

August 2008

Newsletter of Texas Baptists Committed and Mainstream Baptists

ANNUAL TBC CONVOCATION — HELPING TEXAS BAPTISTS STAY BAPTIST

Our annual Texas Baptists Committed Convocation will be held on Tuesday, August 19, 2008, from 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. We will meet at Gaston Oaks Baptist Church, which is located at 8515 Greenville Ave. in Dallas. The theme of this year’s Convocation is “Helping Texas Baptists Stay Baptist.”

Bruce Troy, pastor of Gaston Oaks, will begin the Convocation at 9:30 a.m. by welcoming the attendees on behalf of the host church. Randel Everett, BGCT executive director, and Joy Fenner, BGCT president, will then bring greetings on behalf of the convention leadership.

Registration for the Convocation will cost \$15, which will include lunch.

Ellis Orozco, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in McAllen, will highlight the Convocation by bringing a closing message entitled “**The Importance of the BGCT and TBC Preserving a Distinctively Baptist Witness in Texas and the World.**”

Last fall, the TBC Board of Directors restructured the organization to strengthen its focus on partnering with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and local churches in teaching historic Baptist principles and preserving an authentic Baptist witness. Presentations at the Convocation will discuss the ways in which TBC is carrying out this focus.

Attendees will hear four panel presentations, each of which will be followed by an opportunity to ask questions of the panel.

Panel discussions are as follows:

- **Helping Texas Baptist Churches Teach Baptist Principles: BaptistWay and Baptist History & Heritage Society materials**
- **Helping Texas Baptist Pastors Grow Distinctively Baptist Churches: TBC’s new Pastor Peer Group program**
- **Helping Texas Baptist Seminary Students Learn Historic Baptist Principles**
- **Helping Texas Baptist Churches Call Distinctively Baptist Pastors: Help for Pastor Search Committees**

In accordance with the educational emphasis of Texas Baptists Committed, TBC



*Ellis Orozco
 Pastor, Calvary Baptist
 Church, McAllen, TX*

seeks to duplicate all or part of this program in local churches and associations throughout Texas this fall. To request a presentation for your church, please contact the TBC office.

To register for the Convocation, email carolscott@txbc.org or call 325-659-4102. TBC has reserved a block of rooms at the Holiday Inn Select at 1655 N. Central Expressway in Richardson, just a few minutes from Gaston Oaks, at a rate of \$79 plus tax. To reserve a room at the reduced rate, please call the Holiday Inn Select at 972-669-0508, from 8:30-4:30, Monday through Friday. Ask for Carolyn or Lisa, and be sure to tell them that you want one of the rooms in the Texas Baptists Committed block. To obtain the TBC reduced rate, please make your hotel reservation by August 11.

You can find the full Convocation program on page 3.

BGCT Executive Director Randel Everett will be the featured speaker at the annual Texas Baptists Committed Breakfast at the BGCT in Fort Worth at 7 a.m., Tuesday morning, November 11, 2008.

Tickets will go on sale September 1. After that date, you can contact the TBC office to reserve your tickets.



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TBC Online!
www.txbc.org

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TBC Committees Working on New Initiatives

by Bill Jones, TBC Communications Editor

Last fall, the Board of Directors of Texas Baptists Committed established four committees to position TBC to meet the challenges facing Texas Baptists now and in the years to come. Since that time, these committees have been working to plan new initiatives aimed at meeting the needs of Texas Baptists. They have been given separate responsibilities – for administration, communications/technology, development, and education. Because these responsibilities overlap, the committee chairs have worked together to harmonize the efforts of the individual committees.

Here are a few of the initiatives on which these committees are working:

Administration

- Create satellite TBC office in Dallas, to ultimately become TBC headquarters
- Hire an associate executive director charged with specific responsibilities, including the following:
 - Enhance TBC’s computer and media capability
 - Travel across Texas to build relationships and inform Baptists about TBC

Communications/Technology

- Modernize TBC recordkeeping and fundraising
- Enhance TBC Web site on an ongoing basis
 - Provide “Donate Online” capability
 - Provide expanded access to the latest Baptist news
 - Provide expanded access to information on Baptist heritage and distinctives

Development

- Plan a retreat for pastors and their spouses
- Communicate TBC efforts more effectively to a wider group of supporters
- Broaden the base of TBC financial support
- Enhance newsletters
 - Provide the newsletter by email, rather than postal mail, to

supporters who request it (it will still be provided by postal mail unless requested otherwise)

- Increase the frequency of newsletters to at least once per quarter
- Add a “mini” e-newsletter to be emailed regularly to supporters

Education

- Develop TBC presentations on Baptist distinctives, to be presented at regional TBC meetings and in local churches
- Expand TBC assistance to pastor search committees, using materials produced by TBC

A number of pastor search committees have attested to the valuable help provided by TBC materials.

- Develop TBC pastor peer group program
 - Experienced pastors take responsibility for mentoring groups of less experienced pastors
 - Members of group are encouraged to contact mentor regularly with questions about issues that they face
 - Group meets on regular basis, as determined by mentor and group

Finally, we have also discussed initiatives for reaching out to college students to educate them on Baptist distinctives and encourage their involvement with TBC. We consider it a priority to educate younger generations of Baptists on what it means to be a Baptist.

We’re excited about the possibilities. For over 20 years, Texas Baptists Committed has worked to keep the Baptist General Convention of Texas free from Fundamentalist control. Our success is your success, because it is your support that has made our work effective. The BGCT continues to be under attack by Fundamentalists, as exemplified by the presence of the Fundamentalist Southern Baptists of Texas Convention in our state.

Texas Baptists need TBC more than ever, and TBC needs the support and involvement of Texas Baptists more than ever. In this newsletter, you will find a form that you can send to TBC with your donation. Please contribute today to keep Texas Baptists free.

Been to the TBC Web Site Lately?

If you haven’t checked out the TBC Web site lately, we invite you to go to www.txbc.org today. In recent months, we have made enhancements that we hope will make it more useful to you. On our home page, you will be directed to the latest editions of the TBC Newsletter; David R. Currie’s *A Rancher’s Rumblyings* column; and the *Baptist Reflections* column written by various Baptist leaders; as well as archives for all three of these publications. Our home page also features news about upcoming Baptist events. In the months to come, we will add even more enhancements, including links to up-to-the-moment Baptist news and views. **Stay tuned!**

2008 TEXAS BAPTISTS COMMITTED CONVOCATION: HELPING TEXAS BAPTISTS STAY BAPTIST

Tuesday, August 19, 2008, 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Gaston Oaks Baptist Church, Dallas

WELCOME Bruce Troy, Pastor, Gaston Oaks

GREETINGS FROM THE BGCT Randel Everett, Executive Director
Joy Fenner, President

PANEL DISCUSSIONS (*followed by question-and-answer sessions*)

1. Helping Texas Baptist Churches Teach Baptist Principles:

BaptistWay and Baptist History & Heritage Society materials

Ronnie Prevost, Hardin-Simmons University | Doug Weaver, Baylor University |
Ross West, BGCT

2. Helping Texas Baptist Pastors Grow Distinctively Baptist Churches:

TBC's new Pastor Peer Group program

Michael Bell, Pastor, Greater St. Stephen First, Fort Worth | Chad Chaddick, Pastor,
Northeast, San Antonio | James Hassell, Pastor, First, Tulia | Jeremy Johnston,
Pastor, Preston Highlands, Dallas | Steve Vernon, Pastor, First, Levelland | and
others involved in the Pastor Peer Group program

3. Helping Texas Baptist Seminary Students Learn Historic Baptist Principles

Tommy Brisco, Dean, Logsdon School of Theology | David Garland, Dean, Truett
Seminary | and a representative of B. H. Carroll Seminary

4. Helping Texas Baptist Churches Call Distinctively Baptist Pastors:

Help for Pastor Search Committees

Judy Battles, Truett Seminary | David R. Currie, Executive Director, TBC | James
Stone, Logsdon School of Theology | Linda Wear, BGCT

CLOSING MESSAGE Ellis Orozco, Pastor, Calvary Baptist, McAllen

**The Importance of the BGCT and TBC Preserving a Distinctively
Baptist Witness in Texas and the World**

Register for the Convocation by emailing carolscott@txbc.org or calling 325-659-4102.
\$15 registration fee will include lunch. To reserve a hotel room at the special TBC rate of
\$79 plus tax, call Holiday Inn Select in Richardson - by August 11 - at 972-669-0508,
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A Rancher's Rumblings

By
David R. Currie
Executive Director

February 26, 2008

IS THE BGCT INCLUSIVE? (PART ONE)

Recently, I have heard some people expressing concern that the BGCT does not really welcome all churches to full participation in the life of the convention, especially on important boards and committees. Some seem to even think that I am a person who sort of “blackballs” churches that do not support TBC or CBF.

I am honestly disturbed that anyone might think such a thing, and I was actually surprised at the criticism. Over 1,000 people serve on the 27 boards and committees that relate to the BCCT. One of the main reasons that TBC worked so hard to prevent a Fundamentalist takeover of the BGCT was to keep our ministries and institutions free from control.

Based on my experience, the notion that we were not inclusive of all churches struck me as totally inaccurate. So I decided to examine a few institutions. Remembering Billy Ray Parmer’s admonition that perception is often reality, I thought I should examine reality (besides that, I wanted to know the truth for myself).

I serve on the Howard Payne University Board. To be honest, I had no idea what churches my fellow Board members attended. What I found was that the following 30 churches are represented on the HPU Board:

- Coggin Avenue, Brownwood
- Crescent Heights, Abilene
- First, Arlington
- First, Brownwood (4)
- First, Canyon
- First, Coleman
- First, Grapevine
- First, Henderson
- First, Houston
- First, Mount Vernon
- First, Richardson
- First, Salado
- First, San Antonio
- First, San Saba
- First, Sulphur Springs
- First, Universal City
- First, Weatherford
- First, Wichita Falls
- Friendship, Fairview
- Genesis, Fort Worth
- Green Acres, Tyler
- Hyde Park, Austin (2)
- Lakeside, Granbury
- Memorial Drive, Houston

- Pioneer Drive, Abilene
- Second, Houston
- Southland, San Angelo (me)
- Tallowood, Houston
- University, Fort Worth (2)
- Westside, Lewisville

Now I do not have a list of churches that contribute to CBF, but I do not think that many of these churches do so. However, even if they do, I do not understand what difference it makes, as long as they support Texas Baptists. For that matter, I can certainly identify several churches in this list that have pastors who are strongly pro-SBC.

I thought that I should look at a second Board, so I randomly picked the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor’s. I found the following representation:

- Calvary, McAllen
- Comfort, Comfort
- Cowboy Church, Mound
- First, Beeville
- First, Belton (5)
- First, Boerne
- First, Falfurrias
- First, Grand Prairie
- First, Hewitt
- First, Killeen
- First, Marble Falls
- First, Navasota
- First, Normangee
- First, Rosebud
- First, Salado (2)
- First, Temple (4)
- First, Waco
- First, Woodway (2)
- Great Hills, Austin
- Green Acres, Tyler
- Hampton Road, DeSoto
- Macedonia Missionary, Temple
- Meadowbrook, Rockdale
- Medical Center, San Antonio
- Memorial, Temple
- New Hope Missionary, Dickinson
- Oak Ridge, San Antonio
- Oakwood, Belton
- Prestonwood, Plano (2)
- Second, Houston (2)
- Taylor’s Valley, Temple (2)

Now, again, I have no real idea where these churches send their mission money. But isn’t that the point? No one is orchestrating these boards to meet an agenda. My hunch is that this Board—as other boards—is reasonably representative of Texas Baptists as a whole. In fact, I recognize several dually-aligned churches that relate to both the BGCT and the SBTC.

Now it may be that several members from dually-aligned churches were appointed by the boards themselves, since the BGCT voted to allow our institutions to appoint 25% of their board members, but that is still significant. Rather than try to control the entire board process, the BGCT voluntarily agreed to allow this change. Do you honestly think that this would happen in Funda-

mentalist-controlled state conventions, such as Missouri's, Georgia's, or Louisiana's, where strong-arm tactics have been used to control educational institutions?

