



Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

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

October 16, 2002

**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES**

Nashville, Tennessee OCT 22 2002

(02-97)

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Baptists must rethink principles to reach postmoderns, speakers say
- News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

Baptists must rethink principles to reach postmoderns, speakers say

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Baptists will need to focus less on propositional truth and more on the quest for meaning to be relevant to a "postmodern" culture, said speakers at a conference on religious freedom and postmodernism.

David Wheeler, pastor of First Baptist Church in Los Angeles, said many Baptists have done evangelism by appealing to the reason of an "autonomous self" to accept or reject theological concepts contained in a fixed, sacred text. But those concepts are increasingly viewed as irrelevant to postmodernists, a name given to philosophers reacting against some of the basic ideas that produced the Enlightenment and defined western thought until the 20th century, Wheeler said.

Wheeler, however, said that Christians, and Baptist in particular, still have answers for the postmodern quest for meaning and community.

"When the self is an evolving project, and critical consciousness has dissolved the certain, there is still a quest for meaning and a quest for community," he said.

Instead of trying to prove Christianity by rational argument, Wheeler said Baptists should do what believers did before the modern age -- urge others to follow Jesus.

"To dare to follow Jesus -- and invite people to follow Jesus in their quest for meaning, in their quest for community -- could be tremendously effective in evangelism," Wheeler said.

Phyllis Rodgerson Pleasants, a church history professor from Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond in Virginia, said individualism and rationalism of a later era changed the way early Baptists viewed their quest for meaning.

Citing Baptist confessions of faith from the 1600s, she said: "Their accent mark was not on autonomous freedom. Their accent mark was not even on the autonomous congregation's freedom. Their accent mark was on people's freedom to follow the Lamb wheresoever the Lamb was going."

She said earlier Baptists understood the concept of following Christ in community better than their modern counterparts, who view discipleship in more individualistic terms. "They believed if God was revealing God's self, and you thought you had an inkling of that revelation, [then] God was going to reveal it to someone else," she said.

Both speakers said experiencing Christ in community is more valid to postmodernists than rational appeals based on the authority of texts or doctrines.

"The center is Jesus Christ, who never once said, 'say after me,' but commanded, 'follow me,'" Pleasants said.

"Instead of defending a certain set of dogmas, we [should] dare to listen to Jesus saying, 'Believe me, follow me,'" Wheeler said. "In doing so, we may find the highest degree of certainty possible in this postmodern age."

The conference, "Baptist Freedom in the 21st Century: Engaging the Postmodern Culture," took place Oct. 8-10 at the 200-year-old First Baptist Church of Washington, D.C. The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the Alliance of Baptists and American Baptists' Roger Williams Fellowship sponsored the meeting.

-30-

News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

Louisiana Baptists to consider tightening membership requirements

ALEXANDRIA, La. -- The Louisiana Baptist Convention will consider changing its constitution to define a "cooperating" church as one that supports both the state and Southern Baptist conventions through the Cooperative Program unified budget.

Currently, churches qualify for messengers at the state convention if they cooperate "monetarily," meaning designated gifts, also count.

"The only thing that separates us from Independent Baptists is the Cooperative Program," executive board member George Bannister said during discussion on the motion, which passed the group and now goes to the state convention this fall. "We need to set the guideline to say this defines us as Southern Baptists."

Other proposed changes to the constitution include adding the "Baptist Faith and Message" statement to its bylaws. A statement proposed for addition to another article in the constitution would pledge the state convention to conducting all its work "in accord with the principle that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant and infallible Word of God." (ABP)

Non-SBC churches not invited to Missouri state convention

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. -- The president of the Missouri Baptist Convention has directed that cards for registering messengers to the upcoming state convention annual meeting not be sent to six churches that have dropped affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Last year the Missouri convention unseated messengers from Second Baptist Church in Liberty, Mo., for the same reason, saying the state convention's constitution requires that cooperating churches also must be aligned with the SBC.

MBC president Bob Curtis said he made the decision so any messengers from the churches wouldn't be embarrassed by another showdown. In addition to Second, Liberty, the affected churches are Kirkwood Baptist Church and Delmar Baptist Church in St. Louis; First Baptist Church of Columbia; Broadway Baptist Church in Kansas City and Tryst Falls Baptist Church, according to the Baptist newspaper Word and Way. (ABP)

Lawyer gets support for friend-of-the-court brief

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. -- A Missouri lawyer has collected 1,657 individuals and 23 churches to sign on to a friend-of-the-court brief against legal action by the Missouri Baptist Convention against five convention agencies.

Bart Tichenor of Jefferson City completed a four-day tour of 12 cities to promote his effort Sept. 26. Tichenor said he made the tour to raise awareness of his effort to oppose lawsuit by convention leaders against five agencies that moved to self-perpetuating boards of trustees.

Tichenor said he encountered opposition at just two of the dozen sessions.

He said breach-of-contract charges against the agencies appear to seek unspecified monetary damages, in addition to legal costs. He said that contradicts statements by convention leaders that the lawsuit wasn't about money, but simply asks a court to decide whether the institutions broke the law by changing their charters without convention approval. (ABP)

Falwell apologizes for comment about Muhammad

LYNCHBURG, Va. -- Jerry Falwell apologized Oct. 12 for saying on the CBS program "60 Minutes" that the founder of Islam was a terrorist.

Falwell's comments calling Muhammad a "terrorist" and a "man of war" angered Muslims around the world. A clash between Hindus and Muslims in India sparked by the comment left nine people dead.

Falwell, pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va., said the quote came in response to a "controversial and loaded" question that he shouldn't have answered.

"I sincerely apologize that certain statements of mine ... were hurtful to the feelings of many Muslims," Falwell said in a statement. "I intended no disrespect to any sincere, law-abiding Muslim." (ABP)

Fixture at Wake Forest stepping down

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. -- Ed Christman, chaplain at Wake Forest University since 1969 at a fixture at the university for more than 50 years, is retiring July 31.

Christman, 72, attended the university's old campus in Wake Forest, N.C., receiving degrees in 1950 and 1953. A "clear call to ministry" during his last months in law school led him to a long career at the university.

He started as a part-time director of the school's Baptist Student Union and moved with the university to Winston-Salem as a full-time assistant chaplain in 1956.

"Ed Christman is one of the Wake Forest 'institutions' whose tenure and influence have made him one of the most visible and beloved figures in our modern history," said university President Thomas Hearn. "Ed has influenced generations of Wake Foresters." (ABP)

CBF-endorsed chaplains top 250 mark

ATLANTA -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship recently endorsed 33 new chaplains and pastoral counselors, bringing the total number endorsed by the national group to 251.

The newly endorsed ministers will work in specialized settings including hospitals, hospices, the military, prisons and businesses. The Atlanta-based CBF started endorsing chaplains in 1998. (ABP)

International seminary gains accreditation

The International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague has been accredited by the Czech Ministry of Education.

The seminary is also recognized by the University of Wales in Great Britain for classes leading to the master of theology, master of philosophy and doctor of philosophy degrees. (ABP)

END
