

# Evangelical Forum Newsletter



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**Purpose:** The Evangelical Forum is a network of concerned evangelical Pastors and laymen who serve in churches that are part of the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV). We are supportive of friendly cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention and affirm the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000.

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Unsolicited articles, book reviews, and comments are welcomed by email or conventional mail.

## Being Baptist Means Freedom?

To listen to the moderate leaders of today one might imagine that the major problem both in American culture and in evangelical church life is a lack of personal freedom. A favorite slogan of moderates is "Being Baptist Means Freedom." They often identify themselves as "free and faithful Baptists," in contradistinction to those poor old "Fundamentalists" who slavishly follow the Bible and its doctrines.

After looking around at the contemporary spiritual landscape, however, we are left to ask if, in fact, the overriding problem in church and culture today is lack of personal, academic, or religious freedom. Quite the contrary, it seems that our besetting sin is lack of boundaries, distrust of authority, and lawlessness. Peter said of the false teachers of his day: "While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption" (2 Peter 2:19). In the same way it seems that many offer a brand of religious "liberty" that, in fact, leads to spiritual bondage.

Our Baptist forebears were concerned with religious freedom for one reason alone: to prevent the state from hindering their open proclamation of the gospel. Historic Baptists were not civil libertarian Bohemians. Freedom from state interference in the affairs of the church did not mean that Baptists had an "anything goes" mentality when it came to the doctrinal convictions of individual Baptists and of Baptist congregations. For a refreshing correction to the current distortion of the concept of "priesthood of the believer," read Greg Wills' book *Democratic Religion* (Oxford, 1996) which traces the frequent exercise of church discipline among Baptists in the pre-1900 South.

I recently ran across Jeremiah Bell Jeter's annual sermon delivered at the 1877 meeting of the BGAV. That's right, in those days, the annual meetings contained sermons and long doctrinal ones at that! J. B. Jeter was present at both the founding of the BGAV in 1823 and the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. He was a prominent Virginia Baptist Pastor who, after the Civil War, became the editor of the *Religious Herald*. When addressing the 1877 annual meeting, the feisty Jeter chose Jude 3 as his text: "It was needful for me to write unto you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered

unto the saints.” He titled his message, “The Obligations of Baptists to Their Distinctive Principles.”

In that message, Jeter took it for granted that his fellow Baptists held to “what is popularly known as ‘evangelical truth.’ This comprises the fundamental, soul-saving doctrine, facts and duties of Christianity.” Later Jeter makes plain that his focus is not on making men Baptists but on faithfully proclaiming the gospel:

Baptism is not the gospel. Baptist doctrines are not ‘the words of eternal life.’ We remember hearing Dr. Semple—one of the wisest men that we have known—say: ‘The Ministers, who are more anxious to make Baptists than Christians, are not likely to have great success in making either.’

One wonders what he would make of those who place more emphasis on being “Virginia Baptists” than on the gospel. Jeter expresses little sympathy for those who conceal their convictions in order to keep the peace:

If we willfully neglect or pusillanimously conceal the doctrine of Christ, or any portion of it, while convinced of its divine authority, we surely furnish such evidence of our disloyalty to our King as must bring doubt on the genuineness of our piety and the certainty of our salvation.

One wonders what he would say to pastors today who are hesitant in speaking up for the cause of Christ for fear of the opposition of men. Jeter’s boldness is also draped in humble dependence on the Lord: “We should never forget in our contention for truth that its triumph must depend ultimately upon *divine grace*.” Though the veteran Baptist statesman expresses hope for the enlargement of the Baptist movement, the primary focus is on doctrinal fidelity. His core conviction: “Duty is ours: success is God’s.”

At the close of this message, Jeter imagines what the future holds for Virginia Baptists. In fact, he imagines coming to the far away BGAV meeting of 1977 and optimistically anticipates what he might find: “Great changes will have taken place. New faces and new fashions will meet our

eyes, and unfamiliar voices will salute our ears; but the gospel—our distinctive principles—will be unchanged.” He also, however, anticipates that this may not be the case: “Our fathers were faithful—their sons may be miscreant to their trust.”

We might well wonder what Jeter would say if he were to visit our Virginia Baptist churches today. What would he make of a religion professor at one of our Baptist schools advocating the acceptance of homosexuality? What would he make of the emphasis on “missions” over doctrine? What would he make of Virginia Baptist separation from his beloved Southern Baptist Convention that he helped form? What would he make of the emphasis on freedom over faithfulness? My guess is that he would be surprised and saddened. The question remains as to whether there might be time for Virginia Baptists to wake from our cultural captivity and return to the old paths of men like Jeter who prized the propagation of right doctrine and trusted God alone to measure success.