I am going to examine this further in future articles, but I think that, if one will set aside his or her perceptions and look at reality, one will find that the BGCT is very inclusive of all Texas Baptists.

April 22, 2008

IS THE BGCT INCLUSIVE? (PART TWO)

Our Debt to the Hales and Lacys among Texas Baptists

They buried Pete Hale in Commerce last Tuesday. Pete would come to every BGCT annual meeting to support the BGCT and stand up against Fundamentalism. I remember running into him once in a convenience store on my way to the convention, which was being held in Corpus Christi that year. Pete had his overalls on. He was a yellow-dog union Democrat from East Texas.

When I got word that Pete had died, for some reason I thought of my friend Jim Lacy from Midland, who died several years ago. Jim was a staunch Republican from West Texas. Pete's politics and Jim's politics could not have been more opposite. But they agreed on one thing totally (besides their faith in Christ)—they wanted the BGCT to stay free from Fundamentalist control.

Another thing they agreed on was their love for me as their friend. They would argue with me and give me a piece of their mind if they thought I needed it, but I knew they loved me. I miss them both.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas is today free from Fundamentalist control not so much because of John Baugh, Herbert Reynolds, Phil Strickland, or me, but mostly because of thousands of people like Pete Hale and Jim Lacy, who gave, prayed, showed up, and—most of all—cared.

BGCT Supporters Understand TBC's Mission

Last month, I wrote part one of a series focused on exploring the question, "Is the BGCT inclusive?" This week, I want to follow up with part two regarding this question, which also involves the issue of TBC's role in Texas Baptist life.

Several people have asked me about the search committee for BGCT executive director. They wanted to know whether most of the committee members were affiliated with Texas Baptists Committed. You know, I really do not personally know all of the committee members, but I do know that many of them actively support TBC, and I believe that is how it should be. That committee and all BGCT committees should have a lot of people on them who are like Pete Hale and Jim Lacy—that is, people who give, pray, show up, and care about keeping our convention free.

Yes, there is a lot of TBC influence in the BGCT. People who actively support the BGCT—such as members of the executive director search committee—tend to be people who recognize what TBC is all about. And what *is* TBC all about? Our Mission Statement says it in a nutshell:

Texas Baptists Committed is dedicated to reaching people for Christ through local churches; promoting and defending historic Baptist principles; spreading an understanding of Baptist heritage and distinctives through education; and cooperating with the mission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and its related institutions.

In response to the threat of Fundamentalism, TBC put itself forward as a resource for keeping Texas Baptists informed about the BGCT's denominational structure and theological orientation, as well as Baptist heritage and distinctives, and the application of Biblical ethics to social issues concerning Texas Baptists.

Because of this, many people who strongly support the BGCT have had a natural inclination to also support TBC. Similarly, TBC supporters—as our Mission Statement would indicate—tend to be people who have a natural affinity for committed involvement in BGCT matters.

So those laypersons, pastors, and other leaders have earned the privilege to serve in all areas of the BGCT.

Serving Leads to Opportunities

Think about your local church. I bet you can name the ten most influential people in your church. I know I can name the most influential people in the church of which I am a member, and I thank God for those people. They are the people who have shown through the years how much they care. They give, pray, and show up regularly.

How does your church pick deacons? Do you pick someone who comes once a month and drops a \$20 bill in the offering plate? Not a chance! No, you choose people who tithe, teach, and regularly give of their talent and time.

I remember one time that Phil Strickland and I were discussing a key committee that was going to be appointed in the BGCT. I mentioned a name, and Phil responded, "David, he's never taken a stand. How can you put a person in a position of leadership who has never led? In the biggest crisis in Baptist life in the last 100 years, he sat on the sidelines."

TBC Has Always Sought to Broaden the BGCT "Tent"

Yes, I realize that this conversation with Phil occurred many years ago, in the heat of the battle. Russell Dilday had been fired as president of Southwestern Seminary. Most of the wonderful professors who taught me at Southwestern were now gone. It was an intense time.

Now it is a different time. Many who were not actively involved in "saving" the BGCT continue to support the BGCT financially and in other ways. Even as we fought with the Fundamentalist takeover crowd, we also fought for the inclusion, in BGCT life, of persons from all perspectives. We have always worked for inclusion while also taking care to be good stewards of our institutions and ministries by preserving their freedom. The BGCT needs to be a "big tent" convention. We need to include and involve people as diverse politically as Pete Hale and Jim Lacy were. We need everyone to feel included.

Through the years, the BGCT and TBC have worked very hard to seek broader inclusion. That is why our leadership has been so diverse in recent years.

In 1970, my friend Jimmy Allen was president of the BGCT. In 1988, the last year before TBC started endorsing candidates, Paul Powell, another personal hero, was president of the BGCT. In fact, every single president of the BGCT from 1970 through 1988 was a white pastor of a large church, without exception.

In the past few years, BGCT presidents have included institutional leaders, a Hispanic, an African-American, a county seat pastor, and a woman. That is pretty diverse and inclusive.

TBC endorsed these people not because of their affiliation for or against the SBC or CBF. We endorsed them because we be-

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lieve that it is important to show that the BGCT is inclusive and that the BGCT appreciates and honors all of the churches, ethnic groups, and individuals in our convention. I am very proud of the people whom TBC has endorsed and who have served as president of the BGCT.

I am proud of the inclusiveness of today's BGCT. Our convention's key committees include persons from many small and rural churches. I remember a call I once received from a member of the committee to nominate Executive Board members. This person was asking me for recommendations for a BGCT zone that had a large urban population. I gave him the names of some laypersons, scattered throughout that zone, all of whom were members of small churches. I'll never forget Ed Schmeltekopf calling me and saying, "David, thank you for helping (*the committee member who had called me*). We have some great new Board members from small churches that have never been represented before in BGCT life."

TBC and the BGCT Promote Freedom for All

The evidence tells me that the BGCT is more inclusive today than it has ever been in its history. It is my impression that, in what we often mistakenly remember as the "good ol' days," there was a lot of representation from large influential churches but not much representation from the small churches at the grassroots. Today, many loyal BGCT-supportive laypersons from small churches—both rural and urban—are serving on BGCT committees. Most of these churches were never represented in the "good ol' days." Leaders in the Baptist Building did not know people in the small churches or the rural communities. But TBC knew them and, when asked for recommendations, we recommended them to our convention leaders.

I do not apologize for that. They earned the right to serve, because they cared, and they proved it by attending conventions and giving of themselves. As I said earlier, all you have to do is look at the evidence to know that the BGCT is more diverse and inclusive than it has ever been in its history. TBC has worked hard to make this a reality.

We have also worked hard to be fair and inclusive of *all* churches, regardless of whether they ever had even one solitary member supporting TBC. Every church in the BGCT is free today to give its mission money as it chooses—to whomever it chooses. Can Fundamentalist-controlled conventions say that? You know the answer. The truth is that not one church that supports the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention can send one dollar more to the SBC than they can through the BGCT. The BGCT has consistently supported—and promoted—the freedom of every church to give as it chooses. The BGCT did nothing to cause the creation of the SBTC! All BGCT churches have remained free to give as they choose.

I appreciate Jan Daehnert—who served as BGCT executive director in the interim—pointing out that we need to work harder to include, in BGCT life, BGCT churches that—although they do not support Fundamentalism—still support the SBC mission programs. If some people have the impression that we would exclude those who support SBC mission programs, please hear me carefully and let me correct that impression. *It has never been TBC's intention to exclude anyone from active participation in BGCT life.* We have simply stood for freedom and fairness for all Texas Baptists.

Persons who continue to support SBC missions and ministries—but not Fundamentalism—are an important part of the BGCT. Their inclusion in BGCT life should not be at issue—provided that all of us agree that we do not want to endanger BGCT institutions and ministries by welcoming Fundamentalists to the table. We want to work with those who want to cooperate as Baptists to advance Christ's Kingdom. But Fundamentalists seek only to control—not cooperate. We cannot afford to pretend that the past 30 years did not happen.

Who Else Will Fill This Role – with Fairness and Freedom?

So when people question TBC's role in recommending people to serve—whether as members of BGCT committees or as BGCT officers—we should question what they're criticizing. Someone needs to fill this role. TBC is unique in being made up of a diverse cross-section of Texas Baptists. Basically, there are three main things that TBC members agree on—our love for Jesus, our love for people, and our commitment to keep Texas Baptists free from Fundamentalist control. Other than that, we're different in all kinds of ways.

So TBC knows a lot of people in all areas of the state, in churches large and small, in communities rural and urban, and of every ethnicity. We can recommend a diverse range of Texas Baptists who will work to keep the BGCT free but will also open it up to meeting the needs of all Texas Baptists. Why should anyone have a problem with that?

I want to close part two of this discussion by addressing the desire, which some have expressed, for an "open" convention. That sounds like a nice ideal, but it's not realistic. If TBC does not endorse candidates for BGCT offices this year, you can be certain that every candidate that materializes will have been put forward and endorsed by *some* group—probably a "silent" group. Those who are elected will then be "lobbied" to favor the members of their group—the folks who supported them and claim the credit for their election. Then the question will be, "will they be as inclusive as Texas Baptists Committed?" Will they work to include all Texas Baptists, as we always have at TBC?

If Pete Hale and Jim Lacy can work together for a common cause and mission, then all Texas Baptists should be able to work together as well. We all are charged with carrying out the Great Commission, and we need all of us working together to accomplish the task that Christ has given us. There is absolutely no reason for any division in BGCT life today.

May 20, 2008

THE REAL ISSUES – SUPPORT OF THE BGCT AND OPPOSITION TO FUNDAMENTALISM

There is division in BGCT life these days. Personally, I don't understand it, but I've heard it from enough people to know that it is reality. Why don't I understand it? Because many of us have worked hard to do things differently than the SBC. Just look at the facts.

TBC has worked closely with the BGCT to encourage the election of officers who represent every facet of Baptist life. During the past 5 years, the following people have served the BGCT as president:

- Ken Hall, president of Buckner International in Dallas
- Albert Reyes, then president of the Baptist University of the

Americas in San Antonio

- Michael Bell, pastor of Greater St. Stephen First Baptist Church, Fort Worth
- Steve Vernon, pastor of First Baptist Church, Levelland
- Joy Fenner, former director of the Texas WMU and member of Gaston Oaks Baptist Church in Dallas

Of these five presidents, three were white, one African-American, and one Hispanic. Two were pastors, and three were denominational leaders. They represented four distinct geographical areas of our state.

During those 5 years, the following people served as first vice president of the BGCT:

- Albert Reyes
- Michael Bell
- Steve Vernon
- Joy Fenner
- Mike Massar, pastor of First Baptist Church, Tyler

You've probably noticed a trend here. For the past few years, the first vice president has been moving up to run for president. The thinking behind this process was to give people the opportunity to learn "on the job" for a year before becoming president. However, this is not the case this year, as Mike Massar has said that he currently does not plan to run for president this year.

The second vice presidents during these 5 years have been the following:

- Dennis Young, pastor of Missouri City Baptist Church, who is an African-American
- Stacy Conner, pastor of First Baptist Church, Muleshoe
- Dan Wooldridge, pastor of Crestview Baptist Church, Georgetown, and well known as a supporter of SBC mission programs
- Roberto Rodriguez, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista, Harlingen, in the Rio Grande Valley
- Jeff Raines, associate pastor of First Baptist Church, Amarillo

These second vice presidents have also been geographically balanced, ethnically balanced, and from churches that have faithfully supported the BGCT. One recent trend that has added to the diversity of leadership has been the move to a one-term presidency. This began with Ken Hall and has continued since, as a personal decision by each president to decline to run for a second term. It is a decision that has allowed for greater diversity of representation in that office and demonstrated the key role that so many ethnic churches play in relating to the BGCT. I pray that it will continue, so that many others can be included in leadership through the years.

