



Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

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

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Nashville, Tennessee

(02-108)

November 14, 2002

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Film festival explores faith in mainstream film
- North Carolina Baptists to study CBF giving track
- Texas Baptists approve new missions network

NOV 21 2002

Film festival explores faith in mainstream film

By Ted Parks

LOS ANGELES (ABP) -- Battered and bloody as they beat each other to pulps, these angry young men are looking for community in all the wrong places.

At least that's one take on "Fight Club," a brutal, R-rated film about urban misfits who beat each other up for fun. Pastor and film professor Scott Young finds in the movie a desperate search for connection among people with little else in common but meaninglessness.

Young chairs the City of the Angels Film Festival, an annual Los Angeles event that explores how mainstream films relate to faith and the struggles of modern urban life. Now in its ninth year, the festival screens movies followed by panel discussions where theologians, critics and industry professionals wrestle with the movies' deepest implications.

Craig Detweiler, producer of the 2002 festival, believes the event is important to people of faith because of film's pervasive cultural impact and ability to raise fundamental questions about life.

"There's a spiritual conversation going on in the movie palaces," Detweiler said. Hollywood movies like the recent "Signs" and "Magnolia," he explained, "are full of profound spiritual longing and quest." American moviegoers, he added, "are clearly going on a search for ultimate answers to the ultimate question."

On its rough surface, the 1999 "Fight Club," directed by David Fincher, seems anything but a film for a festival about values and faith.

In the movie, Ed Norton plays a young, urban professional with a comfortable existence but a life so empty he entertains himself by visiting support groups for problems he doesn't even have. He meets an offbeat stranger, played by Brad Pitt, who lures the young professional into a life centered on fist-fights with other guys also looking for something to do. The pain the men voluntarily share becomes a bizarre bond linking them tightly together.

The movie pulls few punches in its graphic depiction of the fighters' brutality and depravity. The story's empty 30-somethings make love, pillage and especially fight, their senseless blows blackening eyes and bloodying faces.

City of the Angels organizers encourage viewers with eyes to see to look beyond the gore to what the film says about a generation promised prosperity but left morally and spiritually bankrupt.

"Enter the world of a man whose life is full of nothing; a 30-year-old boy who has a career, a furnished apartment and spiritual depression," writes Annette Lopez, member of the festival's executive committee, in her introduction to the film.

"We are the middle children of history, raised by television to believe that someday we'll be millionaires and movie gods and rock stars, but we won't," continues Lopez. The movie, she says, "takes us on a journey of how a man seeks improvement in self-destruction."

Young, the festival's chairman, observed that the characters' desperate longing for connection, as bizarre as it seems in the movie, is the same impulse that propels Christians into the community of believers.

While the movie itself doesn't answer wrenching questions about the need for community, Scott believes Christians can take the discussion to the next level. "It's really kind of a stupid way to love each other," Scott said. "Is there a better way?"

This year's City of the Angels theme, "American Dreams: Life, Liberty, Pursuit of...," brought together key elements from the festival's past. With Los Angeles having become "a parabolic city," to use Young's phrase, theologians and filmmakers in the area began asking in the early 1990s how movies could address not only the perplexities of the modern city, but the fundamental issues of life.

Scott said that last fall's terrorist attacks caused a lot of Americans to rethink their identity and place in the world.

The festival's opening film, the 1939 "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," provided a starkly different view of American values and problems than "Fight Club." Starring Jimmy Stewart, the movie was directed by Frank Capra, who later directed Stewart in the Christmas classic "It's a Wonderful Life."

In the 1939 film Stewart plays Jefferson Smith, a boys' club leader appointed by a bumbling state governor to go to Washington after the state's sitting senator dies. The naive but deeply patriotic Smith confronts state graft and a gossipy Washington press before facing his crooked foes in a final heroic showdown on the Senate floor. Smith's David-and-Goliath confrontation of the establishment in the film suggests that one virtuous individual can indeed change things, Young believes.