Note: The entire text of Jeter’s 1877 sermon, “The Obligations of Baptists to Their Distinctive Principles,” is posted at [www.jpbc.org/jeter.doc](http://www.jpbc.org/jeter.doc). ♦

JR



### **2004 Evangelical Forum Meeting**

Evangelical Pastors and Laymen are invited to meet for prayer, fellowship, and worship on Monday, November 8, 2004 in Roanoke, Virginia just before the annual meeting of the BGAV. Details on time, location, and speakers will be announced in the September 2004 issue of the *Evangelical Forum Newsletter*.

## The Averett Issue Revisited

In the December 2003 *Evangelical Forum Newsletter* we made this prediction about the BGAV's response to Averett's leftward drift: "Look for more double-speak to come in the future on this issue, including written 'partnership agreements' that fail to address real issues. Look also for future recommendations of indirect funding for Averett through 'student ministry' or 'scholarships,' much like the indirect funding that the University of Richmond received when the Center for Baptist Heritage & Studies was approved" (p. 4). Sadly, we must now report that this prediction has largely come true.

The state of the Averett situation is as follows: In November 2003 the BGAV messengers voted to escrow 2004 funds to the school. This move came in response to grassroots uproar over the appearance of a stridently pro-homosexual opinion article from the chairman of Averett's Religion Department in the August 13, 2003 *Danville Register & Bee* newspaper and Averett's invitation of liberal Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong to deliver a guest lectureship in September 2003. In its April 2004 General Board meeting, however, the Virginia Baptist Mission Board released \$180,000 to Averett and announced that the remaining 2004 funds for the school would be considered at the BGAV meeting in November in Roanoke. In this announcement, the BGAV stressed that the \$180,000 released in April would go for scholarships. They also announced that the Averett administration is working on establishing a program to train "bi-vocational pastors." This program would be the recipient of the remaining withheld funds. It is noted in the Board decision that this new program for bi-vocational ministers might include topics like "church management, ordinances, preaching, and theology." It also notes, "This program shall be totally independent of the religion department of the university and outside the influence or participation of any current professor in the religion department."

### Some Questions to Ponder

There are so many things that evangelical Virginia Baptists will find troubling about this recommendation that it is difficult to know where exactly to begin. Nevertheless, we should find some place to begin our protest. Here are at least five questions to consider:

1. Does the Mission Board really believe that by saying that the money sent to Averett goes to "scholarships," that this makes their decision more palatable to Virginia Baptists? Where does this scholarship money go? It goes to Averett University for its undesignated use, of course. So, our mission dollars go to support students attending a school where they may take religion classes with Dr. Laughlin and be introduced to his version of "higher criticism" that erodes belief in the authority of scripture and, thereby, Biblical understandings of marriage and family. We are supposed to applaud this as a noble compromise?
2. What have Averett University and other BGAV partners learned from this? Is Averett apologetic? Chastened? The statement offered by Averett was, quite the contrary, defiant in tone: "At Averett University, our mission says, 'both academic and religious freedom are valued.' The university's commitments to intellectual inquiry and excellence assume discourse and disagreement, even on fundamental issues. ***We are not prepared to compromise on these principles*** (emphasis added)." Oddly enough, Averett announces it will not compromise, while the Mission Board announces that it will! It appears that Averett has acted with more conviction than the Mission Board. Perhaps most importantly, Averett has learned that it can basically do whatever it wants and face no serious challenge from the BGAV.
3. What has Dr. Laughlin learned from this? Was he ever given any private or public reprimand by the Averett administration? Was he ever placed on administrative leave? Removed from the classroom? No, he has learned that he may continue to say and write what he likes with his university's full support, in the name of academic freedom. We are left to ponder: What would the response have been to Dr. Laughlin if

he had written an opinion article in the local paper that promoted pedophilia or white supremacy? My guess is that the university would have immediately and profusely apologized for his comments, and they would have found a way, despite his tenure, to remove him from teaching. So, what is the difference? Plainly, Averett and her supporters have capitulated to the culture by saying that the homosexuality is an open question and is, therefore, open to debate. As an aside, we might note that Dr. Laughlin received his PhD from the Southern Baptist Seminary (b.f. “before fundamentalism”). If we needed any further proof, the radicalism of his beliefs stands as prime evidence of the need that existed for reform in our Southern Baptist seminaries as they existed prior to 1979.