I do not believe that Texas Baptists could have had better leadership these past five years. TBC endorsed these people because we knew that they loved and supported the BGCT and, especially, because we knew that they opposed Fundamentalist control of the BGCT. Our endorsement never involved any consideration of whether they supported the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or the Southern Baptist Convention with their national mission dollars. That was—and is—irrelevant. Instead, their support of the BGCT and their opposition to Fundamentalism were the keys to receiving TBC's endorsement.

But I hear loudly the cry that TBC is "picking the officers" and that we need an "open" convention. Well, personally, an open convention is fine with me. However, I've never felt that the

convention was "closed." It's just that candidates for any office of any organization rarely spring from "the floor." They are usually put forward by some individual or group well before the meeting. In BGCT life, TBC has been uniquely positioned to recommend candidates for office, because TBC is made up of people who have taken the time and effort to become informed about, and involved in, BGCT life.

If TBC is to consider refraining from endorsing candidates this year, I need to first address a few issues regarding potential officers.

There seem to be two very powerful fears in play here. Persons who have worked closely with TBC over the past 20 years—and given time, energy, prayers, money, and faithful attendance to the BGCT annual meeting each year—FEAR that, if TBC is not actively involved in endorsing officers for the convention, the convention might elect SBC supporters who would lead the BGCT down the path to Fundamentalist control. They FEAR, too, the election of those who—while not overtly supporting the SBC—might naïvely attempt to "work with" the SBC's Fundamentalist leadership, ignoring the historic Fundamentalist commitment to control, not cooperation.

On the other hand, persons who have maintained a strong relationship with the BGCT, but—for historic or personal reasons—have continued to support SBC missions and ministries, FEAR that they are not fully accepted in BGCT life because they do not support CBF and are still funding many SBC ministries (and even institutions).

Well, I think I have come up with a simple, fair way to ease the fears of everyone concerned. Here is my solution.

I recommend that anyone who runs for office in the Baptist General Convention of Texas begin by making clear to Texas Baptists first, that he or she loves and supports the mission, ministry, and institutions of the BGCT; and second, that he or she opposes SBC-style Fundamentalist control. They can give their mission money where they want to give it, but they must publicly commit to firmly opposing Fundamentalism in any form. That is only fair and right. People have a right to know where these candidates stand on Fundamentalism.

The BGCT should be a "big tent" convention that offers a place at the table for churches that support CBF missions, SBC missions, or both. Support of CBF or SBC is not—and should not be—an issue in the BGCT. We have worked hard to protect local church autonomy and protect every local church's right to give cooperatively as it chooses, in whatever percentage it chooses.

The reality is that there should be no Fundamentalists remaining in the BGCT. Frankly, if you are a Fundamentalist, there is a convention that was created just for you—the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. That is where you belong, and you should join it with our blessing. You can leave the BGCT, and there will be no hard feelings on our part.

Today's BGCT should be made up of churches and people who oppose creedalism in any form or fashion, and support freedom for our institutions and ministries, and a shared vision of ministry and mission together as Texas Baptists.

So, if you feel led to run for office in the BGCT, and someone is willing to nominate and support you, I encourage you to run and let the people decide. However, I want to repeat that this encouragement comes with one qualifier attached. As you run, be sure to first clearly affirm to Texas Baptists that you love, support, and

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believe in the Baptist General Convention of Texas just as she is—a convention focused on including all who want to partner together to spread the Kingdom of God, free from Fundamentalist control.

We cannot afford to pretend that the past 30 years of division in Baptist life did not happen, and we must not revisit, or stumble blindly into, old battles that take our focus away from the work of the Kingdom. So we must know where our officers stand on support of the BGCT and opposition to Fundamentalism.

Supporting CBF or the SBC is not now and never has been the issue; supporting the BGCT as a free and faithful state convention is very much the issue.

Whosoever will serve, step forward.

July 15, 2008

MY CHILDHOOD COMES TO AN END

My childhood finally ended on July 12, 2008, when my childhood hero, Bobby Murcer—former centerfielder for the New York Yankees—died at age 62 from brain cancer.

Now I know you must be thinking, “David, he was just 7 years older than you—what do you mean, ‘childhood hero’?”

Yes, it is true that he succeeded my first childhood hero, Mickey Mantle, in centerfield for the Yankees in 1969 when I was already 16 years old, but I loved him as my favorite ballplayer, my last really favorite baseball player, like I was still a kid. When I was 26 and working for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, I wrote him a letter, like I was 12, just to tell him that, as silly as it was at my age, I just wanted him to know he was my favorite baseball player.

I once saw him hit a home run in old Arlington Stadium and stood in my chair, yelling and clapping. Somewhere, I have a bunch of pictures I took of him from that night.

I thought I was a Yankees fan until they did the unthinkable and traded Bobby to the Giants in 1974. Then I realized that I was really more of a Bobby Murcer fan than a Yankees fan, and I still remember the weekly Giants letter to which I subscribed as a youth minister in Gorman.

One of Bobby’s cousins—who was close to my age—lived in Eden, Texas. When she found out that I was a big fan of Bobby, she got me an autographed baseball from him.

But back to Bobby Murcer’s days as a Yankee. I spent the summer of 1972 in Cumberland, Maryland, as a Home Mission Board summer missionary. The day before I left to come home, the Yankees were playing the Baltimore Orioles in a doubleheader. Sherrill Dillon, who is still a good friend of mine today, drove me to Baltimore a day early to catch my plane. We spent that day at old Memorial Stadium, watching the Yankees and Orioles.

I remember it as if it were yesterday. It was July 31, 1972. The Yankees won the second game of that doubleheader, 2-1, and Murcer drove in both runs. The Orioles were up 1-0 in the 8th inning, and the Yankees had runners on 2nd and 3rd, and Murcer was due to bat. Earl Weaver, the Orioles manager, went out to talk to the pitcher, and I just knew that they were going to intentionally walk Bobby. But they weren’t as smart as I was—they decided to pitch to him, and he hit a single, driving in both runs. I can still visualize exactly where he hit the ball and what I felt at that moment.

I confirmed that memory on the Internet, and found some other information there, too. Both Mickey Mantle and Bobby Murcer were born in Oklahoma and signed by the same scout—Tom Greenwade. Bob Stephenson, who serves on our TBC Board, was also born in Oklahoma and played 1 year for the St. Louis Cardinals, playing alongside legends such as Stan Musial, Ken Boyer, and Red Schoendienst. In that 1955 season, Bob played in 67 games, hit .243, drove in 6 runs, hit 3 doubles, and stole 2 bases.

When it comes to Bobby Murcer’s value as a ballplayer, statistics tell only part of the story. Remember—he played long before steroids inflated home run totals. But his 252 home runs ranked 72nd all time when he retired.

In 1972, Murcer hit .292, with 33 home runs, 96 RBIs, 102 runs scored, 171 hits, 30 doubles, 314 total bases, and a slugging percentage of .537. How did those figures rank in the American League that year? Runs scored—1st; total bases—1st; home runs—2nd; RBIs—3rd; hits—3rd; doubles—3rd; slugging percentage—3rd; triples—tied for 3rd; and batting average—10th. You stick in the big leagues for 17 years, hit .277, with over 250 home runs and over 1,000 RBIs, and—without question—you’re one of the best players of your time. That was Bobby Murcer’s baseball career.

But don’t forget the day he gave the eulogy for Thurman Munson, the great Yankee catcher, either. By that time, after several years with the Giants and Cubs, he was back where he belonged—in Yankee pinstripes. That day in 1979, he came home from Munson’s funeral and hit a home run and drove in 5 runs in the Yankees’ 5-4 win. I still have the newspaper story and picture of that game.

But Mike Vaccaro of the *New York Post* put Bobby Murcer’s life in perspective:

“He was admired for that. He became beloved later on, as an announcer, as an ambassador, as a humble messenger of all that’s supposed to be right about baseball, and about human beings. We lose a terrific Yankee. But more important, we lose a tremendous person.”

I was moved as I read article after article this weekend (forwarding them to Lance and Chad) about what kind of man Bobby Murcer was and, especially, the messages posted on the Oklahoma City newspaper memory board about what a devoted Christian he was.

But my favorite quote came from Joe Girardi, the current Yankees manager, who said, “Bobby was the type of man that, I believe, got what life was about—trying to make life better for people around him.”

There’s a sermon in Bobby Murcer’s life, folks. Give it some thought.

May 6, 2008

A REFLECTIVE TWO WEEKS FOR WHICH I AM GRATEFUL

The past two weeks have been an emotional time for me personally, and I want to share my feelings with you—my extended family—about this special time in my life.

On Monday, April 21, Mother fell in her kitchen. She has been clinging to living alone in Paint Rock, at age 91, in the house that my father’s parents built in 1935. Well, not completely alone—she still enjoys the company of her precious cat, “Pretty Face,” who replaced “Little One,” who lived to be 18 years old.

My sister was away when Mother fell, so I got the call to come to Paint Rock and check on her. She claimed to be fine, refused to go to the doctor, and had plans to come to San Angelo on Tuesday to get her nails done before attending the Currie-Strickland Lectures at Howard Payne on April 28.

However, on Tuesday evening, April 22, Mother fell again. This time, she slid off the couch and could not find her emergency button, so she laid on the floor from 7 p.m. until 6 the next morning, when she rolled over and set off the emergency button, which was on her back. She was taken to the hospital and stayed there until the following Monday, when she moved to a nursing home in Ballinger. It appears that she suffered a mild stroke, which, of course, kept her from going to Brownwood for the Currie-Strickland Lectures.

I realize that most of you reading this are not likely to have had a parent live to be 91 years old. I jokingly tell Mother, from time to time, that she *has* to keep on living, because she has not finished raising me yet. Even though I say it teasingly, it may well be true. I think God realizes I still need a Mother.

But back to how I felt as I looked at Mother in the hospital. She couldn't walk and was obviously very weak. It seemed that I finally, for the first time, realized that I will not have her with me much longer. Sure, in my mind, I've always known that day would come and have frequently commented that I hoped she could die in her home, because I know she doesn't want to leave it. I also know that I've heard her say, for as long as I can remember, "I don't want to live too long."

But she's still my Momma, and none of us likes to think about losing someone who loves us like Momma loves me. I have been very blessed to know so many people who have loved me and believed in me and supported my work through difficult times and many mistakes—especially friends such as Phil Strickland, Gary Elliston, David Sapp, Doug Ezell, Ira Peak, Jim Heerwald, John Crow, John Petty, Ron Cook, Bill Tillman, Sam McCutchen, and many others. But, to be honest, there's no comparison between their love for me and Mother's love for me. If it were possible for a Mother to love her son too much, my Mother would stand convicted of that charge.

So Mother missed the inaugural Currie-Strickland Distinguished Lectures in Christian Ethics at Howard Payne University in Brownwood on April 28.

I must tell you that this event affected me emotionally more than I ever dreamed it would. I have been used to working behind the scenes and being joked about publicly as a "lightning rod." But I never really expected to receive this kind of recognition for the work I have done at TBC for 21 years and, to be honest, I didn't really think I cared much about such recognition.

But then Gary and Molli Elliston established these lectures to honor Phil Strickland and me. Friends, this is, without question, the greatest honor I have ever received and probably ever will receive.

Three close friends of mine—David Sapp, Richard Jackson, and Jimmy Allen—delivered these inaugural lectures. As I heard them speak, I heard the words of a popular song—"what a lucky man I am"—running through my mind.

David, Richard, and Jimmy are legends in Baptist life. Against all odds, against all concern for their professional and financial futures, these three men stood proud and strong for Christ, biblical ethics, and Baptist principles as few others have—with no regard for the cost. They did it simply because they knew in their hearts

and souls what it means to be committed to Jesus.

As I heard them speak, I could not help but reflect on the way that God has put the right people in my life at the right time, over and over again.

When I was 15 years old, Mike Chancellor—who now serves on the Howard Payne Board with me—came to Paint Rock to preach a youth revival as I was struggling with a call to ministry.

I received a track scholarship to Howard Payne. It was the only scholarship I was offered, so I grabbed it. On my first Sunday after checking into the dorm, I met Gary Elliston, who would become a lifelong friend.

