The World Economic Crisis • see page 21

Baptists of the Middle East
Online Registration Begins for 2010 Baptist World Congress

The Baptist World Alliance is now receiving registrations online for the 20th Baptist World Congress in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, in 2010, via the Baptist World Congress website: www.bwacongress2010.org.

Every person attending the congress must register. Online registration closes June 30, 2010.

Participants such as choirs and dance groups may also apply to participate at the event.

The congress, the major international gathering of Baptists which is held every five years, is expected to have a projected 15,000 persons in attendance. It will be held July 28 to August 1 at the Hawai‘i Convention Center.

The congress theme, “Hear the Spirit,” will be explored in worship celebrations, Bible studies, workshop presentations, and through artistic expressions.

Congress attendees will be exposed to Hawaiian music, Hawaiian culture, and the relationship of the theme to “Aloha” – the common Hawaiian greeting that has multiple meanings.

The major sessions will incorporate the use of several languages, music from around the world, speakers representing various regions and continents, and imageries from various cultures.

Registration may also be done by regular mail by printing the registration form available on the congress website.

Unless otherwise noted, photos in the issue are by BWA staff.
21 Christian Response to the Global Economy
Baptist voices from around the world address the challenges and need for renewed commitment to biblical stewardship during this time of economic upheaval.

24 EBF/BWA Religious Freedom Monitoring Group Visit to Azerbaijan
Tony Peck reports on the recent Religious Freedom Monitoring Group visit to Azerbaijan. Meeting with various government officials and religious leaders, the Baptist leaders addressed issues of harassment, obstacles to church registration, and imprisonment of pastors.

25 Book Note

26 Executive Committee Makes Important Decisions
At its recent Falls Church, VA, gathering, the BWA Executive Committee addressed issues of budget reductions and organizational restructuring, and announced decisions regarding personnel, awards, and future BWA meetings.

28 Celebrating What God Has Done: 400 Years Together
As we celebrate 400 years of Baptist faith this year, we retell our stories – from the earliest Baptists who proclaimed that the English King could not control the religious beliefs of his subjects, to Baptists of today who still maintain that each individual must have freedom to respond to the Creator.

29 Leena Lavanya to Receive BWA Human Rights Award
The Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award will be presented to Leena Lavanya in honor of her work with the poor and dispossessed of India through her “Serve Trust” organization.

30 In Memoriam
FROM THE PRESIDENT
David Coffey

The Disappearing Christians of the Middle East

I have a friend called Harry whose 90 year old grandmother died a few weeks ago. Eugenie Tabourian was an Armenian Christian from Jerusalem. She and her husband fled from Turkey during the Armenian genocide of 1915 and arrived in the Holy Land which in those days was bustling with Christians. Today, many indigenous Christians have left this golden city in search of fresher and safer pastures.

Sixty years ago Christians constituted more than 25 percent of the overall Palestinian population in the Holy Land, and almost 80 percent of the southern triangle of Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala. Today, those numbers have dwindled alarmingly, due largely, though not exclusively, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In a nutshell, Christians have lost hope in a land that once witnessed the birth of Jesus the Hope of the world.

The first 600 years after the Day of Pentecost saw the spread of the Gospel to the east of the Roman Empire with significant communities extending as far as China. These years saw a vibrant growth among the Christian churches of the Middle East; it was in the Middle East that the books of the New Testament were gathered into the canon of the Bible; in the same region, the work of the ecumenical councils clarified the great doctrines of the faith.

Philip Jenkins has reminded us of this rich period of the church in his latest book, The Lost History of Christianity (2008 Harper). In the year that Baptists celebrate their 400th anniversary in Amsterdam, we do well to recall with gratitude that before Smyth and Helwys there were churches in the modern nations of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Samarkand is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world which prospered from its location on the Silk Road trade route between China and the Mediterranean. Long before Good King Wenceslas ruled a Christian Bohemia and before Poland was Christian, there was a thriving church in Samarkand – modern day Uzbekistan. As Jenkins observes: “Losing the ancient churches is one thing, but losing their memory and experience so utterly is a disaster scarcely less damaging.”

The Middle East is the birthplace of Christianity and the home to some of the world’s most ancient Christian denominations. But the Christians of the modern day Middle East have been declining and disappearing in recent years because of a combination of low birth rates, emigration, and increasingly – violent persecution. The plight of Hanna Massad, pastor of the Gaza Baptist Church, is a shocking example of the power of fanatical extremists to terrorize a Christian minority.

