

Evangelical Forum Newsletter



Vol. 2. No. 1
December 2004

Reflections on the 2004 BGAV Meeting

The BGAV held its annual meeting on November 9-10, 2004 at the Roanoke Civic Center in Roanoke, Virginia. The clerk reported 1,320 registered messengers, but in the program and business sessions it seemed there were never more than several hundred people sparsely filling the large venue. The gathering offered another entertainment-based format that limited any sustained or serious discussion by the messengers on substantive issues. The leadership also patted itself on the back for its “reality-based” budget. In other words, self-congratulations were said to be in order for the decision to stop spending at a rate out of all proportion to giving. The Treasurer reported that over-spending in past years has resulted in an “internal account obligation” of \$4.6 million that has now been reduced to a *mere* \$1.2 million. All officers pre-selected by the Mainstream Baptist Politburo received a firm rubber stamp. Below are some further observations.

Bread and Circuses Programming

As in recent years, the program committee adopted a “bread and circuses” style program. The featured entertainers were the “The Hoppers,” a Southern Gospel group, and Steve McVey of GraceWalk Ministries (see the review of McVey’s questionable doctrine in the September 2004 *EFN*). Also featured again was the drama group “Re: Creations” from Bluefield College. Among other things, this group presented one skit in which a group of Pharisees-in-training attended a Marine-style boot camp. The not-so-subtle message once again: legalism BAD; unbridled freedom GOOD. What was lacking, unfortunately, was any distinction between godly discipline and licentiousness.

General Lack of Controversy

What was perhaps most memorable about this meeting of the BGAV is that it was, on most substantive issues, so lacking in controversy. The BGAV leadership continued its lockstep march to the left, with several knee-jerk reactions to the SBC bogie man. Most notable was the move toward full membership in the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). Sadly, no question was raised from the floor by the messengers as to whether or not the SBC might have some legitimate gripes about the alleged liberalism of the BWA. Moderates on the budget committee turned to a familiar page in their play-book: Expand the slice of pie given to a liberal entity in the so-called “centrist” WM-2 track and, correspondingly, decrease the slice of pie going to an SBC entity. In this case, the WM-2 track allocation for the International Mission Board (IMB) was decreased to just 17.43% and the allocation for the BWA increased to 10%. When the WM2 track was started in 1992 it allocated 45% to the IMB and just 1.65% to the BWA.

Much to the chagrin of the moderate BGAV leaders, the giving patterns of BGAV churches continue to offer little evidence of any groundswell of protest against the SBC and its mission agencies. The SBC is still the largest recipient of Cooperative Program dollars in the “moderate” BGAV. The Treasurer reported that last year BGAV churches gave \$1.9 million dollars

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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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Contributions to support the Forum and this newsletter may be sent to JPBC and marked for “Evangelical Forum.”

This is a quarterly newsletter. Projected publishing dates for Volume 2: December 2004, March, June, September 2005.

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

Friction Over Campus Centers

to the SBC through the various cooperative program giving tracks and another \$4.6 million to the SBC in designated giving (primarily to the Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong mission offerings). In comparison, the moderate-liberal Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) received a mere \$967,624 in Cooperative Program giving and just \$526,784 in designated giving (primarily to its Global Missions Offering). Designated giving to the much promoted Kingdom Advance program from BGAV churches was an unimpressive \$2,090!

Also passing without controversy was the decision to retain Averett University in the 2005 BGAV budget (\$150,000) despite recent controversy over outspoken advocacy of homosexual behavior by the chairman of the Averett Religion Department (see the June 2003 *EFN*). These funds are to be escrowed until Averett and the Mission Board arrive at a plan as to how they might be used for training bi-vocational pastors at Averett. The plan of the BGAV leadership seems to be to remove controversial matters from the annual meeting of messengers and insulate them within the smaller Mission Board. No one raised any question from the floor challenging this process or asking why Averett might be considered trustworthy in training ministers if it has apparently failed in forming an evangelical Religion Department for training impressionable undergraduates.

If there is any noticeable trend in the giving of BGAV churches it is that more of them are choosing to bypass the tracks designed by the Budget Committee (WM1, 2, and 3) in favor of creating their own customized "Individual Church Design." In 2003, 281 churches chose this option and their combined giving was over \$2.5 million (22% of total giving). In 2004 the number of churches who have opted out of the liberal leaning BGAV budget tracks has risen to 295 with combined giving of over \$3.3 million (32% of total giving). Though the Treasurer has offered no analysis of this trend, it seems likely that most of the churches that have chosen to design their own plans have done so in order to avoid support for liberal causes (BWA, BTSR, Leland, Averett, etc.) in the BGAV budget and increase support for traditional SBC ministries.