Gary and I sat together all through our freshman year, as Nat Tracy taught us Old and New Testament. Jimmy and Richard often referred to Nat Tracy as they spoke in Brownwood last month. It was Nat Tracy and James Shields who changed my entire understanding of Christianity while I attended Howard Payne.

In my freshman year, I met James Dunn. I met Phil Strickland in my senior year. Then I went to Southwestern Seminary, where there were then incredible "teachers from God," like Boo Heflin, Yandell Woodfin, Bob Adams, Leon McBeth, William Estep, Huber Drumwright, C.W. Brister, Tommy Briscoe, Doug Ezell, and Bill Pinson. I knew that Bill Pinson was getting ready to leave, so I made sure to take a course under him before he left. I treasure the memory of studying under such special teachers.

In January 1988, as I was beginning my work at TBC, I traveled the country with Richard Jackson. Hear me, readers—NO ONE could ever have more integrity than Richard Jackson. He was deeply conservative theologically, but he knew that Pressler and Patterson were lying every time they opened their mouths, and he refused to be a part of what they were doing. I love and admire Richard Jackson.

The next two years, I traveled and spoke with Daniel Vestal. What an incredible man of God is Daniel Vestal! He is perhaps the finest Christian I have ever known—pure love and grace and evangelism and ethics all in one committed person. If you know Daniel Vestal at all, you can't help but love and admire him. He is truly a man of God if I have ever known one.

As I heard these men speak at these lectures honoring Phil (yes, I realize that I was being honored, too, but, at the moment, I cannot accept that emotionally), I found myself thinking, "what a lucky man I am"...born in a San Angelo hospital (there were no hospitals in Paint Rock – Mother had been born at home)...then raised in a very small town with a very small Baptist church. Growing up in that church, I often found that I was THE "youth group"—I was the only youth in Sunday School. So I've often wondered, "how could God find me?"

But then I reflect on this pattern of God placing the right people in my life at the right time. Wonderful, loving Christian parents...good pastors like Chester Sylvester and James Golden...friends and teachers like Mike Chancellor, Nat Tracy, Gary Elliston, James Dunn, James Shields, and Jim Heerwald...followed by those great Southwestern professors I mentioned earlier...plus Ira and Sam, whom I met in Seminary...plus Gene Wilkes and Ken Huggins, who were great friends to me in seminary...and, later on, Herbert Reynolds and John Baugh, who were like no men I had ever met before...and now men like Ken Hall and Ron Cook, who are valued advisors to me now that I do not have Phil anymore.

In short, as I reflect on these two emotional weeks, I find

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...continued from page 9

myself relating to the feelings expressed by the legendary baseball player Lou Gehrig, who stood in Yankee Stadium on that long-ago day, looked into the faces of thousands of people who had loved, encouraged, and supported him, and said, "Today, I consider myself the luckiest person on the face of the earth."

Only, as you well know, it really has nothing to do with luck. It has everything to do with God's grace. God has been gracious to me. Many thanks to all of you for your friendship and support over the years.

April 1, 2008

BASEBALL, DADDY, AND CONVICTIONAL BAPTISTS

Last week, baseball's 2008 season began in Japan. However, as I write this, it is Opening Day in America, and—unfortunately—the Rangers are losing. It was easier when Mickey Mantle was playing and I was a Yankees fan. As a child, I thought it was normal for my favorite team to win the World Series every year. I still love baseball and am especially mindful of it today, March 31, 2008.

On March 31, 1908, twins David Floy and Joe Roy Currie were born in Paint Rock (or maybe it was on the ranch). Roy, my Daddy, would be 100 years old today if he were still alive (he died in 1989), and he certainly would be watching baseball. I miss watching games with him and hearing Dizzy Dean and Pee Wee Reese announce those games.

We had a great trip together to Spring Training in 1979, and I have a picture of Daddy with Al Kaline, the Hall of Fame Detroit Tigers outfielder. Kaline, who was retired by then, was one of the players he loved. Somewhere, I also have a picture of me with Bill "Spaceman" Lee.

In early March this year, Loretta and I went to Tucson to catch a few Spring Training games. While watching the Rockies and Angels, I missed my Dad while having a great time visiting with an older gentleman sitting one row behind me. He asked whether I knew much about baseball, and I told him my Dad had *raised* me on baseball. So he asked whether I could name the 16 teams in the 1950s before expansion.

I took him up on the challenge. He mentioned that several cities had more than one team. I replied, "you mean the St. Louis Cardinals and the St. Louis Browns; the Philadelphia Athletics and the Philadelphia Phillies; the Boston Red Sox and the Boston Braves; the New York Yankees and Giants, along with the Brooklyn Dodgers." I kept going until I named them all.

Well, he spent the next hour quizzing me, and I must say it was as much fun as I have had in years. I just kept remembering so many things about baseball that I learned from my Dad and Uncle Floy. Uncle Floy and Daddy subscribed to a magazine called *Baseball Digest*, and Uncle Floy would put a check mark next to each article when he finished it. I think that reading those magazines with them taught me a lot of baseball history.

History has always fascinated me, and I love reading and studying history. I learned Baptist history while growing up in Training Union. Now if you're under the age of 40—or you didn't grow up in Baptist churches—you've probably never heard of Training Union. So I'll explain it like this—Training Union was sort of like Sunday School at night. However, where Sunday School mostly

covers Bible basics, Training Union mostly covered Baptist basics. It's my conviction that Baptists have paid a dear price for doing away with Training Union.

Today, our churches are full of people who are Baptists in name only—they are not "convictional Baptists." They don't even know what it means to be a Baptist, but they attend a Baptist church because they live close by or they like the preacher or their friends go there. They could just as easily go to a "Bible church" or a church of another denomination if the preacher they liked moved away or their close friends changed churches.

Oh, I'm glad they are attending a Baptist church, but we need Baptists who are Baptist out of conviction rather than convenience. I believe it is critical to our future as Texas Baptists that we have a "convictional Baptist education" program in every church, along with a "convictional Baptist education" program in every university and Baptist Student Ministry in our state.

Furthermore, I believe that every pastor should preach at least one sermon per year regarding "What it means to be a Baptist," and tell the story of Baptist history—from the Anabaptists through Roger Williams on to John Leland to E.Y. Mullins and George W. Truett, and concluding with a clear explanation of what has happened in Baptist life these past 30 years. Our people need to know our history and why our Baptist principles are so fundamental to spreading the Gospel in a free-church tradition.

I would love to see home study groups that focus on Baptist principles as well as Bible study. I would love to see retreats—focusing on Baptist principles—for youth, college students, and young couples. We have a fascinating Baptist history; our freedom as Baptists was bought for a heavy price paid by many.

Although some refuse to believe it, Texas Baptists Committed has always been more about Baptist principles and education than politics. Our focus and ministry has been about preserving Baptist freedom for all—and not on controlling Baptist agencies and ministries. There is a difference between protecting and controlling. We have worked to protect our institutions and ministries by recommending leadership publicly committed to protecting our freedom. I am proud of what we have done to preserve the Baptist witness in America and to help produce more and more convictional Baptists.

At TBC, we are focusing our future on how to be more helpful to local churches and individuals in producing convictional Baptists. In the coming months, we will be enhancing our Web site to provide more resources to help in this effort. We also plan to travel and speak more on the importance of being convictional Baptists.

Being a Baptist saves no one; being a Baptist is not as important as being a Christian. However, being a Baptist is something that we should thoroughly understand...something in which we should take pride, for we have a significant role to play in the Kingdom of God as free Baptists.

I am thankful that my parents taught me what it means to be a Baptist. I am thankful that I went to a Texas Baptist university. I am thankful that I belong to a church that freely relates to an open and inclusive state Baptist convention. Finally, I am thankful that Mother turned 91 last week and that I still have her here with me to love—not just in memory.

Faithful Baptist parents...a strong local church, with Training Union every Sunday night...and a university rooted in the Texas Baptist way...all of these helped produce a convictional Baptist. Being just a casual baseball fan was never good enough for me, and neither is being just a casual Baptist. I invite you to work with us at TBC to help more casual Baptists become convictional Baptists.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY DEPENDS ON A FREE PRESS

by Joy Fenner
President, Baptist General
Convention of Texas

Recently, the directors of Associated Baptist Press presented their Founders Award to the Baptist General Convention of Texas. As president, I was privileged to accept that award on behalf of the BGCT. In preparing my response for the award presentation, I sought to discuss why the BGCT had so diligently supported ABP through the years. In researching the subject, I discovered three elements that were especially significant: people, process, and principle.

There were—and, thankfully, are—Baptists in Texas who insisted on receiving an accounting of happenings in the Baptist world that was fair and accurate, neither

**...as long as there have been
Baptists and Baptist churches,
there have been those who paid a
price for religious freedom.**

suppressed nor slanted. So they rejoiced when ABP was born—a Baptist news service independent and free to tell the truth. Fair and accurate, neither suppressed nor slanted. As it states on its Web site (www.abpnews.com), Associated Baptist Press is “the first and only independent news service created by and for Baptists.”

Texas Baptist leadership has, throughout the years, chosen to involve key people in the decision-making process, all of which has informed and built trust, all the while laying a foundation that has resulted in not only one-time funding but ongoing support. I believe, however, that the people have effectively worked the process because of the

principle: Texas Baptists believe in freedom of the press. This is strongly evidenced by the independence of our newsjournal, the *Baptist Standard*, which partners with and supports the BGCT but is not controlled by the BGCT Executive Board.

And yet, freedom of the press is just one piece of a much bigger picture: religious liberty.

Right now, I am reading three books:

- *Fed Up with Fundamentalism*, by Leroy Seat, a missionary colleague of mine in Japan

- *Baptists and Religious Liberty, the Freedom Road*, a doctrine and heritage study book by Bill Pinson, published by BaptistWay Press

- *No Armor for the Back, Baptist Prison Writings from the 16th and 17th Centuries*, by Keith Durso

Not one of these books is “fun” reading, I assure you. These real-life experiences of Baptist believers have reinforced vividly for me my understanding that, as long as there have been Baptists and Baptist churches, there have been those who paid a price for religious freedom. They remind me that true religious freedom means freedom for persons of all faiths, as well as those of no faith. Moreover, in a day when truth is handled so carelessly, I am reminded that freedom does not give license to do anything or nothing; rather, for the Christ-follower, freedom calls us to a standard far higher than any court or convention could place upon us...a standard of integrity and excellence.

Religious liberty is a precious part of our Baptist heritage, and a free press is essential to that liberty. May the BGCT—and all Texas Baptists—continue to give our unflinching support to those who strive to keep us informed with the unvarnished truth...even when it hurts!

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Why I Chose to Serve on the TBC Board

by James Hassell

Member, TBC Board of Directors; and
Pastor, First Baptist Church, Tulia,
Texas

I've chosen to serve on the Texas Baptists Committed Board of Directors for a variety of reasons. In fact, there was only a moment's hesitation before I responded with a "yes" to the Board's invitation.

First and foremost among my reasons is that serving in such a capacity affords me the opportunity to give back to Texas Baptists, for I am a product of missional Texas Baptists. George W. Truett said, "The church that is not missionary does not deserve the ground on which its building stands." Indeed, I've observed and experienced TBC's consistent commitment to the local Baptist church whose focus is beyond itself—a "missionary" church, in Truett's words.

So I choose to give back, because strong BGCT churches and Texas Baptists Committed have been essential in leading me to understand the diligent protection of religious freedom, church freedom, Bible freedom, and soul freedom that has marked traditional Texas Baptists. I would not have been educated at Hardin-Simmons University or Logsdon Seminary if it were not for

generations of pastors, laypersons, and honest teachers who took a stand *against* religious tyranny and *for* the authority of Christ. I fear that my generation—"Generation X"—tends to take for granted the opportunities that God has set before us; we have failed to show gratitude to those who walked the extra mile, time and time again, to see to it that the local church remained empowered in its redemptive purpose. So I choose to give back.

Second, I serve on the TBC Board because Texas Baptist life remains in a state of flux. Rather than fear change or shrink from it, I want to work with the TBC Board to take a hands-on, solution-focused approach to the challenges that face Texas Baptists—both now and in the years to come. In my first meeting with the TBC Board, I sensed excitement about the many ways in which TBC is committed to the future of Baptist life.

