



News from the Blue Ridge

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Family Events:

Family activities during March have largely been overwhelmed by job responsibilities. Both Claire and I have had numerous extra responsibilities during the spring semester and these have consumed most of our extra time. But with the spring semester coming to a close in two months, our schedules should settle down to a much more reasonable routine.

Also March brings the yard work responsibilities. Although I enjoy working outside and am looking forward to beginning to develop landscape designs of the yard, the yearning is very real for the days of the apartment when I would hear the purr of that John Deere lawn mower taking care of the grass and someone else riding it! The first mowing came at the end of March and the yard seems like a 40 acre field to mow. With the option to purchase half of the adjacent lot to the south of us, we will be taking on some additional mowing responsibility in the not too distant future. But the idea of the nearest neighbor locating a house no closer than 100 feet to ours is very appealing. I suspect by the end of the summer that rider on the John Deere mower will be me!

Claire's work schedule this spring has been enormous and filled with some extreme challenges. Her column will return in the May issue of the newsletter.

The following article came originally from the Sunday church bulletin of the San Pablo Catholic Church. Enjoy it!

If you can start the day without caffeine,

If you can get going without pep pills,

If you can resist complaining and boring people with your troubles,

If you can eat the same food every day and be grateful for it,

If you can understand when your loved ones are too busy to give you any time,

If you can overlook it when something goes wrong through no fault of your and those you love take it out on you,

If you can take criticism and blame without resentment,

If you can resist treating a rich friend better than a poor friend,

If you can conquer tension without medical help,

If you can relax without liquor,

If you can sleep without the aid of drugs,

If you can say honestly that deep in your hear you have no prejudice against creed, color, religion or politics,

Then, my friend, you are almost as good as your dog.



University Happenings:

March 12-14 was a special time. Kent Blevins and I traveled to Chapel Hill, NC, to attend the southeast regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), and the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion (NABPR). Several other GWU professors were also present. GWU was well represented! The trip up and back as well as the time together in the hotel room after the sessions gave Kent and me a wonderful opportunity to get to know one another better.

Additionally, four of our religion major and divinity school students attended the meetings. This provided them with a first hand experience of the professional guilds for those investing their lives and careers in religious studies in higher education in North America. Plus, and maybe most importantly, the book exhibit gave them the opportunity to purchase books at 40% to 50% discounts. The sessions gave them first hand encounters with several scholars who have written books they use in the classroom. Our department is beginning a tradition here to increasingly get our students involved in these opportunities both at the regional and national levels. Eventually we are aiming for a growing number of our students to be on the programs with paper presentations.

Another delight for me personally was the chance to have time with several former MDiv and PhD students, several of whom presented papers in sessions of the meetings. One of the great joys of teaching is to watch these young people blossom and grow in their intellectual skills to become truly outstanding young scholars who are making a difference.

March 17-21 provided another, different kind of opportunity for me. I traveled to the University of Central Florida campus in Orlando to participate in a conference sponsored by Syllabus Magazine on developing internet based college courses. I have been asked to be a part of the launching of GWU's internet based Distance Education program this coming fall. In the fall I will offer an advanced NT elective course on Paul's Thessalonian letters thru the divinity school in the MDiv program. Then in the spring, the NT intro course will be offered through the G.O.A.L. program in the adult evening school.

Gardner-Webb is preparing itself to jump into this new frontier of higher education. The massive fiber optics intranet system is almost completed on campus; substantial new additions to the computer hardware to undergird the system are being brought online this spring. Although new frontiers always bring some hesitancy and apprehension about the future, it is clear that we are on the threshold of some massive

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Lorin's Musings:

From the latest issue of the Texas edition of CBF News comes an article by Michael Clingenpeel in Virginia that is very helpful.

A Tale of Two Worlds

Seventy-one years ago Albert Dieffenbach, an observer of the American religious scene, described the 1920s conflict between the fundamentalists and modernists as "two spiritual worlds, irreconcilable, met in inevitable collision." I visited the descendants of these two worlds during the month of June, first the Southern Baptist Convention in Salt Lake City and last week the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Houston. Those of us who audit annually the proceedings of both groups are witnesses to two world views, two forms of religious practice, two codes of theological beliefs and two manuals for ecclesiastical behavior.