The one controversial issue raised at the meeting was the report by the Properties Studies Committee including its suggestion that the BGAV sell its campus centers at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond and at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Though several messengers persistently asked about the wisdom of this decision, in the end, the body approved the committee's recommendation. The selling of these valuable properties (along with the sale of Camp Piankatank in Bedford that met with no opposition) for apparent non-ministry purposes points to both a serious financial and spiritual crisis for the BGAV. Saddest of all, was the lack of creative consideration of how these spaces might have been used to support strategic ministry purposes. Once sold, it will likely be impossible to ever replace them.

On the Mainline

Perhaps the most telling moment of the 2004 BGAV meeting came during the John Upton's Executive Director report which included a video interview with church consultant Lyle Schaller. Schaller was apparently hired last year to give consultation to the Mission Board staff and to the "largest" churches in the BGAV. Dr. Upton seemed thrilled by Schaller's message that the BGAV should "act your size." His optimistic take was that though the BGAV has lost numerous churches to the more conservative SBCV, and though it continues to decline in nearly every observable area, that it is still one of the largest religious bodies in the commonwealth. No emphasis was given as to how or why the BGAV might use any assumed influence. The assessment was purely about numerical size. Schaller also praised the BGAV for its Kingdom Advance re-organization to fit the post-modern times. The degree of doctrinal fidelity or definition of the BGAV was, of course, not mentioned at all. Schaller's appearance was ironic, since he is the church growth guru for liberal mainline Protestantism. He is the church consultant that the past generation of leadership of mainline denominations (Presbyterian Church-USA, United Methodists, UCC, etc.) has listened to for advice. And what has been the result for these

denominations? Decline, doctrinal compromise, loss of vitality, and diminishing relevance. The leadership seems pleased to discover that the BGAV is a typically declining, liberal, mainline Protestant denomination.

Whither Evangelical Churches in the BGAV?

So, what are evangelical, SBC churches, pastors, and laymen to do who remain in the BGAV? Many feel that it is past time to abandon the BGAV and affiliate with the SBCV which continues to grow and offer programs and services that are more in harmony with the spirit of doctrinally traditional churches. Many churches will, no doubt, consider dual affiliation. For those who remain related to the BGAV alone, it certainly makes sense to join the 295 churches in Virginia that have chosen a customized budget plan. A customized plan allows the church positively to designate more money to SBC causes and negatively to remove support for liberal causes. ♦

JR

Jeter Booklet Published

Jefferson Park Press is a new ministry of Jefferson Park Baptist Church. It has printed an attractive 21 page booklet by J. B. Jeter, titled *The Obligations of Baptists To Their Distinctive Principles*. The booklet is a sermon preached by Jeter at the 1877 meeting of the BGAV in which he urged his fellow Baptists to “contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). This booklet would be ideal for personal or group study on the core principles of the Virginia Baptist fathers. Cost: \$3.00 plus shipping and handling. Email your order to jeffparkchurch@juno.com.

EFN Back Issues Now Available On-line

Volume I (2003-04) of the *Evangelical Forum Newsletter* is now available online at www.jpbc.org/ef.html.

2004 Evangelical Forum Roundup

The Evangelical Forum held its third annual meeting on Monday, November 8, 2004 at the Plantation Road Baptist Church in Roanoke, Virginia. There were about 50 Pastors and laymen present, representing some 20 churches from throughout Virginia.

The featured speaker was Dr. Greg Wills, Professor of Church History at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Wills gave two messages. In the afternoon he discussed the practice of church discipline among Baptist churches of the 19th century in a message titled “Baptist Churches and Church Discipline: Our Forgotten Heritage.” He stressed that modern churches have allowed individualism to eclipse the practice of accountability in meaningful church membership. In the evening session, Dr. Wills spoke on “Baptist Churches and Denominational Identity: Can It Be Recovered?” He noted that moderate Southern Baptists have tended to see being Baptist as a “tribal” identity. Evangelical Southern Baptists, on the other hand, have returned the emphasis to Baptist Christian identify as a Biblical and theological conviction. We are Baptist not because we were born Baptist, but because of our conviction that the Baptist church model is most faithful to Scripture’s teaching on the nature of the church. Jeff Riddle of Jefferson Park Baptist Church also shared two messages on the life and thought of BGAV and SBC pioneer J. B. Jeter (1802-1880). In his closing remarks, he asked the Forum participants to consider what Jeter would say about the current state of the BGAV.