I expect Texas Baptists Committed to continue to highlight the impact of the BGCT's ministries and institutions that are so valuable to our churches and our people as we strive to live out the Great Commission in our communities, throughout Texas, and beyond. I look forward to being in-

involved in TBC's steadfast support of bedrock Baptist principles: soul competency, local church autonomy, religious liberty for all people, and biblical authority. Although the future is uncertain, TBC recognizes that these principles have guided Texas Baptists through tectonic shifts in the past, and they will also lead us into a future of committed and effective evangelism.

In fact, our TBC Board has established a unique approach toward educating others, especially young people, on the biblically focused principles that have kept Texas Baptists free. I'm fully dedicated, as a member of the TBC Board, to establishing supportive and cooperative relationships with new generations of leaders to make a future that is as bright as our past.

Therefore, a "yes" to serving on the Board of Texas Baptists Committed is a "yes" to promoting our Baptist heritage; working with Texas Baptists to confront the challenges and opportunities of the future; developing new generations of Baptist leaders who are committed to bedrock Baptist principles; and promoting and supporting a vision of missions that provides worth and sustenance to our local churches through the power of God's Spirit.

Announcing - A Call for Contributors

For

Exiled II - The Lost Generation

(a sequel to)

Exiled

– *Voices of the Southern Baptist Convention Holy War*

Carl L. Kell (ed.)

(University of Tennessee Press, 2006, 2007)

I am launching a nationwide search for *second generation* Southern Baptists whose father and/or mother lost their job, position, or church during the SBC holy war. If you have a story to tell, please contact me:

Dr. Carl L. Kell

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ASKING YOU TO PARTNER WITH TBC

by *Bill Jones*,
Communications Editor, Texas Baptists Committed; and member of TBC Board of Directors

As we prepare to gather for our annual Texas Baptists Committed Convocation next month, I want to take a moment to consider exactly what TBC is all about.

Some still think of TBC purely in terms of its historic focus on mobilizing Texas Baptists to support TBC-endorsed candidates for BGCT office year in and year out...candidates committed to fighting Fundamental control and supporting freedom. Newspaper articles—by Baptist newsmen and others—continue to refer to TBC as a “political organization.”

Well, the battle for Baptist freedom is certainly not over, but it has changed. The threat is less overt, more subtle, but no less real. After all, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention continues its efforts to draw churches away from the BGCT.

But Texas Baptists Committed is a dynamic organization that seeks to meet the needs of today and tomorrow, not yesterday. TBC, under David Currie’s leadership, has always sought to educate and inform. For the past year, however, David and our Board have been working together to give even greater emphasis and breadth to that focus to enable us to respond to the needs of Texas Baptists today and well into the future. Although we can never afford to neglect the “politics” of the moment, our focus extends much further than that. We are focusing on educating and equipping every generation of Texas Baptists so that they will be prepared to handle the challenges and threats posed to them in the years to come.

At our Convocation in Dallas next month, we will be presenting four panel discussions that will share details concerning some of the new TBC initiatives targeted at equipping Texas Baptists, or—as the Convocation theme puts it—“helping Texas Baptists stay Baptist.” I’m excited about these programs, and I believe that they will get you excited about the future

of TBC.

Following are the four areas of TBC work that our Convocation panels will share:

- Helping Texas Baptist Churches Teach Baptist Principles
- Helping Texas Baptist Pastors Grow Distinctively Baptist Churches
- Helping Texas Baptist Seminary Students Learn Historic Baptist Principles
- Helping Texas Baptist Churches Call Distinctively Baptist Pastors

This is just the beginning. Our TBC Board continues to explore ways in which we can partner with the BGCT to address the needs of Texas Baptists. So there will

Teaching them [Baptist church members] the importance of historic Baptist distinctives—such as soul competency, the priesthood of every believer, and separation of church and state—is the responsibility of the free and faithful Baptists in their church.

be additional initiatives down the road. But there will be a central focus to all of them—encouraging generations of distinctively Baptist believers and distinctively Baptist churches.

Many of us remember a time when Training Union taught us what it means to be a Baptist. We grew up learning, every Sunday night, the principles that had been dear to Baptists ever since those first Baptist churches were formed in England and Holland in the early 17th century.

But Training Union is a distant memory today. Many members of Baptist churches know no reason for being Baptist except that the Baptist church is the closest...or the one with the most comfortable worship style...or the one with the best youth program for their kids. Teaching them the importance of historic Baptist distinctives—such as soul competency, the priesthood of every believer, and separation of church

and state—is the responsibility of the free and faithful Baptists in their church.

That’s where Texas Baptists Committed comes in. We seek to partner with the BGCT in providing Texas Baptist churches with resources for teaching and promoting Baptist distinctives.

But Texas Baptists Committed is YOU. I hope that these new TBC programs will excite you to the point of wanting to actively participate in, and support, them. Please partner with us in this work.

Do you want to teach a series on Baptist heritage and distinctives in your Sunday School class? We can help you find the source materials that you need.

Is your church looking for a pastor? Let us know, and we can send you our “Help for Pastor Search Committee Packet.”

Do you want to introduce your church to what TBC is doing? We plan to take our Convocation program to churches around the state this fall. Ask your pastor to contact our office and offer to host one of these programs.

Finally, please contribute financially as the Lord leads you. In fact, if you find that one of the new TBC programs being presented during our Convocation is of special urgency to you, feel free to send a donation and designate it for that program.

These are just a few of the ways in which you can be involved. If you want to partner with us, we’ll find a way for you to get involved.

New generations of Baptists—young and old—need to know that Baptist is more than just another denominational name. It’s a way of living out the Gospel of Jesus Christ...a way of sharing the freedom that Christ gives...a way of taking personal responsibility for one’s own relationship with God. It means taking a stand for freedom and against any who seek to control that relationship.

Texas Baptists Committed is looking for partners...free and faithful Baptist partners to share in this great work. We invite you to take a fresh look at what TBC is doing, to get excited about the future of Texas Baptists, and to become active partners with us.

The Hunt Paradox: “Radical Change” & Unity

by *Marv Knox, Baptist Standard*,
Posted on June 12, 2008, to his *FaithWorks* blog on the
Baptist Standard Web site

Johnny Hunt, the Southern Baptist Convention’s new president, presents a paradoxical picture. He’s an ultimate insider calling for “radical change” within the SBC.

No wonder he’s calling for change. Its leaders acknowledge the SBC is declining and membership is falling. This is quite a slap in the face for a group who gained control of the convention by warning “liberalism” would lead to decline. It’s a bitter pill for folks who touted every numerical gain as a sign of God’s favor upon their movement.

If the reason you’re growing is because God approves you, then what does God think of you now that you’re sliding?

This realization may bestow a blessing upon the SBC. Whatever your theology or politics, you can find grace at the bottom of a pit. When you’re strong and flying high, you’re tempted to think you don’t need God’s help all that much. “It’s OK, Lord. We’re strong and smart and committed and faithful and, of course, orthodox. We can take it from here.”

But when you’re declining, you need God’s grace. To quote the old hymn, that’s when you lean on the everlasting arms of God, your Savior.

So, President Hunt advocates “radical change” in the SBC. “We’ve been declining as a denomination, and you can’t turn something around until you stop the tide and direction it is going,” he said at a news conference.

He also called for unity among Southern Baptists, telling the media he hopes to show there is room “under the Southern Baptist umbrella” for those with the passion to take the gospel “down the street and around the world.”

And he urged younger Baptists to “step up to the plate” and get involved in the convention. After working diligently for 15 years to mentor and encourage young pastors, Hunt might have special currency to accomplish this feat.

But if he really wants to initiate “radical change” that will result in Baptist unity, he should take seven steps to radically change the SBC and foster a kind of unity he and his inner circle haven’t dreamed of.

This will call for him to exercise radical courage. But if he pulls it off, he could go down as the most effective president in SBC history. Here they are:

- Rescind the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message statement and reaffirm the inclusive 1963 BF&M. The newer document has been a bellwether of disunity.
- Affirm the historic Baptist diversity of biblical and theological interpretation and vow to build unity on missions, evangelism, fellowship and passion of purpose.
- Publicly apologize to seminary professors, missionaries and others who lost their ministries exclusively because they did not affirm the “conservative resurgence.”
- Vacate half the membership of each SBC board of directors and intentionally select leading so-called moderates to fill the new vacancies. Within three years, remove all current SBC agency heads, and exhort the newly reconstituted boards to hire centrist leaders to build balanced faculties, student bodies, missionary forces and staffs that reflect all Baptists whose tradition is the Southern variety.
- Lead in dissolving the two new state conventions that formed solely out of loyalty to the “new” SBC and call on their churches to return joyfully and enthusiastically to full membership in the state conventions from which they sprung.
- In other states, especially where conventions loyal to the “new” SBC disenfranchised churches that did not agree with SBC developments, overtly embrace and affirm those churches.
- Reach out to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist World Alliance as faithful bodies of believers. Join those two organizations in sponsoring a national convocation of apology and repentance: Together, apologize to the world at large and the broader Christian community for three decades of bitterness, recrimination and infighting that defamed the name of Christ, undermined evangelistic witness and demeaned brothers and sisters in Christ. Also, jointly apologize to one another for all the lies, gossip and slander said about each other. And most importantly, repent before Holy God for all these sins, begging forgiveness and a second chance at being the people God intended.

President Hunt vows he wants “radical change” leading to unity. This is radical. It would give Baptists an opportunity for unity.

Why I Said “Yes” to TBC

by *Chad R. Chaddick*

Member, TBC Board of Directors; and Pastor, Northeast Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas

In January, I attended my first TBC Board meeting in Dallas—one of four recently elected members in attendance. All four of us were asked why we said “yes” to the invitation to serve on the TBC Board of Directors.

Since that meeting, as I have reflected on that question and my initial response, I have realized that my “yes” to service on this Board is really a natural outgrowth of the “yes” that I said many years ago to supporting TBC as a member.

As I told the Board, my agreement to serve stems from a conviction that TBC people are my kind of Baptists. Seeing so much flux and uncertainty in the future and direction of so many Baptist organizations, I prefer to ride these waves of change with like-minded Baptists over navigating them alone or with those who do not share my convictions.

But maybe the phrase “my kind of Baptists” is too vague and general to convey the depth of the “yes” that I have said and continue to say. The kind of Baptists to whom I refer are men and women who know *why* they are Baptist and why they are *not* some other expression of the Christian faith. Furthermore, they are committed to being authentically Baptist and producing a traditional, historical Baptist witness rather than changing the core of Baptist identity to suit some revisionist agenda.

At the core of Baptist identity—and at the core of these people’s commitment—is the unequivocal affirmation of the Lordship of Christ. Such Baptists are so committed to the Lordship of Christ that they have spent considerable time, prayer, and resources to ensure that Baptist institutions, agencies, churches, and believers remain free from authoritarian and autocratic leadership...free to follow Jesus wherever and however He leads.

These Baptists are committed to the inspiration of the Bible as our most reliable and authoritative source of instruction on being Christ-like people. They are so committed to the Bible that they have spent considerable resources to provide educational opportunities in which the freedom of inquiry is cherished and protected. Why? Because freedom of inquiry is Biblical—as portrayed in the lives and

teachings of the Old Testament prophets and New Testament disciples. Because, furthermore, God values such liberty—even the liberty to be wrong, as Genesis teaches us.

These Baptists seek to value what God values, and they trust that God is great enough to bless the righteous choices and redeem the fallen choices that are made with that liberty. Yes, these Baptists are committed to the historic Baptist principles of local church autonomy, the priesthood of all believers, and religious liberty for all people. They spend a significant part of their lives seeking to nurture, protect, and advance these principles, because they are convinced that the Bible teaches that God values them.

It is to all of these things and many more that these Baptists have shown themselves to be committed. They have shown their commitment not only by their words but in deed and in truth, to borrow a phrase from John. Sacrificial effort, sacrificial attendance, and sacrificial giving charac-

At the core of Baptist identity—and at the core of these people’s commitment—is the unequivocal affirmation of the Lordship of Christ.

terize these men and women, and they have operated on the principle that change will not take place without personal commitment and active involvement.