In addition to challenging today's cynical attitudes toward government, the film also provides an alternative to strictly materialistic interpretations of the American Dream, Young said. Because Smith wants to serve rather than acquire, the film argues against the "'shop till you drop' version of the American Dream," Young explained.

Even with its buoyant idealism, the movie has a darker side, according to Detweiler. Peopled with politicians and others who sell out to wealth and influence, the film "is all about corruption at the highest levels of both the government and the press," Detweiler said. "It's about one man willing to stand up against the system and push democracy to its limits."

Barbara Nicolosi, director of a Hollywood screenwriting program and member of the festival's executive committee, believes City of the Angels fills a niche by allowing Christians to dialogue more effectively with "the art form of our time."

"The church needs to engage the serious questions that artists are raising," Nicolosi said. Though some Christians might want to avoid Hollywood altogether, she believes the Bible's command to love one's neighbor means believers cannot retreat from modern culture.

"I think a lot of the sentimental, superficial schlock ... that people are clamoring for in the church, it's not good for us," Nicolosi said. Quoting a friend, she added, "I would rather see an R-rated truth than a G-rated lie."

North Carolina Baptists to study CBF giving track

By ABP staff

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP) -- The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina will look into the possibility of doing away with a giving option favored by moderates.

Messengers to the Nov. 11-13 convention in Winston-Salem, N.C., authorized a study of "Plan C," one of four giving tracks available to the state's churches and the only one that includes funding for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate organization based in Atlanta.

Tim Rogers, pastor of Victory Baptist Church in Seagrove, N.C., moved that the convention president appoint a special committee to study whether budget Plan C is consistent with the state convention's constitution.

One of the several purpose statements in the constitution is to "to cooperate with the Southern Baptist Convention." Some interpret the phrase as meaning that the state body must work exclusively with the SBC, and not with other national organizations like the CBF.

Rogers said the giving option ought to be re-evaluated in light of a recent statement by CBF leaders declaring the group separate from the SBC in a bid for membership in the Baptist World Alliance.

"I believe North Carolina Baptists are Southern Baptists," Rogers told the Winston-Salem Journal.

The CBF received about \$210,000 from the North Carolina convention through the first 10 months of 2002, compared to more than \$9.6 million forwarded to the SBC through the other three giving plans.

State convention president Jerry Pereira, a conservative who was elected unopposed to a second term, told reporters he supported having four giving plans and hoped moderates wouldn't see the study as a first step in forcing them out of the convention.

"I think we've modeled cooperation," said Pereira, pastor of First Baptist Church of Swannanoa, N.C.

In other business, conservative candidates were unopposed in elections for the state convention's top three officers. Bob Foy, a layman from Mooresville, won re-election as first vice president. David Horton, pastor of Gate City Baptist Church in Greensboro, was elected second vice president as the first unopposed non-incumbent for a convention office in at least 20 years.

The elections mark the seventh year in the last eight that conservatives have controlled at least two of the top three BSC offices. All three officers said they were willing to work with moderates.

The president and the vice presidents form a committee to nominate a key committee on committees, which in turn nominates a committee on nominations. That committee nominates members of the general board and trustees and directors of North Carolina Baptist agencies and institutions.

Some conservatives complain that moderates wield too much control of the general board. An article in the Conservative Record, the newsletter of Conservative Carolina Baptists, has called for the election of only conservatives to North Carolina Baptist boards for the next three years.

Messengers also defeated a motion on the floor to reallocate funds for the Baptist state newspaper Biblical Recorder in the "Plan D" giving track to the Conservative Record. Thomas McLean, pastor of Oak View Baptist Church in Rocky Mount, made the motion, claiming the state news journal was unfair to conservatives.

Steve Hardy, editor of the Conservative Record, opposed the motion, saying the paper is not an agency of the state convention and doesn't intend to become one.

Joe Babb, a member of the Recorder's board of directors, took exception to the suggestion of bias and commended the paper's staff for fairness. "Certainly, sometimes those who read what they don't like want to kill the messenger," said Babb, a messenger from First Baptist Church in Arden, N.C.