The Providence Baptist Church of Suffolk provided a wonderful supper on site for all those in attendance. The members of Plantation Road Baptist Church provided desserts. A warm time of fellowship was shared by all. An offering of \$334.00 and book sales of over \$200.00 were collected. ♦

Dorothy Patterson responds to Virginia WMU

by Dorothy Patterson

Note: This article was originally posted at gender-news.com (a ministry of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood) on Tuesday, November 2, 2004 and is reprinted by permission. Dr. Dorothy Patterson, Professor of Theology of Women's Studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote the following response to the Declaration of the Dignity of Women statement adopted by the Women's Missionary Union of Virginia (available online at wmu-va.org).

How intriguing to see that the leaders of Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia have adopted a declaration endorsing the "diverse and unlimited" Christian vocations of women. Does Scripture offer any unlimited choices other than God's grace?

In the Old Testament God appointed Aaron and his sons to the priesthood. Not even all men were candidates for this special spiritual office (See Exodus 29; Lev. 8). In Israel, members of the tribe of Levi were assigned responsibility for the priestly role, yet some were rejected because of their age or physical blemishes (Num. 8:23-26; Lev. 21:17-23). Throughout Scripture God states clearly the requirements for those who serve in positions of leadership in kingdom ministries, and some of those requirements are gender based (see 1 Tim. 2:8-15).

God does not need any group of women or men to declare the dignity of His creation. He does that quite well Himself (Gen. 1:26-28). Southern Baptists certainly affirmed this principle in their updated confessional statement adopted in 2000:

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption...

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation (Excerpt from Article 28 of the BF&M 2000).

No woman or man can understand the mind of God (Is. 55:8-9). Yet, many want to use their own reasoning to make decisions. For example, in the human mind, to be the pastor in a local church is the highest honor. Therefore, that position is considered the prize and a coveted role for influence and service. Yet the psalmist said, "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord" (Ps. 86:10). Jesus Himself extolled the value of a little child (Matt. 18:2-5, 10). I welcome into my home scores of esteemed pastors and religious leaders throughout the year, but not one of them is more valuable to me than my adorable granddaughters.

No one could help but see that throughout history women have obtained many distinctions and been used very effectively in the kingdom of Christ. Miriam was noted as a leader among the children of Israel and as a musician and prophetess (Ex. 15:20), but the only blight on her life was her effort to supplant her brother Moses (Num. 12:1-16), who had been anointed by God as the spiritual leader of Israel.

Deborah used her gifts of leadership as a judge in counseling people with problems and in participating in their deliverance in time of war (Judg. 4-5), but she is identified as the "wife of Lapidoth" and a "mother in Israel." She did her counseling under a palm tree in her own yard, not sitting at the city gate with the elders. She chose to encourage Barak instead of assuming leadership of the troops in the time of battle.

Huldah, a prophetess in Israel during a time of spiritual backsliding, played an important role during the nation's subsequent revival. However, she didn't accomplish this by preaching in the temple or assuming the role of a priest; rather, she personally delivered God's message to King Josiah through the High Priest Hilkiah (2 Kin. 22:14-20).

Anna was indeed the first to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and the redemption for Israel, but she did not deliver this good news as a priest but as a lay evangelist, simply proclaiming the good news to all whom she encountered (Luke 2:36-38).

Mary Magdalene was the first to arrive at the empty tomb and took advantage of proclaiming the resurrection to everyone she met. She did not need the office of priest or pastor nor the platform of a public arena but simply a grateful heart and willing spirit (John 20:1-18). Her enthusiasm for proclaiming the gospel and her commitment to follow Christ have certainly characterized many women in every succeeding generation as well.

The question has never been whether or not women are valued in the kingdom of Christ, nor has it been whether or not women are to be involved in ministry. Both are affirmed in Scripture; both have been acknowledged in confessional statements; both are clear in the many opportunities offered to women for service to Christ. As in every aspect of following Christ, the task before women and men is to determine the biblical boundaries that surround every decision of life. Pragmatic guidelines, such as proper qualifications, whether educational preparation, availability for service, personal interests, feelings, etc. simply are not part of the biblical criteria for making choices. Feelings can be subjective, varying with mood and circumstances and without biblical authority. God-given boundaries are not manipulated by culture or society, nor do they disappear with the changing of generations. Jesus, of course, is part of the culture, but He is above and quite often against culture, and never is He bound by culture.

In the debate prompting this declaration, women dare not be emotionally stirred up to disregard clear directives in the recognized canon of Holy Scripture. Rather they must be determined to look to Scripture as the ultimate standard providing a worthy authority over life and practice as well as a sure and certain measure against which one may test personal feelings and desires (2 Tim. 3:14-17). Scripture then must endure culture throughout the passing of generations and appropriate itself anew in each generation, whatever the cultural setting, with vitality and relevance.