So they have worked and attended and given for the purpose of nurturing real Baptist kinds of Christians and a Christian community steeped in Baptist principles and polity. They have done this for Baptists in Texas, and they have done this for Baptists around the world.

When I said “yes” to being involved in the work of TBC, I said “yes” to being involved with this kind of people, this kind of effort, and this kind of Baptist life in Texas and the world. These people are my kind of Baptists.

In closing, the preacher in me cannot help but ask, Why haven’t more of our Baptist folks said “yes” to Texas Baptists Committed? Why don’t more Baptists continue to say “yes” through their involvement as new needs and opportunities eclipse the old? It is up to us who are already involved to lead the way.

HISPANIC BAPTIST LEADERS – PREPARING THE FIELD FOR A TEXAS BAPTIST HARVEST

by *Debbie Ferrier*,
Vice-Chair, Board of Directors, Texas Baptists Committed

San Antonio has just commemorated its annual “Remember the Alamo Weekend” by reenacting the siege of the Alamo by General Santa Anna and the Mexican Army. As I watched the local news station report on the Mexican Army’s storming of the walls of the Alamo on March 6, 1836, killing 188 “Texians,” I was reminded of a Sunday School lesson that I prepared, several years ago, for a series on Texas Baptist history and Baptist Distinctives.

In preparing that lesson, I drew a revealing comparison of the Texas population in 1835 to its 2006 counterpart. In September 1835, the population of Texas, which numbered 47,670, was 62.9% Anglo-American; 29.8% Native American; and 7.3% Mexican. In 2006, according to the U.S. Census, the population of Texas had grown to 23,507,783: 48.3% Anglo-American; 35.7% Hispanic; 11.9% African-American; and 4.1% Asian or other race or ethnicity.

Bringing these numbers into sharper focus is the discovery that there are approximately 100 different religious groups represented in Texas, and at least one-half of the Texas population is affiliated with no religious group at all. If these numbers are correct, then well over half of our state has yet to meet Jesus Christ.

As I sat in a meeting with Texas Hispanic leaders several weeks ago at the Baptist University of the Americas (BUA), I couldn’t help but think about how privileged Texas Baptists are to have the people sitting around that table leading the Hispanic Baptist community. According to demographers, Hispanics will make up 50% of the Texas population by the year 2015.

Our challenge is daunting. Only 2% of the current Hispanic population is Baptist. We can’t know how many of that other 98% know Christ, but we can be reasonably sure that many of them have never even been told that Jesus died for them and that He wants to live in their hearts today. How are we going to reach all of the men, women, and children coming into Texas, and share the hope and love of Jesus Christ with them?

When Dr. Albert Reyes was president of the Baptist University of the Americas in San Antonio, he wrote a paper entitled “Unification to Integration: A Brief History of the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas,” and asked me, as chair of the Board of Trustees, to read it. I’m sure he would be pleased for you to read the entire paper—you can find it at <http://www.bucknerchildren.org/Reyes%20Blog/HistoryofHBCT.pdf>.

For the moment, though, I’d like to share a few items from Dr. Reyes’ paper. The first Mexican Baptist church in Texas was organized in 1886, in Laredo. Mexican Baptist work in Texas began to grow with the establishment of churches bearing the name *Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana* in San Antonio (1888), El Paso (1892), Beeville (1900), Corpus Christi (1911), and Dallas (1918).

The Mexican Revolution – which became known as Mexico’s civil war – brought many more Mexican citizens into Texas. This revolution was the result of a plan developed in 1910 by Francisco I. Madero, who had fled Mexico for San Antonio. During the revolution, as many as 1 million Mexican citizens either crossed the border into Texas or died in the attempt. The Mexican Baptist

Convention of Texas was organized that same year. The development of Mexican Baptist work grew in the ensuing decades.

Then, during the 1940s, Mexican Baptists in Texas established four institutions to support the work of their churches:

- The Bible Institute of Bastrop (1940), established by Paul C. Bell, who also served as pastor of the *Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana* of Bastrop

- The Mexican Baptist Children’s Home (1944) – now known as Baptist Child and Family Services, established in San Antonio by Dr. Perry F. Webb

- The Valley Baptist Academy (1946) – now known as the Valley Baptist Missions Education Center, established by Paul J. Siebenmann for the purpose of instructing Mexican and Texan youth through secondary education

- The Mexican Baptist Bible Institute (1947) – now known as the Baptist University of the Americas, established in San Antonio by Paul J. Siebenmann for the purpose of training ministers

Bolstered by new church starts and these new institutions, the Mexican Baptist Convention was growing and maturing, led by visionaries committed to the mission of reaching Mexicans and Tejanos in Texas.

As I mentioned earlier, today’s Texas Baptists are privileged to have Hispanic Baptist leaders who recognize and believe in the mission of reaching everyone in Texas for the Kingdom of God. As these leaders met at the Baptist University of the Americas several weeks ago, I knew that Texas Baptists were crossing over into one of the most exciting times in our history.

This meeting saw significant contributions from leaders such as Rudy Camacho, Alcides Guajardo, Gus Reyes, Ruben Chaires, Teo Cisneros, Al Flores, Baldemar Borrego, Rolando Lopez, Rene Maciel, Javier Elizondo, Rolando Rodriguez, and Marconi Monteiro. Their contributions ranged from how the school is perceived by the Hispanic Baptist community, to how BUA can provide training to Hispanic Baptist congregations, to – most importantly – how BUA will work with *Convencion*, the BGCT, and churches to recruit and train Hispanic pastors to fill Baptist pulpits in Texas.

What is the answer to reaching the growing Hispanic population in Texas for God’s Kingdom? Dr. Charles Wade, former executive director of the BGCT, said that the Baptist University of the Americas is the premier equipping institution for recruiting, educating, and training the large numbers of cross-cultural ministry leaders that will be needed by tomorrow’s Hispanic Baptist churches.

Today, BUA has more than 1,600 alumni serving as Christian leaders in local churches, denominational offices, mission fields, and the business world. Three of every four Hispanic Baptist pastors in Texas attended BUA. Currently, BUA has over 200 students enrolled at the San Antonio campus, plus more than 700 additional students in schools and institutes in the United States, Mexico, Spain, and India.

Let’s celebrate the future of Texas Baptists. We have a great history, and our people are wonderfully diverse. There has never been a better time to reach our state with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I challenge you to accept God’s love, embrace His mission, and pray for our Baptist leaders.

Does the SBC want me?

by Ken Coffee, Interim Pastor, First Baptist Church, Big Spring, Texas,
Posted on July 16, 2008, to his Strong Coffee blog at kennaco.blogspot.com

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Ken Coffee formerly served as executive director of the San Antonio Baptist Association and associate director of the State Missions Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.)

There is a lot of discussion on other blogs about whether or not the conservative resurgence was worth it in the Southern Baptist Convention. Put me on the side of those who think it was not. Oh, if doctrine is your primary concern, then it was probably worth it. However, doctrine is not my primary concern. My concern is relationships.

Many of us feel that we in the SBC are morphing into a group of intolerant religious bigots, who are rapidly coming to believe no one else is going to be in heaven except us. We are becoming more "Campbellite" than Baptist. Alexander Campbell probably would never have left Baptists in 1827 if we had been then like we are becoming now (hyperbole...said in jest).

This resurgence everyone in SBC leadership is so proud of has become a huge, bigoted conglomeration that shows

My conservative credentials will match up with anyone out there, but these credentials stop at drinking the Kool Aid and giving up my right to think for myself.

no tolerance of anyone who has a different point of view. First, they demanded we use the word "inerrant" when describing the Bible, "inerrancy" when describing our theology of the Bible, or "inerrantist" when describing ourselves. I actually had that conversation with a pastor when I served as executive director of San Antonio Baptist Association.

He wanted to know if I was an inerrantist. I replied, "I think God is a perfect God and as such could not have an imperfect word. I believe the Bible is without error." He then asked, "But, are you an inerrantist?" See what I mean? If I didn't use his word he was not going to recognize me as part of his fellowship of Baptists.

Then, when all was well in Smallville, er uh, Nashville, they decided to rewrite the Confession of Faith that had stood for almost four decades. They then began to exert not-

so-subtle pressure on employees, missionaries, and churches by making them choose to adhere to, and even affix their signature to, the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message.

People who would not sign were terminated or exiled to the purgatory of Baptist opinion. Again... "Use our language or step aside. Teach what we say or step aside." When entire state conventions decided to step aside, they all of a sudden became "liberal conventions," even though made up of the same churches.

The big question in my mind is, do Southern Baptists still want me? Frankly, I am not sure I am welcome in the SBC anymore. And it's not because I've changed.

In any discussion of liberals, people always rush to point to Baylor University. Baylor University is not and never has been an SBC university. Taking over the SBC could not affect Baylor. It is true that efforts by regents to effect change at Baylor were rebuffed. No conservative is pleased at some of the things we heard about that were being taught at Baylor.

I will readily admit the presence of some liberal professors at the seminaries. But, how many was it? How many babies did we have to throw out to get rid of that bath water?

My conservative credentials will match up with anyone out there, but these credentials stop at drinking the Kool Aid and giving up my right to think for myself. When I need to know what to believe, I do not have to ask someone on the SBC Executive Committee. I can find it for myself, in the Word of God.

People in my state will tell you I have been one of the voices that have encouraged reconciliation between the SBC and my state convention. I would love to see us working together. I would love to continue to call myself a Southern Baptist.

The big question in my mind is, do Southern Baptists still want me? Frankly, I am not sure I am welcome in the SBC anymore. And it's not because I've changed.

New Baptist Covenant: Unity. Harmony. Now, what comes next?

*By Marv Knox
Baptist Standard*

ATLANTA—Fifteen thousand participants in the New Baptist Covenant convocation arrived in Atlanta Jan. 30 seeking unity in Christ and departed Feb. 1 wondering where their quest will lead.

In the meantime, they demonstrated racial, theological and geographic harmony as they prayed, sang, listened to sermons and attended workshops focusing on ministry to the people Jesus called “the least of these” in society.

The unprecedented event brought together African-American, Anglo, Asian-American and Hispanic Baptists. They represented 30 Baptist conventions and organizations, all affiliated with the North American Baptist Fellowship, the regional affiliate of the Baptist World Alliance. They also heard from two former U.S. presidents, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, and a former vice president, Al Gore—all Baptists.

A Historic Gathering

Participants scaled a 163-year-old wall that has divided the denomination since U.S. Baptists parted company over slavery more than a decade before the Civil War.

As women and men of numerous races sat side-by-side through sermons and hugged and laughed in hallways, they embodied a dream-come-true for Baptists who dreamed of racial reconciliation in their denomination.

“This is the most momentous event of my religious life,” declared an emotional Carter, a son of the South and a lifelong Baptist.

“For the first time in more than 160 years, we are convening a major gathering of Baptists throughout an entire continent, without any threat to our unity caused by differences of our race or politics or geography or the legalistic interpretation of Scripture,” said Carter, who co-chaired the gathering with Mercer University President Bill Underwood.

Carter’s euphoria echoed the aspiration of another Baptist from Georgia, and the convocation fulfilled the prophecy of Martin Luther King Jr., Underwood told the crowd.

“Forty-five years ago, a native son of Atlanta, a Baptist pastor, shared with all of us his dream: One day, on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners would be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood,” Underwood said to sustained applause.

“Today, here on those red hills of Georgia, Baptists have come together to take a step in the long and difficult journey toward achieving Dr. King’s great dream. After generations of putting up walls between us—separation, division by geography, by theology, but most of all division by race—a new day is dawning. ... Today, we all sit down together at the table of Christian brotherhood and sisterhood.”

Leaders of most of the participating groups first affirmed the New Baptist Covenant in April 2006, when Carter and Underwood invited them to Atlanta to talk about bridging Baptists’ racial,

theological and geographic divisions by working together “to promote peace with justice, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, care for the sick and marginalized, welcome the strangers among us, and promote religious liberty and respect for religious diversity.”