4. How in the world can Virginia Baptists trust Averett to establish a program to train bi-vocational pastors? This is the most illogical of the hasty recommendations. If Averett has not proven itself trustworthy in establishing an evangelical religion department, what makes Virginia Baptists think that this same institution and same administration will do any better at establishing what is essentially “seminary” level theological training? This move seems particularly ironic given last November’s floor fight at the BGAV between supporters of liberal Leland and Baptist Seminary at Richmond over shrinking BGAV dollars and the recent revelation that auditors have discovered that the BGAV has spent \$4.3 million dollars more than it has received in the last few years (see the editorial in the May 27, 2004 issue of the *Religious Herald*, p. 9). It seems that the Mission Board’s response was: “Well, maybe it would be good to start another seminary at Averett.” All we need in Virginia is another moderate school to train ministers.
5. Does the fact that the Mission Board’s recommendation concerning this new pastoral training center explicitly states that it will not be tied in any way to the religion department at Averett indicate that the BGAV leadership admits that department to be doctrinally unsound? If so, why are we supporting the exposure of even less mature undergraduate minds to that same religion department? Does this make sense?

### Is Averett A Christian University?

Perhaps the most central question that remains completely unaddressed by the BGAV leadership is why “mission dollars” are used to support schools that do not have a clearly defined Christian identity. It is a well-known axiom that institutions drift left.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps a hundred or more years ago, Averett was a Christian school. Now it appears to be a well-supported, private, secular university with a nominal Baptist heritage. Why should we provide scholarships for Baptist students to attend Averett and not offer the same to those who attend any secular university in the commonwealth? Is it proper stewardship for Virginia Baptists to continue to lend financial support to schools that are not unapologetically committed to propagating evangelical faith?

### Read the Article for Yourself

As a service to our readers and with the permission of the *Danville Register & Bee*, we are reprinting the Laughlin article as it appeared on August 13, 2003. [article is included as insert between pages 8-9 of this newsletter.] What is particularly troubling about this article is not just Laughlin’s clear and uncritical support for homosexuality, but the high-handed and condescending way in which he makes his argument. He evinces little respect for those who take seriously the integrity, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture.

What is more, the arguments he makes do not demonstrate thoughtful scholarship or serious reflection. The arguments he makes for the acceptance of homosexuality from Scripture are, quite frankly, of the weakest sort. For example, Laughlin infers that those of us who oppose homosexuality on Biblical grounds rely largely on proof texts from the Old Testament without regard for the complete canonical context. One wonders if Laughlin is familiar with the rich Christian theological tradition that recognizes Christ’s fulfillment of the Old

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<sup>1</sup> For the tendency of Christian schools to drift from their confessional moorings, see James Tunstead Burtchaell’s massive study, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998).

Testament law. For example, in Covenant Theology, the *ceremonial* and *civil* aspects of the law are thought, indeed, to be set aside, but the *moral* principles that undergird the law remain operative. These principles include the goodness of the gift of sexuality as limited to the bounds of a covenanted, committed marriage between a man and a woman. Laughlin snidely dismisses passages from Leviticus as irrelevant, but he never addresses the heart of the Christian protest against the sinfulness of homosexuality as found in Romans 1. He also demonstrates no understanding of the Christian doctrine of the perspicuity (clarity) of Scripture, ridiculing Cal Thomas, in typical post-modern style, for believing that Scripture can offer plain teaching that the faithful can clearly understand.

Laughlin implies that only the uneducated and uninformed hold that the Scriptures plainly teach against homosexuality. This argument either demonstrates his ignorance of the state of current Biblical scholarship or his duplicity in not mentioning arguments that counter his claims. The very best Biblical scholars agree that the Christian Scriptures offer round disapproval of homosexual activity. This devious practice was widely known in the Greco-Roman world, and it was rejected by both the ancient Israelites and the early Christians. Such a scholarly “slouch” as E. P. Sanders of Duke University writes: “Paul was against homosexuality, both active and inactive, both male and female. This marks him as Jewish.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the best modern treatment of the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality comes from Richard B. Hays, a mainline Methodist scholar who also teaches at Duke, in his book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.<sup>3</sup> Hardly a “fundamentalist” Hays honestly concludes that “the Biblical witness against homosexual practice is univocal.”<sup>4</sup> In his exegesis of Romans 1 Hays states:

... in Romans 1 Paul portrays homosexual behavior as a “sacrament” (so to speak) of the antireligion of human beings who refuse to honor God as Creator. When human beings engage in homosexual activity, they enact an outward and visible sign of an inward and visible reality: the rejection of the Creator’s design.<sup>5</sup>

Hays boldly concludes his chapter on homosexual practice with these words:

Thus, in view of the considerable uncertainty surrounding the scientific and experiential evidence, in view of our culture’s present swirling confusion about gender roles, in view of our propensity for self-deception, I think it prudent and necessary to let the univocal testimony of Scripture and the Christian tradition order the life of the church on this painfully controversial matter. We must affirm that the New Testament tells us the truth about ourselves as sinners and as God’s sexual creatures: marriage between a man and woman is the normative form for human sexual fulfillment, and homosexuality is one among many tragic signs that we are a broken people, alienated from God’s loving purpose.<sup>6</sup>

How striking that a Methodist scholar with a sterling academic reputation can offer such a forceful and Biblical argument against the modern church’s unsteady move toward toleration of homosexual practice while a scholar of much lesser rank in our Baptist school takes an outlandishly liberal and scholarly indefensible position!

The question every Virginia Baptist should ask is this: Would I want a man like Laughlin teaching Biblical studies to my impressionable eighteen year old or to anyone else for that matter? A follow up question would be this: How has Laughlin been allowed to gain and maintain his teaching position within Averett University, while holding these views? At the least, this article demonstrates his lack of discretion; at the most, it reveals his utter disregard for sound doctrine and normative Christian practice.

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<sup>2</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991): 110.

<sup>3</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996): 379-406.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

## What is the BGAV's Stance on Homosexuality?

The recent Averett controversy brings a critical issue to the surface that cannot be sidestepped or ignored. How will the BGAV respond to the issue of homosexuality? This issue is being raised in every mainline denomination. The question is whether or not we will take a stance, like the Episcopalians, that accommodates to the culture and urges uncritical acceptance of homosexual practice or, like the Southern Baptist Convention, take a firm stand in opposition to this unbiblical practice. The Baptist Faith and Message of 2000 is unequivocal: "In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography" (from article XV "The Christian and the Social Order"). In comparison, we should pay close attention to the recent actions of the Alliance of Baptists at their Spring 2004 meeting. The Alliance represents the far left wing in Baptist life. It also represents the end point on the slippery slope of liberalism. Given enough time, where the Alliance is the BGAV and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will be.

### The Alliance of Baptists: Statement on Same Sex Marriage

At its April 17, 2004 annual meeting, the Alliance of Baptist adopted the following "Statement on Same Sex Marriage":

Affirming that our federal and state constitutions exist to protect the rights of minorities from the tyranny of the majority and in the context of the current debate over same-sex marriage, we of the Alliance of Baptists decry the politicization of same-sex marriage in the current presidential contest and other races for public office. We specifically reject the proposed amendments to the constitution of the United States and state constitutions that would enshrine discrimination against sexual minorities and define marriage in such a way as to deny same-sex couples a legal framework in which to provide for one another and those entrusted to their care.

As Christians and as Baptists, we particularly lament the denigration of our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender sisters and brothers in this debate by those who claim to speak for God. We affirm that the Alliance of Baptists supports the rights of all citizens to full marriage equality, and we affirm anew that the Alliance will "create places of refuge and renewal for those who are ignored by the church."

*This Statement of Concern was adopted at the Annual Meeting of the Alliance of Baptists meeting at First Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio.*

This statement is posted on the Alliance website ([www.allianceofbaptists.org](http://www.allianceofbaptists.org)). Albert Mohler, the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote an insightful Baptist press article reacting to this Alliance statement (see "First Person: Alliance of Baptists affirm same-sex 'marriage,'" Baptist Press, April 30, 2004). Though deploring its unbiblical stance, Mohler does express admiration for the Alliance's honesty. They are at least not afraid to come out in the open and tell us where they stand.

The Alliance website also lists its affiliated congregations, including eighteen BGAV churches (see [www.allianceofbaptists.org/churches.htm#Virginia](http://www.allianceofbaptists.org/churches.htm#Virginia)). Many among the elected leadership of the BGAV, at the highest levels, have come from these churches. One is left to wonder if these congregations are in agreement with this statement. Also of interest is the posting on that same website ([www.allianceofbaptists.org/related\\_organizations.htm](http://www.allianceofbaptists.org/related_organizations.htm)) of "partners or organizations which have a philosophy consistent with that of the Alliance of Baptists." These include: The Associated Baptist Press, the Baptist Center for Ethics, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. All of these agencies receive funding through the BGAV

budget (WM2 and WM3). One is also left to wonder if these organizations are in sympathy with this statement.