Certainly women should be called to share the gospel with all who cross their paths (Matt. 28:19-20); yes, your guide better be the Holy Spirit of God, and you can rest in knowing that the Holy Spirit within will NEVER contradict His written Word without. That Word is found on a printed page for you to read and embrace as the boundary to every decision; and what a heritage women have—women who have been leaders in the kingdom, women who have borne sons and daughters and nurtured them in the faith to produce the succeeding generations, women who have served their families and their neighbors and their congregations. Finally, indeed the prophet Joel did announce that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on ALL God's people regardless of gender, social class, or age. In fact, he mentions women twice in these verses (Joel 2:28-29). Peter quoted the passage from Joel at Pentecost to emphasize that God's Spirit would be given to all believers so that they could all speak forth the good news (Acts 2:17-18). Paul picked up this emphasis when he reinforced that IN CHRIST there is no difference in race, legal status, or gender—Christ died for all, and all come to Him in the same way (Gal. 3:28).

How interesting to hear that God “discriminated” against women, and, if viewed in this way, against many men, by setting forth boundaries on what women and men could do in the kingdom. Paul followed the leading of the Spirit who inspired his epistles to set forth guidelines in the same “discriminating” way, yet consistent with the creation order and with the whole of Scripture.

The North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention is also accused of what is alleged to be “discrimination.” However, perhaps you need a closer look at exactly what action has been taken. First, the

action confirms that Southern Baptists still want to be known as “people of the Book.” Whatever the cost in stinging criticism, discouraging misunderstanding, or judgment of motives, Southern Baptists still want to go on record as following the dictates of Holy Scripture as best they can understand its clear message. Are Southern Baptist women still being approved for the chaplaincy? Yes, indeed. Women are preparing for the chaplaincy here at Southwestern Seminary, and a professor who will be devoting his full energies to prepare men and women for that important service has just been added to the faculty. I just enjoyed a personal visit with a Southern Baptist woman, a graduate of Southwestern Seminary, who is a chaplain in St. Louis, MO. She affirmed the excellent support she had from NAMB. Her home church commissioned her (not through ordination but through a special setting apart in appropriate ways); NAMB issued a letter of endorsement according to the confessional guidelines of Southern Baptists; she is having a fruitful ministry.

Do you think for one minute that a Jewish rabbi or Moslem imam would be forced to perform pastoral responsibilities such as administering the Lord’s Supper or baptism in contradistinction to his faith? Absolutely not! Southern Baptists have the same religious freedom to guard what they hold to be divine guidelines in configuring the responsibilities of their chaplains as well.

There are many needed ministries to women and children for chaplains in the military and in prisons, as well as in hospitals or industrial settings, which do not demand assuming the office and responsibilities of a pastor. In fact, there are many ministries that are like those of a pastor, such as offering counsel and comfort, which are not assigned exclusively to a pastor per New Testament guidelines. And in those New Testament guidelines, there are only two prohibitions for women.

Perhaps Southern Baptist women who serve as chaplains will open new arenas of ministry to the families of those in the military or in prisons just as they have ministered to families in hospitals or industrial settings. Paul reminds us not to be “squeezed into the mold of the world” (Rom. 12:2). It follows then that we must be bound by Scripture but unleashed to use creativity and energy in effective ways within its boundaries.

Perhaps I could make my own declaration, and there may well be Southern Baptist women who would join me:

- I am going to study and learn God’s Word (1 Tim. 2:11)
- I am going to use every opportunity to instruct women who are new or young in the faith, beginning with the curriculum stated in Scripture (Titus 2:3-5)
- I am going to use lifestyle teaching to model God’s truth to my children and grandchildren and to all who cross my path (Deut. 6:7-9)
- I am going to share the gospel with every woman or man or girl or boy as I have opportunity (1 Pet. 3:15), and I will delight in woman-to-woman ministries (Titus 2:3-5);
- If I am asked to do so, I will pray or give my testimony within the congregation of believers (1 Cor. 11:5)
- I will preside over my household and make it a place of comfort and nurture (Prov. 31:10-31)
- I will offer my service to Christ according to the guidelines in His Word (1 Tim. 2:11-15). What an assignment this admonition may turn out to be with many opportunities and only two prohibitions (i.e., teaching men or ruling over men) within two spheres (i.e., the home and the church). ◆

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Evidence of the Downgrade

Note: This article provides notice and commentary on recent events in Baptist life that give evidence of a doctrinal downgrade in our churches.

- **Imam Addresses Seminary Community**

The 2004 Hoover Lectures at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (BTSR), held March 9-10, featured Dr. Shaheed Coovadia, a Muslim Imam and Director of Richmond's Islamic Center of Virginia. His addresses apparently focused on the place of Muslims in American culture and Muslim-Christian relations.

Comment: Do seminarians training for ministry in Baptist churches need to learn about interfaith dialogue or evangelism?