That effort piggybacked on a historic gathering of the four predominantly African-American Baptist conventions five years ago, plus ongoing discussions of unity within the North American Baptist Fellowship, NABF President David Goatley said.

“The New Baptist Covenant is a public witness to our common commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed,” explained Goatley, executive secretary of the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention.

“Never before have Baptists on this scale sought to cross the boundaries we choose to live behind—ethnicity, ideology, theology. Never before have Baptists on this scale sought to explore ministries of this impact. Never before have Baptists on this scale come together for cooperation and collaboration for missional ministry impact.

“We are at the threshold of great possibilities,” Goatley said.

Unity the Theme – Not Politics

Prior to the convocation, critics suggested one of those possibilities was politics.

They claimed organizers stacked the program in favor of Democrats, citing the presence not only of Carter, but also Clinton and Gore. Carter refuted that charge in a news conference, noting the all-Baptist program also featured Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa. Organizers invited Republican presidential candidate and former Baptist pastor Mike Huckabee, who accepted and then declined months ago, as well as Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who bowed out at the last minute to campaign for another presidential candidate who attends a Baptist church, John McCain.

In the convocation’s opening session, Carter made a promise that also sounded like a warning to all the other speakers. Imploring the diverse Baptists to make unity the distinctive element of their gathering, he pledged, “There will be no criticism of others—let me say again—no criticism of others or exclusion of any Christians who would seek to join this cause.”

Near the end of the meeting, he told reporters the convocation lived up to his nonpolitical billing. “We have deliberately avoided any identification by politics,” he declared. “It’s been a wonderful mixture of cohesive, different groups. All of us, so far as I know, have been completely unified.”

“Unity in Christ” provided the convocation’s theme. Plenary sessions focused on creating Baptist unity by following Jesus’ mandate set out in his first sermon: “to preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Bill Clinton Urges Humility & Respect Toward Critics

Clinton, the closing speaker, called for unity toward a group with which many of the other participants disagree—the Southern Baptist Convention.

The SBC pulled out of the Baptist World Alliance—the organizational common denominator for all the groups affiliated with the New Baptist Covenant—several years ago, citing alleged “liberalism.”

Clinton described the rift with the SBC as competing interpretations of the New Testament Epistle of James, “that people would know our faith by our works.”

Baptists who gained control of the SBC focused on “works” related to issues such as opposition to abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment and gay rights, he noted, while “more progressive Baptists” focused on fighting poverty, protecting the environment and providing housing for poor people, he said.

“I say this in good conscience: We all believe we are doing what we can. But so do they. They read the obligations of Scripture in a different way,” he noted.

Calling for humility and respect, Clinton urged, “We should not let our response to the people who disagree with us be dictated by what they say about us or even how they treat people we care for. If there is any chance that this covenant can become an embracing one, that there can be a whole community, then there has to be a chance that we can find love.”

Speakers Call for Unity Across Broad Spectrum of Life

Other speakers amplified the unity theme from a range of perspectives:

William Shaw—Reversing Oppression

Christian oneness centers on fulfilling Jesus’ “radical mission,” stressed William Shaw, president of the National Baptist Convention, USA, one of the four African-American conventions, and pastor of White Rock Baptist Church in Philadelphia.

Jesus wasn’t satisfied merely to bring relief to the persecuted and victimized, he explained, noting Jesus “concretized” his mission by seeking to reverse the structures and situations that caused oppression.

The heart of that quest is establishing justice and uprooting injustice, Shaw noted. “When God made mankind, he made us male and female—in his image. To do injustice to anybody is to do injustice to the reality of God, because we are in his image, and his image is not to be demeaned.”

That calls Baptists to seek change in society, he added. “You can’t embrace the mission of Jesus and not encounter the reality of injustice. He came not with actions of charity. He came to change. Justice says we need to change the structures of victimization.”

John Grisham—Helping the Poor, the Sick, and the Hungry

Unfortunately, the Baptist name is associated with exclusion, observed novelist John Grisham, a member of University Baptist Church in Charlottesville, Va. “The reason is because, for so long, so many Baptists have worked so hard to exclude so many,” he said.

Grisham offered Baptists three suggestions for seeking unity: Restore their good name by respecting diversity, stay out of poli-

tics and “spend as much time out on the streets in ministry as in the church.”

“Jesus preached more and taught more about helping the poor and the sick and the hungry than he did about heaven and hell. Shouldn’t that tell us something?” he asked.

Julie Pennington-Russell—Loving by Seeing Jesus in Others

Love is the key to unity, claimed Julie Pennington-Russell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Decatur, Ga. She accepted an assignment to speak on respecting diversity, but she said respect isn’t sufficient to build unity.

Respect alone “has no power to change something that is broken between you and me,” she said. “Only love can do that... Let love take you by the hand and lead you like a child to a new way of seeing that brother or sister, and look for Jesus in the face of that person,” she said.

Marian Wright Edelman—Speaking Up for Children

Marian Wright Edelman called for Baptists to unify around protecting children. She cited a litany of statistics that reveal the depth of poverty, neglect and risk that describe the United States’ 13 million children in poverty, noting they add up to a national catastrophe.

“They are not acts of God,” said Edelman, founder of the Children’s Defense Fund. “They are our choices as citizens and as a nation. We created them; we can and must change them.”

Churches “ought to be the locomotive, and not the caboose, in speaking up for children,” she said.

Tony Campolo—Preaching Good News to the Poor

Baptists could express their unity by giving themselves—and their means—to rescue the poor, Tony Campolo said.

Jesus pronounced his priorities in Luke 4, beginning with preaching good news to the poor, noted Campolo, author and professor emeritus at Eastern University near Philadelphia.

“Do you think Jesus meant what he said, or do you think he was kidding?” he asked.

“There is nothing wrong with making a million dollars. I wish you all would make a million dollars. There is nothing wrong with making it, but there is something wrong with keeping it,” he said. “My Bible tells me in 1 John 3:17, ‘If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need but shuts off his compassion from him—how can God’s love reside in him?’”

After calling on both individuals and churches to pour themselves into ministering to the poor, he shouted, “Rise up, you suckers, and go out and do the work of Jesus!”

Al Gore—Being Good Stewards of the Environment

Gore called for Baptists to protect the environment, pleading for participants in the convocation to make creation care one of their major initiatives.

The former vice president and Nobel laureate discussed the research behind his Oscar-winning documentary, “An Inconvenient Truth” during a luncheon attended by 2,500 participants.

“The evidence is there,” Gore said. “The signal is on the mountain. The trumpet has blown. The scientists are screaming from the rooftops. The ice is melting. The land is parched. The seas are rising. The storms are getting stronger. Why do we not judge what is right?”

“There is a distinct possibility that one of the messages coming

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out of this gathering and this new covenant is creation care—that we who are Baptists of like mind and attempting in our lives to the best of our abilities to glorify God, are not going to countenance the continued heaping of contempt on God’s creation.”

Chuck Grassley—Feeding the Hungry as Public Policy

Ironically, the world—for the first time in history—began producing enough food to eliminate hunger altogether in the 1960s, Grassley said, noting one in seven people worldwide goes to bed hungry each night.

“Unfortunately, this condition, this increased food productivity, has not solved hunger throughout the entire world,” he said. “Poverty, war, natural disasters contribute to the cycle of hunger. But we also confront 21st-century complexities that affect a wholesome, stable and deliverable food supply.”

Grassley said increasing free trade will help alleviate hunger worldwide, but Christians in the United States should begin focusing on practical ways of alleviating hunger themselves. “If ever there was a time for unity, now is the moment—building consensus between agriculturalists and conservationists and building the food supply can create sustainable farming methods that protect the environment.”

Joel Gregory—Welcoming the Stranger

The presence of “strangers” in the world provides a point for Baptist unity, stressed Joel Gregory, a professor of preaching at Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary.

“Behind us, in front of us, ahead of us we meet the face of the stranger in the word of God,” he said. “It is not a marginal issue. It’s a central concern.”

Unfortunately, Christians often try to care for strangers, foreigners and outsiders in the abstract, Gregory said, but God calls them to care for the stranger “in his concreteness, in his particularity, in his idiosyncrasies. ... Behind every generalization is God’s particularity—that person in front of me right now.”

David Satcher—Providing Adequate Health Care for Everyone

Another group that needs the force of Baptist unity is composed of the 47 million Americans who do not have medical insurance, said former Surgeon General David Satcher, of the Morehouse School of Medicine.

Inequities persist in the United States’ health-care system, he noted. “An African-American baby is 2 1/2 times as likely to die in the first year of life as a majority baby,” and globally, child-mortality disparities between the wealthiest and poorest countries are far worse.

“For me, that is not a political issue; it’s a moral issue,” he said.

Charles G. Adams—Setting the Captive Free

Setting the captive free also is a moral issue, echoed Charles G. Adams, pastor of Hartford Baptist Church in Detroit.

If Baptists do not share freedom with others, “then our souls will be destroyed and our freedom with it,” Adams said. “We are free only if we face the challenge of freedom, do the work of freedom, fight the fight of freedom and die the death for freedom.

“We are filled with the Spirit only to empty ourselves in the

liberation of others. We are loved only to love others. We are free only to accept the responsibility of setting others free.”

Special-interest Sessions Focus on Putting Unity into Practice

Convocation participants fleshed out the repeated calls for unity through ministry in 32 special-interest sessions. They featured practical applications of the unity/service theme.

Those sessions are likely to provide the backbone of structure for fleshing out what the convocation means and how participants will continue what began in Atlanta, predicted Jimmy Allen, program chairman for the event.

Ministerial students who attended each session took notes on the outcomes and proposals for cooperation in ministry, he said. They also gathered e-mail addresses of participants who want to continue collaboration on a range of poverty, racial, equality, peacemaking and other policy issues.

Where We Go from Here—A Movement, Not Merely a Moment

“Where we go from here will be very important,” Carter told reporters. “People stop me and say, ‘We don’t want this to be just a moment, but a movement.’”

This spring, the convocation leadership group will reconvene in Atlanta to consider hundreds of suggestions and discuss how to follow up, he said.

The answer will not be creating yet another Baptist convention, Allen added. “This movement will not be centralized. It can’t be.

“We’re not an organized structure. We’re stimulating and reflecting a movement of God that is bigger than us.”

Answers likely will include opportunities for individuals, congregations and larger Baptist groups “to add our voice to common commitment” to implement the ideas for ministry that surfaced in Atlanta, Carter said.

Implementation of those commitments could answer one criticism of the New Baptist Covenant—absence of Southern Baptist Convention leadership, he added.

Carter noted he had developed a positive relationship with SBC President Frank Page, who initially criticized the endeavor. Carter also said he would provide Page with a full report on the convocation and its possible outcomes.

“The results of this meeting will determine how the Southern Baptist leaders respond to us,” he predicted. “We will reach out” to them to participate in follow-up projects, he added.

Carter also debunked the notion that no Southern Baptists participated in the convocation. For example, his congregation, Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga., allocates 5 percent of its budget to the SBC and 5 percent to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Many other Baptist churches follow that pattern, he asserted.

Historian Walter Shurden, recently retired director of the Center for Baptist Studies at Mercer University and one of the early organizers of the convocation, said the event could become “a major step in racial reconciliation and gender recognition of Baptists in North America.”

“It’s the most significant Baptist meeting in my life, after playing in the Baptist yard 55 years or so,” he said. “I’ve never been to a Baptist meeting where there was the equality as well as the presence” of multi-racial, multi-gender participation.

“It bears the marks of the ministry of Jesus.”

Ethics and Evangelism Focus of Inaugural Lectures at Howard Payne

By Ken Camp
Baptist Standard

BROWNWOOD—Evangelism and ethics both grow out of a vibrant relationship with the God who is love, speakers told participants at the inaugural Currie-Strickland Distinguished Lectures in Christian Ethics at Howard Payne University.

People cannot fully come to know God apart from the Bible, but they cannot really know the Bible apart from God, said David Sapp, pastor of Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta, Ga.

“If God breathed it, how can we possibly understand it apart from knowing him?” Sapp asked.