So far this year, the Biblical Recorder has received about \$33,000 through Plan D designations.

Messengers to the convention overwhelmingly rejected the proposal to amend the Plan D portion of the budget, and then approved the entire \$37.5 million spending plan.

Conservatives generally prefer plans A and D, which forward 32 percent of all receipts to the Southern Baptist Convention. Moderates typically opt for Plan B, which gives the SBC only 10 percent, or Plan C, which gives 10 percent to the CBF.

Giving to plans C and D has increased particularly in recent years, officials say, while popularity of Plan A has declined.

-30-

Texas Baptists approve new missions network

By Ken Camp

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- The Baptist General Convention of Texas overwhelmingly approved formation of a missions network that leaders hope will change the way the state's Baptists view missions.

"We're moving back to the New Testament principle of missions that is church-based," said Keith Parks, a retired missions executive who served on a missions-review-and-initiatives committee that proposed the plan adopted by messengers to the BGCT annual meeting, held Nov. 11-12 in Waco.

The new network will match churches, associations, institutions and individuals with short-term and long-term missions opportunities across the United States and abroad.

The network will be set up as a separate, not-for-profit affiliate of the BGCT. It doesn't replace existing relationships with mission boards of the Southern Baptist Convention, but augments them with flexible structures designed to respond quickly to changing needs.

Some SBC leaders criticized the plan, first made public in September, saying it would divert mission gifts and duplicate work already being done by Southern Baptist mission boards. BGCT leaders, however, said it recognizes that churches no longer view missions as only something they pay for and pray for, but also something they do.

Clyde Glazener, chairman of the 24-member study committee, told messengers the network would "provide a place at the table for every Texas Baptist."

"There is a place for you," said Glazener, pastor of Gambrell Street Baptist Church in Fort Worth, "but it is not possible for you to order the menu for everyone else at the table."

In other business, more than 3,300 messengers adopted a \$50.8 million budget for next year and re-elected Houston pastor Bob Campbell as president.

The budget increases the portion of undesignated Cooperative Program funding that will stay in Texas, allocating 79 percent for BGCT ministries and 21 percent to worldwide causes. The 2002 adopted budget divides those gifts 72.3 percent BGCT and 27.7 percent worldwide. BGCT leaders said the change was prompted by the loss of income from churches that now support the SBC through a rival state convention.

The 2003 BGCT budget also drops restrictions in place the last two years designating funds away from the SBC Executive Committee and Ethics and Religious Commission and capping funding for six SBC seminaries.

Campbell said in a press conference that he viewed the budget and missions network together as a "positive step" toward improving relations between the state convention and the SBC.

"We're saying we want to work with you. We will work with you," said Campbell, pastor of Westbury Baptist Church in Houston.

Convention messengers also approved a motion to develop a code of ethics for ministers and referred to committee a motion to consider aid for Southern Baptist missionaries who desire to stay on the field without affirming the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" as requested by administrators at the SBC International Mission Board.

Joe Trull, messenger from First Baptist Church in Driftwood, Texas, made the motion to devise a code of ethics for Baptist ministers. Trull, a former seminary professor of Christian ethics, said that unlike most denominations, no such code exists for Baptists.

Nina Pinkston, a retired foreign missionary and messenger from Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, asked that the BGCT "explore the possibility" of raising funds for missionaries who refuse, as an act of conscience, to affirm the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message." Administrators of the International Mission Board made the request of field missionaries early this year and are in the process of meeting individually with the last few who still haven't complied.

Pinkston's motion was referred to the BGCT administrative committee for study.

Messengers overwhelmingly defeated another motion by Phil Barton of First Baptist Church in Pottsboro calling on the state convention to adopt the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" as its guiding statement of faith. The BGCT has in the past voted to go on record as affirming the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message" but disagreeing with revisions made to the confessional statement by the SBC in 2000.

Messengers also gave initial approval to a constitutional amendment allowing BGCT-related institutions to elect 25 percent of their trustee boards, with BGCT messengers electing the remaining 75 percent.

-30-

-- Bob Allen contributed to this report.

END