- **Syncretism and Campus "Ministry"**

The University of Richmond installed Daphne L. Burt as chaplain on September 27, 2004. According to the September 23, 2004 *Religious Herald* (p. 5), "Burt said that she modified the standard installation service, originally Christian-focused, to incorporate Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh elements." Burt was also quoted as saying, "While I am unabashedly Christian on Sundays, the joy of my life is making sure everybody has an opportunity to find spiritual community and support, whether they are religious or not."

Comment: What would Chaplain Burt make of Jesus' claim in John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me."?

- **Continuing Controversy Over Homosexuality at BTSR**

The October 2, 2004 *Richmond Times Dispatch* carried an article by Alberta Lindsey titled, "Director Leaves Seminary Over Code on Gays." It reported that Warren Hammond resigned, because, "his conscience would not allow him to enforce a policy that excludes practicing homosexuals, including those in committed relationships." He had been Director of Student Life at BTSR for seven years. Hammonds was quoted as saying, "I couldn't stay at the seminary and support a policy I didn't agree with and couldn't comply with. I would have had to turn in homosexuals or lie about it. I couldn't do either and live with myself." The article noted that Hammonds had interpreted the BTSR code of ethics in the student handbook forbidding "sexual promiscuity, whether homosexual or heterosexual" as not applying to homosexual activity in "committed relationships." The article states, "Until this past spring, Hammonds had interpreted the code as not applying to gays and lesbians in committed relationships." In April of 2004 Hammonds' view was challenged by BTSR President Tom Graves, and this led to his departure.

*Comment: On one hand, one might commend Graves for apparently taking a stand against homosexual behavior among seminarians at BTSR. On the other hand, one wonders how Hammonds was able to serve for seven years as Director of Student Life at BTSR without clarity on this matter. That Hammonds was confused about Graves' ideas on this subject seems understandable given the President's views expressed on this subject. In a May 3, 2001 article in the *Religious Herald* ("Answering the Charges: BTSR responds to accusations from a critic") written by Graves in response to charges of liberalism at BTSR (including pro-homosexual views) by a former student, BTSR's President wrote, "The seminary's policy regarding homosexuality is plain: promiscuity, whether homosexual or heterosexual is not an allowable lifestyle for a member of the seminary community.... Homosexual practice is not affirmed. A promiscuous lifestyle is not condoned. We are committed to a discussion of the church's ministry to the homosexual community as a necessary ingredient in our preparation of ministers." Hammond's reading of this carefully crafted statement*

seems accurate. Graves did not **condemn** homosexual behavior, but merely stressed that it was not **condoned**. His main target was promiscuity. Has Graves changed his mind? Or has he come to the utilitarian conclusion that even moderate Baptists (particularly older ones) are not willing to offer financial support to radical pro-homosexual activism at BTSR?

Also telling about the BTSR atmosphere was a letter to the editor from Link Elmore of Richmond that appeared in the October 20, 2004 Times-Dispatch. The writer described himself as a 1998 graduate of BTSR. He wrote to praise Hammonds' "principled stand" and to thank the secular newspaper for covering this story which "Virginia Baptist's own newspaper, the Religious Herald, chose to disregard." He further wrote, "The seminary [BTSR] is an institution born out of the Southern Baptist conflict between moderates and fundamentalists. In its early years it attracted students—such as myself—who sought a home for teaching that honored Jesus' inclusive vision for all, including homosexuals. As a graduate, I am quite saddened that the seminary has now chosen to discriminate against some whom God, in God's own wisdom, has called to ministry. Warren Hammonds' witness honors the inclusive message of Jesus."

- **CBF Church Promotes Lesbian Woman to Position of Co-Pastor**

A November 22 article posted on Associated Baptist Press (abpnews.com) notes that Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville has recently called two women as co-pastors. One is Amy Mears, who comes to the pastorate after serving as a CBF-sponsored chaplain at the University Hospital in Augusta, Ga. Mears has previously served on the CBF Coordinating Council and on the board of directors for Baptist Women in Ministry. The other is April Baker, who is described as "an openly gay woman" who has served as Glendale's associate Pastor since 2002. Baker is also described as a leader in both the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America and the Alliance of Baptists.

The article notes that, with the addition of Mears, the church will have "an all-female ministerial team. Its other staff pastors—ministers of music and youth—are women."

It further notes that "Glendale is affiliated with CBF [the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship], the Alliance and the gay friendly Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists."

Comments: In 2003 the Tennessee Baptist Convention removed Glendale from its membership. Yet it remains a member of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Is this what it means to be a "free and faithful" Baptist? Can the BGAV, with integrity, be linked to an organization like CBF? I can hear some now who would make the accusation of "guilt by association," but are these associations purely accidental?