### Spiritual Schizophrenia

This is where we come to a painful rub. Where does the BGAV stand on the issue of homosexuality? In the recent BGAV publication “Truthfully Speaking”<sup>7</sup> the authors respond to critics who ask: “Why doesn’t the BGAV take a stand opposing homosexual behavior and homosexual church leadership?” The answer given is this: “It definitely has taken a stand opposing both.” The article then points to two statements affirming Biblical teaching that have been approved by the BGAV. Indeed, these statements are commendable. The 1993 BGAV resolution on homosexual behavior states: “We affirm the biblical teaching that homosexual behavior is sinful and unacceptable for Christians. Therefore, we do not endorse elevating those who practice it to positions of leadership.” Likewise, the 1998 resolution affirming the sanctity of marriage is commendable. It reads: “God created the marriage covenant as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman (Matt. 5:27-32).” We agree that these statements are clear and Biblical. The only problem is that many of the BGAV churches, and the agencies that the BGAV supports through its mission giving, do not join with us in agreement on these issues. Is the BGAV leadership willing to acknowledge that grassroots Virginia Baptists are closer to the SBC than the Alliance on this issue? Will it exercise discipline to confront and, if necessary, exclude those churches, individuals, and institutions that do not affirm these core values?

The mental disorder schizophrenia is certainly not a matter to be taken lightly. *Webster’s New World Dictionary* defines it, in part, as “disintegration of personality expressed as disorder of feeling, thought, and conduct.” Individuals, churches, and associations of churches can also suffer from what we might call “spiritual schizophrenia.” This malady is expressed when one’s thoughts and conduct become disorderly and contradictory. How can the churches that belong to the Alliance of Baptists also belong to the BGAV? How can the BGAV say that it affirms these statements made in 1993 and 1998 on human sexuality and still support Alliance-friendly institutions like the Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond? Will God restore to our churches and to our association of churches clarity and orderliness of thought and practice? ♦

JR

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<sup>7</sup> This document is subtitled “The Executive Director and Treasurer’s Frequently Asked Questions and Answers About the BGAV.” We assume, then, that its authors are John Upton and Eddie Stratton. It is marked by accusations and gossipy anecdotes from unnamed sources and politically nuanced answers that, at best, dodge truthful and honest responses. Sadly, the back cover announces, “These materials are made possible by the generous gifts to the Cooperative Program from Baptist General Association of Virginia churches.” Is this where our mission dollars are being spent?



## Book Review

Dan Lucarini. *Why I Left The Contemporary Christian Music Movement: Confessions of a Former Worship Leader*. Darlington, England/Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2002, 138 pp..

This book is written by a self-described former “foot soldier” in the movement to drive traditional churches to accept contemporary Christian music (CCM) in their worship. The author now rejects the use of CCM in evangelical churches and has written this book to expose his readers to the dangers of its uncritical acceptance. He summarizes the reasons for his departure: “Our key premises were that music is amoral; God accepts all music styles; and no one should judge another’s preferences or tastes. As I dug into the Bible to prove them right, instead I saw that they were man-centered, illogical, and misrepresentations of basic biblical principles” (34).

The author outlines his theological and philosophical objections to the use of CCM. He begins by questioning the wisdom of using contemporary music in order to meet the felt needs of or to appeal to the human worshippers. He calls this the lie of “God accepts us as we are.” He makes the serious charge that CCM presents dangers of immorality (by use of secular music), divisiveness (splitting churches between traditionalists and CCM proponents over worship styles), and deception. Among his comments: “Our acceptance of CCM into our worship services has hurt an entire generation of older Christians, has led to church splits, and has created a breeding ground for immorality, selfishness and divisive attitudes in younger generations” (46).

Central to Lucarini’s argument is the idea that musical style is not morally neutral (amoral) or merely a matter of tastes and preferences. On the contrary, he argues that CCM is based on rock music which “is clearly and unequivocally associated with immorality, especially promiscuous and adulterous sex, glorification of drugs, and rebellion against authority” (91). He thereby raises a question that is seldom heard even in our doctrinally conservative churches: “With what moral dimension is my favourite music associated?” (91).

In the closing chapters of the book, the author anticipates and answers typical objections that are raised to acceptance of CCM. These include the question of whether the use of CCM is justified in order to reach people. Lucarini concludes: “We should not accept just any worldly method to reach the lost. Instead we must discern carefully what methods are acceptable for use in the kingdom of God” (100). Based on the research of John Makujina (*Measuring the Music*), Lucarini also debunks as evangelical myth the frequently used argument that CCM is justified because past luminaries like Luther and Wesley adapted secular tunes to gospel use. The author further derides the use of blended services and separate services (traditional and contemporary) as a “slippery slope” that inevitably leads to “blurring” that “is almost always towards contemporary shades” (123).