Proper understanding of Scripture and application of its teachings in daily life require disciples to seek the mind of God, he said. Sapp suggested three themes that help Christians interpret Scripture—love, covenant and conquest of fear.

Love is the key

“Love is key to understanding the mind and heart of God,” he said.

But determining the most loving thing to do in the midst of any circumstance proves difficult, he acknowledged. Consequently, many Christians retreat to a rule-based ethic and treat the Bible as a “moral and ethical encyclopedia” from which they pluck isolated verses—usually ones that reinforce their own opinions and prejudices, he added.

God demonstrated his love through covenant relationships, and covenant serves as an interpretive key for reading Scripture, Sapp noted.

“Without commitment, there is no covenant,” he said. “Covenant commitment is an obligation not just of contract but of relationship.”

Covenant finds its expression in community, Sapp noted. In the Old Testament, God established covenant with Israel as a people, not strictly with individuals. While the New Covenant has more individual expression, he observed, it still offers invitation to enter into a larger community as part of the kingdom of God.

“Sin is social and not just personal,” he said.

The defeat of fear

Much sin grows out of fear, and “defeat of fear is part of the agenda of God,” Sapp said. “Much of our sin has its genesis in fear. Fear is fertile soil for evil.”

Both ethics and evangelism express God’s love, said Richard Jackson, director of the Jackson Center for Evangelism and Encouragement and pastor emeritus of North Phoenix Baptist Church in Phoenix, Ariz.

“Evangelism is born in the heart of a God of love,” Jackson said. From the earliest passage in Genesis and throughout the Bible, Scriptures testify to God’s loving pursuit of spiritually lost men and women.

“Jesus Christ didn’t come to heal the sick, or he would have healed them all. He didn’t come to feed the hungry, or he would have fed them all,” Jackson said. “He came to seek and save the lost. He healed the sick and fed the hungry because of who he is.”

Likewise, Christians today evangelize because Christ gave them that assignment, he said. Christians meet needs and seek justice because of who they are.

“Because Jesus lives in me, I will reach out to help those who are hurting,” he said.

Evangelism and ethics

Evangelism and ethics—“winning people to Jesus and wanting people to act like it”—bring Baptists together, noted Jimmy Allen, former denominational executive and recent coordinator of the New Baptist Covenant celebration in Atlanta.

Allen recalled his experiences as pastor of First Baptist Church in San Antonio, leading a church with a historic commitment to missions and evangelism to recognize ethical challenges and injustices in their own community.

At the downtown San Antonio church, Allen noted, people already possessed the necessary desire. They just needed to be challenged.

“A church will follow the vision of its pastor if the pastor has a passion for it,” he said.

But in some churches, he added, members must be shaken from their complacency and challenged to look beyond the four walls of the church building to see community needs.

“The moribund church never looks outside its windows except to see if the grass is mowed,” he said.

Gary and Molli Elliston of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas established the Currie-Strickland lectures in honor of David Currie, executive director of Texas Baptists Committed, and in memory of Phil Strickland, longtime director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas’ Christian Life Commission.

New Baptist Covenant Preparing for Regional Meetings

Volunteers in various parts of the country are organizing regional meetings of the New Baptist Covenant, according to Jimmy Allen, a member of the Steering Committee. To date, gatherings have been scheduled for 2009 in Birmingham, Alabama, on January 30-31; Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on April 23-25; and Norman, Oklahoma, on August 7-9.

President Jimmy Carter has committed to attend the three regional meetings. Steering committees are currently working on program details, and additional information will be released as it becomes available.

Additional regional meetings are being considered for the Midwest and Northeast.

RACIAL RECONCILIATION – TAKING IT STEP BY STEP

by Michael Bell, Pastor, Greater St. Stephen First Baptist Church, Fort Worth; Member, Advisory Board, Texas Baptists Committed; Former President, Baptist General Convention of Texas

It has been almost 15 years since three Tarrant Baptist Association pastors and I stood in the library at Broadway Baptist Church, Fort Worth, to announce the formation of an interfaith, multicultural clergy consortium that we named Tarrant Clergy for Inter-Ethnic Peace and Justice (TCIPJ). There were already other ministerial fellowships and unions that were meeting throughout the county, but none had the breadth and width of this newly organized coalition.

In a nutshell, TCIPJ was formed to promote interracial and interfaith conciliation and respect. Our group gratefully claimed an imam, priests, rabbis, and pastors as members. There were Cambodian Americans, Vietnamese Americans, Korean Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Anglo Americans, and Thai Americans who associated with our partnership.

These women and men, numbering over 60, were committed to peace, goodwill, and justice. They willingly gave of their time, energy, expertise, and resources in an effort to promote healing and mitigate misunderstanding. These leaders discovered that the realities of life are experienced and processed differently by distinctive racial/ethnic communities.

Once each quarter, we would host an assembly—complete with breakouts and a plenary session—and invite the public to attend. These meetings were well-attended, fueled by the hope for meaningful community dialogue aimed at decreasing racial polarization. In November 1994, the Fort Worth Human Relations Commission recognized the work of TCIPJ “for improving and promoting positive human relations.”

After 3 or 4 years, probably because it had run its course, the group was discontinued. However, the beneficence birthed out of this effort at racial rapprochement continues, in subtle ways, today.

During the time we were together, planning and engaging each other conversationally, there was a palpable anticipation that we just might experience breakthrough. We did not have to beg, bribe, or cajole our members to attend. It seemed as though everyone knew that to ignore the unyielding truth that something needed to be done would be to sentence our community and our children to the same unresolved and unaddressed muddle that we had inherited.

It’s been over a decade now since TCIPJ closed shop, and I am yet convinced that there are still some well-intentioned women and men, on all sides, who are grieved by the loss of speech across lines of difference and the subsequent

erosion of relatability. Recently, during the months leading up to the convening of the New Baptist Covenant in Atlanta, I sensed a familiar undertone of optimism, tempered with caution, among the couple dozen or so African American pastors within my orb of friendship.

The presidents of the four largest African American Baptist conventions had gone on record as endorsing the New Baptist Covenant, a culturally diverse network of Baptists.

The presidents even planned their winter meetings to coincide with the scheduling of the New Baptist Covenant Celebration. There was a distinct air of anticipation, especially among a good number of African American church leaders, about the Atlanta gathering. I, along with an appreciable number of my pastor friends, cleared our calendars and made preparations to participate in what Covenant program chair Jimmy Allen characterized as “the most significant meeting [Baptists] have had in a hundred years.”

We were not dissuaded by the lamentable myopia of the glass-is-half-empty crowd who noisily concluded that this opportunity (to at least take a baby step toward reversing the prevailing oppositional dynamic of race relations) was no more than a partisan political plot.

Unfortunately, because of my oldest sister’s unexpected death, I could not attend the Celebration, but – throughout the course of the meeting – I received phone call after phone call from friends who testified to its success. The consensus was that the journey was worthwhile. Even those brothers and sisters who went with no or low expectations returned to report that the Celebration was indeed a step in the right direction.

This is not to say that cross-cultural suspicion and distrust has been assuaged or that estrangement has been overcome. Truth be told, the Covenant never purported to be the vehicle that would move us past the current climate of alienation. But enough good occurred over the course of those 3 days in Atlanta to keep hope alive just a bit longer.

Two months after the Celebration, I am trusting that we haven’t seen the end of this movement. I am anxious to see how the recommendations that were formulated in the March follow-up meeting at the Carter Center will pan out.

Martin Luther King, Jr., who was assassinated 40 years ago this April, asked a question that still resonates today, “Where do we go from here?” Those of us who embrace the mission of the New Baptist Covenant find ourselves struggling to answer Dr. King’s question, knowing all too well that without struggle there is no progress.

A Mountaintop Experience

by David R. Currie, Executive Director

Earlier this year, I attended the *Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant* in Atlanta. It was like nothing I have ever experienced before.

Thirty years ago, I joined the staff of the SBC Christian Life Commission, working with the great Foy Valentine. I was 25 years old. In that summer of 1978, I attended the SBC annual meeting in Atlanta, where Jimmy Allen was reelected president of the SBC for a second term.

Since that convention, I have attended well over 100 Baptist gatherings: SBC annual meetings; BGCT annual meetings; CBF general assemblies; Christian Life Commission seminars—both SBC and BGCT; Mainstream Baptist Network and TBC convocations; evangelism conferences; and numerous other gatherings of Baptists.

But the *Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant* in Atlanta stands alone—it was not just another Baptist meeting. It was truly a mountaintop experience.

I have heard great preaching before—but not so many outstanding preachers and sermons, one following after the other.

I have heard great music in worship—but not music that constantly moved me to tears, session after session.

And I have never experienced worship in a gathering of such racial diversity—all of us worshipping together as Baptists whose only desire was to praise the Lord together and love each other. Unity in diversity—what a wonderful thing to celebrate!

Several people told me that they knew that I had been involved in the planning for this event. Some even asked me how I “put this program together.” I simply smiled and replied, “I didn’t. Jimmy Allen did, with a great deal of help from Jimmy Carter and Bill Underwood.”

It was truly a remarkable experience. Around 15,000 people are reported to have attended at least one plenary (general) session, although I have heard that there may have been even more than that. But I believe that this event will prove to be so historic that, in years to come, many others will want to claim that they were there, and that is fine with me. After all, I know that many were there in spirit but were either unable to come or chose—for various reasons—not to come.

In the months leading up to the meeting, there were warnings from critics that this would be nothing more than a political pep rally. They were wrong. Throughout the 3 days, I never heard a single partisan political statement. Several politicians spoke to the gathering, but they checked their politics at the door. Every one of them was faithful to the spirit and theme of the meeting—unity in Christ as free and faithful Baptists—and focused their messages

on subjects appropriate to the Luke 4 theme of the meeting.

I credit that to the influence of President Carter. At the press conference held on Wednesday afternoon, shortly before the first session began, a reporter from the *Boston Globe* asked President Carter to comment on Senator Ted Kennedy’s endorsement of Barack Obama. President Carter cut him off quickly, saying, “call me Saturday, and I will answer your questions, but this meeting is not partisan in any manner.” President Carter made it clear to everyone involved that the meeting was about Jesus and Baptist unity; everyone followed his lead.

If you were not able to attend, I urge you to go to www.newbaptistcelebration.org. Then click the **Videos** tab to access a list of videos of the messages given at this celebration. Please watch and listen as these speakers give their own perspective on how Baptists can unite to carry out Christ’s mission, as He announced it in Luke 4:18-19. Will you agree with everything that you hear? Not necessarily. But you don’t have to worry about hearing anything that smacks of partisan politics—there was none of that. However, there were many things said that will give you something to think about as you seek to carry out Christ’s mission in your own life and your own church.

A personal word—my favorite message was given on Friday evening by Charles G. Adams, pastor of Hartford Baptist Church in Detroit. I urge you to listen to this remarkable sermon—you will be blessed. But I hope you will listen to all of the messages given at this meeting—all of them will inspire you and challenge you.

So what does the future hold? Where do we go from here? The planners met in March to evaluate the meeting and begin making plans for turning this *moment* into a *movement* that will further unite Baptists and make us more effective in carrying out Christ’s mission. I expect that we will eventually meet again in another *Celebration*, and I hope and pray that many more will join us in this movement.

I do know one thing—it is the future, not the past, on which we Baptists need to focus. Yes, we must remember the mistakes and tragedies of the past to avoid repeating them. The SBC takeover is history, but we must remember it by being vigilant to prevent such a Fundamentalist takeover of our beloved state convention. However, God is calling Texas Baptists to do much more than this—He is calling us to a future in which we seek ways to partner with Him in new and fresh ministries.

Yes, Atlanta was a mountaintop experience. As we come down from the mountaintop, I pray that God will lead us to find ways to partner with folks with whom we have never partnered before, in exciting new Kingdom ministries. Please pray about how you can be a part of this exciting Baptist future.

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Texas Baptists Committed is dedicated to reaching people for Christ through local churches; promoting and defending historic Baptist principles; spreading an understanding of Baptist heritage and distinctives through education; and cooperating with the mission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and its related institutions.

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