This story also illustrates the way in which uncritical acceptance of women into pastoral ministry, ignoring Scriptural truth in the name of "equality," leads down the slippery slope toward uncritical acceptance of persons into ministry regardless of sexual behavior. The Editor of EFN went to seminary at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (back when it was controlled by moderates) with Amy Mears. This story is also a reminder of how important it was for conservatives to reclaim conservative, orthodox theology in our Southern Baptist seminaries and shape the next generation of SBC pastors and leaders.

One further observation, a visit to the website for "Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists," a primarily American Baptist organization, provided a list of its affiliated churches. Among these is Washington Plaza Baptist Church in Reston, Virginia. As of the 2002 Virginia Baptist Annual, this congregation was listed as a member of the BGAV. ♦

JR

***Which Denomination, Which Convention?
Recognizing and Evaluating the Issues***
by Malcolm Yarnell

Note: The following article is reprinted by permission from the December 2004 edition of SBC LIFE (SBCLife.net), published by the SBC Executive Committee.

On a Sunday evening in mid-September, my assistant and I drove for three hours from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, to a forum at a church in central Texas. The church was examining its relationship with its association, state convention, and national convention. I had agreed to serve as a representative of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Not knowing what to expect, I quickly prepared my responses to the eight questions on the journey to the church. Most of the questions were programmatic and missions oriented, although there were questions about confessions, inerrancy, and the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). Other organizations represented were the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC), the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), and the local association. The public dialogue from the forum was frank and friendly for the most part. Indeed, the organizers limited our ability to address one another. They were adamant that the dialogue should not turn into a debate.

The forum's friendliness lasted for about an hour. The second hour began to turn to more critical discussion when the church members began to display deep concerns about homosexuality. Their question to me was, "Will the Southern Baptist Convention cooperate with a church that supports homosexuality?" My answer was an unequivocal, "No." The SBC voted in 1992, through a change to its constitution, to exclude churches that "affirm, approve, or endorse homosexual behavior." The SBC will simply send the money back if such a church seeks to associate itself through cooperation. The BGCT representative passed the question to another BGCT representative in the audience who gave a more nuanced answer. The SBTC representative leaned over, pointed at me, and said, "We agree with them." The CBF representative took a bit longer to give his very nuanced answer. He admitted that the CBF will pool the contributions from a church which endorses homosexuality with funds from other churches, but claimed that the CBF did not promote the homosexual agenda. This answer did not sit well with the leading men of the church.

Soon, the questions turned to the various organizations' views of women and women in ministry. The representative of the local association, who was also a professor at a nearby university, seemed intent on lambasting the changes made to the Baptist Faith & Message in recent years, especially with regard to women. Honoring the desires of the organizers to not directly address one another, I responded kindly but firmly to the professor's false charges. Southern Baptists are not misogynists but believe that God has created male and female in His image. An equality before God, however, does not negate complementarian roles in this life. Moreover, we believe that God calls women to ministry, but not to be the pastor of a local church.

The 1963 Baptist Faith & Message did not address the fact that the Bible really is the Word of God (article 1). It did not identify homosexuality as sin (article 15). It did not restrict the pastorate to

men only (article 6). The reason Baptists did not address these particular issues in 1963 was that liberalism and neo-orthodoxy had not manifested themselves fully in the seminaries as yet, the homosexual lobby had not come out of the closet as yet, and there were no women pastors as yet. The 2000 Baptist Faith & Message addressed these issues because they had become major concerns by this time. I explained to the audience that conservatives are not “creedalists” and do not elevate the confession above the Bible. Indeed, we were willing to change the confession to meet new concerns that the churches faced.

A little later, the other professor again took up the issue of Southern Baptist views of women. He argued that each local church is autonomous and the convention may not say anything about a church that hires a woman pastor. Moreover, he said that the letters of Paul must be read within their historical context. When given opportunity, again without directly addressing the professor, I reiterated that the SBC affirms the autonomy of the local church under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. (I prefer the term, “Christonomy,” since we do not believe in a literal “self-rule” but in “Christ-rule”). I also went on to explain that the churches have the right and the responsibility when meeting in association or in convention to exclude those churches which severely violate commonly held doctrines. The autonomy of the local church does not empower one local church to force its aberrant views on all the other local churches.

I then went on to show the dangers of holding the position that employing women as pastors is an indifferent matter, as advocated by the other professor. Drawing on my dialogue experiences with members of the Anglican Communion, I pointed out that abandoning one major ethical position often leads to the abandonment of others. As a pro-homosexual bishop told me, the ordination of homosexuals was a logical extension of the ordination of women, which in turn was a logical extension of the ordination of divorced men. Indeed, in England, calls for the ordination of women were followed in a few years by calls for the ordination of homosexuals. Once you begin claiming that a scriptural statement must be interpreted entirely according to the ancient biblical cultural context and that it may not be applicable to our context, you open the door to such ethical shifts.