In conclusion, I believe that Lucarini’s book deserves to be read and discussed by those who lead worship in local churches. Lucarini’s report is anecdotal and personal and is certainly not an exhaustive Biblical and theological treatment of this subject. It does, however, raise courageous questions in a direct but not mean-spirited manner about the evangelical church’s sometimes uncritical rush to jump on the CCM bandwagon. We would do well to consider prayerfully whether or not the church has been aided or hindered in its faithfulness by making use of worldly musical styles in its services of worship. ◆

JR

## **Reflections of A Denominational Trustee**

By R. Wayne Collis

For the last seven years it has been a great privilege and honor to serve as a trustee of the International Mission Board of the SBC. I have truly had an eye opening experience to what God is doing around the world through Southern Baptists. The last 25 years Southern Baptists have had a lot of distractions here in the states as we have fought battles for the Bible and doctrinal purity. At times, because of the battles, Southern Baptists have gotten bad press and we have been viewed with suspicion by those in other denominations.

In my seven years tenure as a trustee, these battles have raged throughout the mission board. At times they have been somewhat disconcerting because they have taken time, energy and resources away from the main task of taking the Gospel “to the ends of the Earth.” I applaud our leadership team, led by Dr. Jerry Rankin, for helping us stay on track and not get bogged down in the issues. This is not to say that the issues were not important, but simply to say that those we have elected to serve and lead us have dealt with them and at the same time moved us forward with zeal and vision.

As a lifetime Southern Baptist, I have not always agreed with everything Southern Baptists have done. There are some things in which I still take issue – but there is one thing I have always supported and been proud of as a Southern Baptist, our obedience to the Great Commission both here at home and around the world. As a trustee, it has been an opportunity of a lifetime to get to know the “ins” and “outs” of what it takes to keep over 5,000 missionaries on the field. It is a tremendous undertaking and we have one of the best models going in the world today.

My first six years on the board I served on the Personnel Committee. In that time, I read thousands of “green sheets” that gave personal information on missionary candidates (all missionary candidates’ biographical information for trustees, is printed on green paper so it can be readily identified as confidential). It was a tremendous responsibility to read all that information knowing that as a trustee, I was helping to determine if a family/individual went to the field or stayed home. Being on that committee has been the highlight of my time as a trustee because of the closeness you feel as you get to know the people God is calling out.

I have also enjoyed serving on the Eastern Africa Regional Committee that oversees the work of nearly 300 missionaries in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, the Congo, and southern Sudan. Twice I have been able to go to the region to experience first hand how our missionaries live and work. I can say in all honesty that their jobs are not a “picnic in the park.” They work in extreme poverty among masses of people. They live among people riddled with disease and starvation. Some live “on the edge” where people don’t even now our world (Western Civilization) exists. What I have seen and experienced has only reinforced my commitment to pray and give so that they can stay where God has called them.

Being a denominational trustee requires a great deal of time. The work of the International Mission Board requires that we meet at least six times per year. Most of our meetings are of a three day nature, counting travel time to and from meetings, nearly 30 days a year are taken up with mission board business. I have been blessed to serve as pastor of two churches during my tenure and both have been very gracious in allowing me the time away for this very important work. I can say that by my involvement, both churches have been blessed and have become more supportive and involved in missions as well.

In a time in which most missionary sending agencies are experiencing decline, both in personnel and resources, as your BGAV trustee to the board, I am happy to report that that's not the case with the IMB. Despite the fact, that in the last year and a half, we've had eight missionaries martyred, we have seen an increase in both personnel and resources. Indeed, the work of the Kingdom is going forward on the blood of the martyrs. Projections are that 2004 could be one of the best years we have ever had.

With one year left on my term as a trustee, a bit of sadness is on the horizon. I will miss going to the meetings, I will miss some of the great friendships I've developed, and I will miss meeting and getting to know personally missionaries going all over the world. Along with the sadness of things missed, there will be some things I'll not miss. Things like "tons" of IMB mail/e-mail to read through, standing in long lines at airport security checkpoints, many nights away from my family and did I mention "tons" of IMB mail/e-mail?

As I reflect back, it has not only been an eye-opening experience to serve as an IMB trustee – it has been a life changing experience. Perhaps someone reading this article will get a call next February asking him to serve as a trustee. I hope you'll say "yes" for it could be an experience of a lifetime you wouldn't want to miss. ♦

R. Wayne Collis pastors Jonesboro Baptist Church in Nelson County, Virginia and has served as a trustee of the International Mission Board since 1997.

