptist has had two groups, with a combined average of 40 people, on site every workday since July 9. "We've been blessed with all these visiting groups from all over the country," King said.

Their work is a two-phase project, said Vadim Katznelson, a Chicago art conservator, born and raised in Russia, who has been supervising the restoration. The first step is removing new paint covering the original mural, brick by brick, using acetone. Several multi-gallon buckets of the solvent lurk along the sidewalk. Dipping cotton swabs on sticks -- they look like giant Q-Tips -- into the acetone, volunteers rub the soaked cotton gently across each brick.

It's meticulous and patient work. They must remove the top layer of paint while doing as little damage as possible to the original mural underneath. On an average, eight-hour day, one person can clean 25 or 30 bricks. Katznelson estimated there are more than 11,000 bricks in all forming the mural.

Most of the first phase was completed by late July, although several patches of paint, including a section obscuring the starburst, were still awaiting an acetone scrub. Jeff Palmberg, youth minister at Kalamazoo Covenant Church in Michigan, wearing his protective mask and rubber gloves, worked gently to uncover that section. He brought seven high-school students to work on the mural.

Farther down the wall, students like James Crouse and Mike McCoy seemed to hug the wall as they focused on recreating the detail of the original mural's artists. Both high-school students are from Orrville Christian Church in Ohio.

Beneath the original mural is another layer of artwork, Bakke said. When Uptown Baptist first prepared to paint the mural in 1995, Bakke sought out the neighborhood's gangs because the wall had been covered with tombstones -- a memorial to slain gang members. Receiving their permission was vital, he said, because the painters' lives would have been in danger if the gangs didn't approve.

Bakke explained the mural's concept to the gangs and that it was going to focus on Jesus Christ, and they gave the church the green light to proceed. When they painted over the tombstones, the shootings stopped immediately. Gang members put out the word that no one was to touch the wall, Bakke said.

Fifty people were involved in the original painting of the mural, ranging from teenagers to children, from homeless women to members of Uptown Baptist and other churches.

The restoration has cost about \$12,000, Bakke said, and many churches from across the country have sent money to help with the project. When it's all done, it will be sad news to merchants of nearby stores, where Bakke has been cleaning out entire shelves of supplies for the restoration. Bakke said the timetable is to be done by Sept. 2, when Uptown Baptist will hold an outdoor worship service and celebration.

However, there's one more step that Katznelson, the restoration supervisor, wants to see completed before any talk of a celebration gets too serious. Once both restoration phases are complete, the whole mural will receive a polyurethane coat to protect it from graffiti and similar damage. If some wayward graffiti mars the mural down the road, it will be an easy task to wipe it off.

-30-

**END**

---