First, there's the SBC.

Today's SBC is a world populated mostly by theological and political fundamentalists. In the early years of the SBC controversy, journalists struggled over terminology for this wing of the SBC, and briefly adopted the bulky term "fundamental conservative" at the suggestion of the SBC peace committee. Now that Jerry Falwell is a dues paying, messenger card-carrying Southern Baptist, all heads should be clear that the SBC is fundamentalist.

Fundamentalism is more than a set of beliefs. It is a mindset, a unique way of looking at the world that divides reality into distinct, concrete, opposite camps. Everything is right or wrong, good or evil, true or false, us or them. Fundamentalists have little tolerance for diversity, ambiguity or abstractions. Their world view makes them zealots.

The SBC is a convention that holds the Bible as the inerrant and infallible word of God and measures all reality by its interpretation of the Bible. Its favorite activity is evangelism because everyone who does not conform to its pattern of thinking and behavior needs to be converted from bad to good or from falsehood to truth. Its second favorite activity is edict and warfare because what cannot be converted to think or act like "us" must be condemned as wrong, evil or false, an enemy to the security of the fundamentalist world. Its favorite organizational pattern, whether for church or family, is a hierarchy with clear lines of authority. In any organizational hierarchy some-one functions as the head; for fundamentalists it is always men and clergy.

Not all Southern Baptists are fundamentalists. But virtually all of the SBC's leaders are, and their numbers are rising rapidly among grassroots Southern Baptists because moderates are opting out of the SBC and Independent Baptists are joining.

continued from University Happenings

changes in how education is going to be done.

If you want to see how technology can unbelievably enhance the academic process, just visit the 30,000 plus student campus of UCF in Orlando. The university is a part of the internet 2 project and has a most impressive campus with the very latest and finest computer equipment in every class room.

Second, there's the CBF.

The CBF is a world populated by theological and political moderates. They hold a world view characterized by diversity and complexity. While they acknowledge that there are theological and moral absolutes, their list of absolutes is not very long and they often are difficult to distinguish. Moderates view life as pastels and shades of gray instead of as bold, primary colors. They confess that some situations are perplexing and force persons to choose between alternatives, none of which is ideal. Life's complexity and ambiguity make moderates slower to claim authority or certainty. There is no such thing, therefore, as a flaming moderate.

The CBF is a fellowship of Baptists who hold the Bible as the written word of God that reveals the living Word of God, Jesus. Moderates claim the inspired Bible as their authority, but admit that it is not always clear how its ancient passages are to be applied to late 20th-century issues. CBFers, therefore, have a shorter list of absolutes than SBCers. They believe people should come to a saving knowledge of Jesus and that unreached people around the world deserve to hear the gospel, but their desire to influence society from within rather than convert it from outside generally makes them shy away from in-your-face evangelistic methods and confrontational resolutions.

They tolerate a wide variety of worship styles, church structures, confessional statements and missions strategies. Women find greater freedom to exercise their gifts in leadership positions in CBF because they are not convinced the Bible teaches rigid hierarchies in church and family. They believe pastors and laity should be taught to interpret the Bible for themselves, and that schools should educate rather than indoctrinate.

I often am asked these questions. Where should our church send our mission money? Where do we find our spiritual kin? Where do we get our pastor?

Never have Virginia Baptists' options been clearer. Your church may choose a fundamentalist SBC. You may select a moderate CBF. You may choose to support both, or neither. SBC and CBF are not the only kinfolk in the larger Baptist and Christian family.

Still struggling over where to send your support and find your fellowship? Try this. Pick three or four key leaders from your congregation, men and women of perception, integrity and fairness who hold the respect of your people. Send them next June to the SBC in Atlanta and the CBF in Birmingham. Have them report their observations. There are two worlds out there, and every local church is still in charge of deciding the one in which it wants to dwell.

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The intensive four day conference was extremely productive in providing insights into how to set up an online course in a first class fashion -- something I hope to do at GWU. These developments are beginning to have an enormous impact on American education, and we are just on the threshold of these changes. I'm so glad that Gardner-Webb is trying to be on the cutting edge. More to come in future columns.