## *Paradosis*

*Paradosis is the Greek word for “tradition.” It is also the title for this recurring section featuring voices from the Virginia Baptist past. This article from Pastor J. J. Wicker was featured in the February 13, 1913 issue of the Religious Herald. It is a wise caution against “professionalism” in ministry and an earnest call for incarnational pastoral ministry. This article was transcribed and edited by Marcus Deel, a pastoral intern at Jefferson Park Baptist Church and a May 2004 graduate of the University of Virginia who will be entering the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky in August.*

### **The Pastor Among His People**

By John J. Wicker

Jesus Christ became incarnate. He was made in the likeness of men, made of the seed of Abraham, make like unto his brethren, in order that he might become a merciful, faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God. He was tempted in all points like unto his brethren. Because of his **sympathy** he is able to succor us. If incarnation was essential to service on the part of God, how important it is that the undershepherd become a **man** among **men**. The human touch is divine, the divine touch is human. The personality of man is the moving power in human affairs. Nothing is so interesting as man. To be interested in **things** requires only covetousness. To be interested in **man** requires Christliness. A **little man** can be interested in a **big** thing, but it takes a big man to be interested in a little child. God became a man in order to become a pastor. His pastoral work has inspired the world. He went about doing good. He stopped in all sorts of homes. He was a friend to all, especially the poor, the needy, the diseased, the broken-hearted, the despised, the sorrowing and the sinful. He loved men. When Jesus announced his call to preach he said, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

How did he do it? He went from city to city; from house to house, and “the common people heard him gladly.” He is pressed by the throng on the beautiful shores of Galilee, and in no place can he be hid. Yet this popular preacher is not swept off his feet by the crowds that gather to hear him in nature’s cathedral, but goes in a lonely place and sanctifies the dust of the ground with the holy touch of his tired knees in prayer, that he may minister to just one poor fallen woman with the same passion that moves the orator as he faces the multitude. The aristocrats invite him, but he dines with publicans and sinners, and announces, “The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” When rich Zacchaeus needs a ministerial visit Jesus says, “To-day I must abide at **thy** house.” He is a shepherd of all the sheep, but the one in the wilderness, lost, drives sleep from his eyes, weariness from his feet, and the faithful pastor seeks that which is lost till he finds it.

“What a **friend we have** in Jesus!”

And so I say:

I. Let the pastor be a **friend**—one who serves.

Nothing is so easily discovered as friendship. You know your friends. No gift is so precious as friendship. The luxury of being a friend to those who need us is the richest enjoyment human life affords. No man is more empty-handed, empty-hearted, empty-headed, miserable, naked, wretched and blind than the man who is going around trying to make friends for himself. The real luxury in the life of “The man of sorrows” is discovered and coveted only by those who understand the meaning of his mission and are touched by the passion of his soul. Love must inspire our friendship for our fellows. Service is easy when love provokes it. It was perfectly easy for Jesus to wash the disciples’ feet. He enjoyed that service with all his soul. The greatest thing God ever did was to love a poor, lost sinner. God knows that He is never greater than when He becomes a friend to those who most need Him. His **arms** were never more strong than when He took the **children** to

His bosom. His voice was never more sweet than when he talked to that unknown Samaritan woman of Sychar. His power was never more omnipotent than when he raised a **widow's** son. His service was never more exalted and inspiring than when he washed the dust-covered feet of his unworthy disciples. His love was never more perfect than when he sat at meat with **Judas**. His suffering on the cross was endured because the world knew not how to appreciate and do these things. His friendship for men is our inspirational example. "If I your Lord and Master have washed your feet," etc. "I have given you an example." To love men who need us is our highest calling and our noblest occupation.

"Oh, Lord, I pray that for this day  
I may not swerve, by foot or hand  
From Thy command,  
Not to be served, but to serve.

"This, too, I pray, that for this day  
No love of ease or pride prevent  
My good intent--  
Not to be pleased, but to please.

"And if I may, I'd have this day  
Strength from above,  
To set my heart, in heavenly art,  
Not to be loved, but to love."

Therefore, let the pastor be a **friend**.