The other professor could no longer contain himself and burst into the conversation, claiming that Southern Baptists were equating women and homosexuality. I responded that we did no such thing. Rather, we were only pointing out that allowing changing cultural norms to define our interpretation of Scripture automatically opens the door to the radical contextualizing and thus dismissal of other biblical statements. Audience members subsequently told me that the other professor immediately became visibly agitated. At this point, the church's forum moderator closed down the forum as they did not want the forum to become a debate.

We were all guests of this local church, and in honor to our hosts, I dropped the argument. There was no shootout at the corral that day. Hopefully, however, one day, conservative Baptist professors can debate these important issues with their liberal Baptist counterparts. The churches would benefit by an open and frank discussion of such important ethical and hermeneutical issues. ♦

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Book Review

John Keith Davies. *The Local Church—A Living Body*. Great Britain: CPD Wales, 2001: 271 pp. ISBN 0 85234 495 3.

John Keith Davies served as a Baptist pastor in Wales for over 37 years and helped to plant four independent congregations. This book was his final literary work completed just before his death in 1999, then collected and edited by his children for publication. It is a manual or handbook on body life and church order covering a variety of practical topics on the nature of authentic, Biblical community.

The Local Church is divided into four parts. Part one is titled “The local church and its life” (15-101). First, a Biblical case is made for the New Testament understanding of a regenerate church membership where meaningful participation of each body part is the norm. Davies then discusses the local church and its relationship with other churches. He stresses the Baptist doctrine of local church autonomy but also confirms the importance of cooperation among churches. Doctrinal agreement is paramount for real cooperation:

Where truth is denied there can be no fellowship at all. Any organization or so-called church that denies the truth is to be avoided or withdrawn from. Doctrines necessary for salvation and for local church life are fundamental to fellowship between churches. Any relationship with another church has to be approached carefully and the basis for the relationship must be clear from the outset. It makes no sense at all for churches that believe the Scriptures to be their final authority in all matters of faith and practice to belong to an organization that does not. Similarly it makes no sense for such a church to belong to an organization where error is accepted as valid and is thereby approved (68).

Finally, in this first section, Davies also examines the local church’s relationship with the state. Davies writes as a citizen of a nation that has a state church (Anglicanism). He argues that “The state and the church are separate with different functions in different spheres” (96). Therefore, he says that it is not appropriate for the state “to pay people as employees to teach religion” or for religion to be part of state school curriculum (96). In addition, he argues that it is wrong for the state “to employ men to preach and teach Christianity to military personnel and prison inmates” (97) or for the church to accept public funds for their work, because “[s]tate financial aid can lead to a loss of freedom of action and can eventually lead to state control” (97).

Part two is “The local church and its membership” (102-66). The author here covers the topics of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. He argues for traditional, strict, Baptist interpretations of these ordinances (not sacraments!). Baptism is for believers only and by immersion. The Lord’s Supper is limited to baptized believers and is hosted only by the local church. Davies rejects “open table” practices, arguing that the Lord’s Supper should not be a “semi-public” event, but it is best restricted to the members of the local church in order to provide proper attention to discipline. One may not fully agree with his close communion argument, but one must also admit that the author makes a winsome defense of the practice. Davies also stresses in this chapter the privileges and responsibilities of service in the church by all the members. Finally, he argues for proper harmony and balance in the roles of men and women in the life and ministry of the church, contending for the Biblical exercise of male headship.

Part three is “The local church and its leadership” (167-201). Davies argues for the Biblical roles of both elders and deacons. He stresses the role of deacons as servants and not as a “board of directors.” He also argues for the concept of plural leadership or plural elders in the church, but concurrently contends for the special and singular leadership of the pastor. Davies concludes that a church cannot be run by committee. It needs the leadership of the pastor. He frankly acknowledges that the recent rediscovery of plural eldership in many Baptist churches in the last thirty years has been a mixed blessing: “Although there have been blessings,

there have also been problems, largely because the principle of plurality was accepted without working out carefully its implications” (184). Men should not be placed in the role of elder just to fulfill a desire for plurality. They should be spiritually qualified and the distinct role of the pastor among the elders should be recognized and respected. Better to have a single elder than place men who are not fit for the eldership in the role “to satisfy some mathematical scruple derived apparently from Scripture” (268).

Finally, part four is “The local church and its mission” (202-71). Here Davies focuses on the church’s responsibility to do mission and outreach. He advocates church planting, in particular, once a church has grown beyond a size where intimate fellowship among its members is no longer viable. Davies also maintains that we should beware of falling into the trap “of allowing the end (the saving of the lost) to justify any and all means” (226). When “results” control our practice of evangelism, Davies notes, “anything which produces results is [considered] legitimate, even the slick, high-powered, costly, gaudy, entertainment-centered, gigantic crusade. It is evangelism so long as it produces results. The integrity of the gospel of the grace of God is thereby relegated to a level of secondary significance” (226). In the end, he contends for the old method of evangelizing—the foolishness of preaching.

This book is striking for its many sound observations that run so counter to the church growth mania of the contemporary evangelical church in America. For example, in his discussion of the church’s meeting place, Davies observes, “The church itself, similarly, should not be too large for fellowship to be real and meaningful. When a church gets too large for meaningful fellowship it is time to plant another church” (31). Later Davies offers these further observations on size:

Growth is evidence of life, but numerical growth can bring problems. A large church can easily become complacent, and often has a higher proportion of passengers in its membership than a relatively small church. This is true even where a large church seems to have lots of so-called converts while a small church may appear to have few. Small however, does not necessarily mean beautiful. A small church can be as dead as a large church, but it certainly looks more pathetic. Small numbers do not guarantee effectiveness or spirituality in a church. Yet small companies do have many advantages where there is genuine spiritual life. Small churches can experience a greater sense of fellowship where every member knows and is known. In smaller churches pastoral work can become a reality (266).

He concludes, “In order for the church’s fellowship and pastoral care to be a practical possibility between 100 and 150 members is likely the maximum size of membership” (270).

This book is to be highly recommended to both pastors and laymen. Perhaps Davies’ book comes across as so fresh and Biblical because evangelicals in the United Kingdom already know well what it is like to live as believers in a post-Christian, secular culture. *The Local Church* would make a great study for a pastor and deacon body to work through during the course of a year of service together. I do not agree with every viewpoint expressed in the book, but it offers a treasure trove of wisdom from a laborer who spent many years of fruitful service in the vineyard and has now been called home. Go to your local second hand bookshop and sell your copies of *The Purpose Driven Church* and *The Purpose Driven Life* and use the proceeds to buy this book. ◆

JR

Paradosis

Paradosis is the Greek word for “tradition.” It is also the title for this recurring section featuring voices from the Virginia Baptist past.

In the last EFN (September 2004) we listed several “Notes on Select Texts of Scripture” from the Virginia Baptist Father Andrew Broaddus (1770-1848). The following is also included among Broaddus’ notes preserved in “The Sermons and Other Writings of Andrew Broaddus with a Memoir of His Life by J. B. Jeter, D.D.” (New York: Lewis Colby, 1852). It is part of a lecture Broaddus presented before the Female Missionary Society, Birmingham, King and Queen County, Virginia. The message is timely given the recent WMU-Virginia Declaration concerning women in ministry. It makes clear that a Biblical “complementarian” view—and not “egalitarian”—is the real heritage of Virginia Baptists.

Female Labor in Advancing the Gospel

“And I entreat thee, also, true yoke-fellow, help those women who labored with me in the gospel” – Philippians iv.3.

Who can read the memoirs of the Apostle Paul, that eminent servant of Christ, as they are presented to us in the Acts of the Apostles, without being struck with the evidence of his self-consecration, his entire embodiment of body, soul, and spirit, to that blessed cause which he had espoused from the memorable day when he was arrested in his mad career by the hand of Almighty Grace, through the whole course of his laborious and devoted life! And who can peruse his epistles to the churches, where the warm effusions of his heart are poured forth, without remarking and admiring that sympathy which is awakened in him, which causes every chord in his soul to vibrate in unison with the feelings of those, who, in any manner, or in any degree, were engaged in promoting that blessed cause which he so ardently loved!

And shall we be content, brethren and sisters, shall we be content with merely looking on, and marking, and admiring? Oh for more of the spirit of Paul! More of that sacred unction so richly shed on him! that we may follow, though at humble distance, in the track of this illustrious herald of the cross!

The words of our text present us with an instance of that sympathy which the Apostle felt; of that interest which he took in behalf of those who were engaged in lending a hand to promote this good work. The humble efforts of pious females are not overlooked in him. “I entreat thee,” &c. “Those women who labored with me in the gospel.” And are we hence to infer, that in those apostolic times, women were engaged in public preaching? I should answer, No! for this would contravene the apostle’s admonition, “I suffer not a woman to teach or have authority.” And were there no way that women might “labor in the gospel,” without becoming public preachers, there would appear to be an irreconcilable variance between the words of our text and the apostolic precept just quoted. The solution, however, of *any* apparent difficulty, is easy; there is a way, there are means and methods by which this work may be performed, without assuming the office of public preaching. This office does by no means involve all the labor which appertains to the sustaining and promoting of the gospel of Christ. ◆

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