## II. Let the Pastor be a Man.

The man behind the gun is the best part of the ammunition. Personality is power. We forget the message of men, but we retain the man. The pastor is a living epistle. So far as we know man is the biggest thing God ever made. A real man, regenerated by the Spirit of God, and devoted to His service is the nearest thing to God in likeness that the eyes of men can see. It seems to me that all deception, caste and priestliness should be utterly abhorred by a pastor who desires to represent God to men. When I was a small boy my grandfather's pastor (a Presbyterian) came frequently to visit the home of his elder. He was a very clerical looking old gentleman, and I frankly confess I was afraid of him. The cut of his clothes, the color of his tie, the style of his beard and his general demeanor was that of a "**preacher**"—and I ran from him. I made up my mind that I would never frighten boys if ever I got to be a preacher. I used to go to St. Peter's Roman Catholic church, this city, with my father. When the priest appeared with a whole millinery shop on his back, I had something of the feeling of a heathen child when he looks up at a great, grim idol with frowning face; as I see it to-day, it is fakeism. It is not the ministry of a **manly friend**. I will not wear a robe in the pulpit, for I refuse to make an ecclesiastical effort to create distinction between myself and my people, that carries with it the idea that I have a special "pull" with God. Getting on a collar hind part before and jumping into a vest backwards will never transfer clerical holiness to the pew. The fact is, distinction between the pastor and his flock in clothes and other paraphernalia creates worldliness on the part of the people by the convulsion that since the pastor has **special** privileges with the Lord, the people can take a few with the devil. Real manliness, perfect frankness, absolute simplicity, genuine sincerity are qualities that tell in a pastor's life among his people. He is only a sinner saved by grace, a friend to every man in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. His friendship, manly character and real interest should find its way into every department of human life.

1. **Visitation**. The pastor ought to love to visit his people. It ought to give him real joy. He ought to enjoy it just like he would visiting his own children or calling on his own parents. In his visiting he ought to

take interest in the house—its condition for healthy occupancy, such as ventilation, light, etc. If the people are poor he ought to talk savings bank to them. Life insurance is a good gospel. Economy as well as liberality should be the topic of conversation. Treat them as you would your own. If they are rich, he ought to tell them of the world's needs, warn them of covetousness, show them where money is needed, rejoice in their prosperity; yet tell them how Jesus talked to rich folks. Show them that, above all things, the kingdom of God needs money. Talk stewardship. Tell of the good money has done. Show them it is a gift of God to be able to make money and love them into liberality.

2. **Prayer.** Prayer is much appreciated. Better make a mistake on the right side and pray where it is not appreciated than leave a hungry soul without bread. Many sick people, however, should not be prayed with. A joke, sunshine, optimism, courage and a rather jolly spirit will be the ministry most needed. Sometimes we should pray with men in their place of business. It is good sometimes to get your people to pray for you. You just kneel and ask them to pray God will make you a good minister of Christ. It will do their own souls good.

3. **Activity.** The preacher should live in the life of his people. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that weep." If he has a "tea-drinking" crowd he ought to learn to be a Chesterfield. If he has a poor, ignorant congregation, he ought to learn to fit in to poor English and narrow fields of thought, for in fitting into their thoughts he can fit them into his thoughts. Get together. He ought to be "all things to all men that he may by all means save some." And especially keep everlastingly at it. If he is ever busy among his people it will (1) make him an **optimist**.

"The optimist, the pessimist—  
The difference easy told;  
The optimist sees the doughnut,  
The pessimist the hole."

And that hole is the preacher's grave. (2) It will give him good digestion. Somebody asked Henry Ward Beecher in what part of the human anatomy was the soul, and he replied, "In the stomach." This is pretty nearly true. Dyspeptic theology will kill the most robust, orthodox congregation that ever tried to chew a sermon. (3) Pastoral activity will put the life of the preacher into the preaching. Old authors, with kiln-dried skeletons, cannot furnish a frame for a sermon for the quivering life of the modern man any more than an electric powerhouse of to-day could hitch on to the lighting apparatus of ancient Rome. If Jesus preached in our city he would take the domestic, social and business life of to-day and gather illustrations to simplify the eternal truth of God, just like he gathered from the fields and flowers and families of the first century, and he would do it by pastoral activity. (4) Pastoral activity will give a man **joy** in the Holy Ghost. It will make him love the place of prayer. With good digestion, plenty of fresh air, happy visitation, helping people along the pathway of life he will find a new **song** on his lips, new **visions** for his church, new **hope** in his service, and Sunday will bring him to his pulpit with the eager readiness akin to the joys of a fountain. Nothing can substitute pastoral work with the preacher, the people and kingdom of God generally. There is only one argument against it. **Laziness.** A lazy preacher is soon looking for a new job—an easy place. There is no easy place for a lazy pastor and no hard place for an industrious one. No man is "too big" to do this work. Jesus Christ and Charles Haddon Spurgeon did it. People who love each other like to be together. There is something very tender in the word "father" as used by Roman Catholics. The preacher in his study is getting information. The preacher in his pulpit is giving information, but the pastor, friend, brother in the home is breathing inspiration on all his work in private and in public.

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