My friend Harry has shared that over the past decade some Muslims have become increasingly less tolerant of people who do not share their faith and many consider Christians as heretics. These attitudes are in part due to an erroneous belief that all Christians in the Holy Land are politically linked to the policies of the Christian “West” and they ignite the spirit of the medieval Crusades which Osama Bin Laden frequently refers to in his “messages.”

These attitudes generate economic prejudice so that Christian shops are at times the last ones to be frequented for business or Palestinian Christians are the last to receive financial aid from local authorities. Harry has told me that if you talk to a Christian ironmonger, butcher or grocer, you can detect the grave concerns simmering under the veneer of pan-Palestinian solidarity.

Arab Christians frequently experience the deep wound of a triple prejudice. Their economic viability is squeezed by Muslim neighbors; their land is relentlessly colonized by successive Israeli governments; but worst of all, they feel they have been marginalized by the body of Christ, particularly those living in the West.

Arab Baptist Christians tell me they understand why Western Christians love the nation of Israel but are puzzled why Arab believers from the Middle East are often not included in the prayers of the global Christian family. They say to me, “Don’t stop loving the Jewish people of Israel – but please love Arab Christians as well. Find a place in your hearts for us both.”

The small yet thriving Baptist communities of the Middle East face severe challenges as they strive to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is time for the global family to show added sensitive appreciation for the life and work of these indigenous Christians who live in the Bible Lands.

I urge you in your prayers to “find a place in your hearts for us both.”
From January 10-22, I accompanied Asia Pacific Baptist Federation (APBF) president and Baptist World Alliance (BWA) vice president Chu Wood-Ping on a trip visiting member bodies in India.

We visited places and members which are among the least known and least visited – viz. the Maharashtra Baptist Society, Baptist Union of North India, Lower Assam Baptist Union, Garo Baptist Convention, Assam Baptist Convention, Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention, etc. We also visited some grassroots missionaries and heard their stories.

Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam met with the international leadership of the Seventh Day Adventist Church on Wednesday, March 11.

The meeting took place to affirm both the BWA and the Seventh Day Adventist commitment to shared values and goals on religious freedom.

Callam stated that “the BWA is pleased with the partnership that has been experienced in the quest for religious freedom.”

The BWA leader also expressed delight at “collaboration in the past,” and said he looks forward “to these opportunities continuing with greater intentionality.”

John Graz, director of public affairs and religious liberty for the Adventist church, said that Baptists and Seventh Day Adventists “share a Christ-centric faith and many of the same values.” He said both Baptists and Adventists “share a passion for religious freedom, and in many countries around the world we cooperate closely to promote and defend this freedom.”

The meeting occurred at the Adventist world church headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, in the United States.

Callam met with all the leaders of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, including world church President Jan Paulsen.

Garo Baptists are sending missionaries to Sudan, Africa! Karbi Baptists are sending volunteer evangelists (no salary except for food allowance) who are bringing hundreds to Christ every year.

BWA Director Fausto Vasconcelos visited some of these groups in December 2007 and they cherish the great fellowship they had with him.

One also realizes that it means so much for these Baptists to be a part of the larger body of Christ. They take great pride in being a member of the APBF and the BWA!

— Bonny Resu, BWA Regional Secretary for the Asia Pacific Region
By Patsy Davis

The month was November. The date was the eleventh in the year 1958. The setting was Calcutta, India. It is a great city indeed; but, to the Baptists of the world, it was, and continues to be, the city where British Baptist missionary, William Carey, wrote a life changing history in the 1790s in indelible letters which remain etched on the hearts of every Baptist. Little did the city or the world know that into the Lower Circular Road Baptist Church, Baptist women, arrayed in colorful native dresses, were making their way to add yet another incredible and beautiful chapter in the annals of the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department.

There were 35 women who were delegates from nine Asian countries, Burma, Ceylon, Hong Kong, Hawaii, India, Indonesia, Japan, East Pakistan and the Philippines, who had gathered at the Lower Circular Road Baptist Church. Mrs. George Martin, President of the Baptist World Alliance Women’s Department, called the women who sat before her in stillness to rise and form a Continental Union of Baptist Women in Asia.

— From a report by Mercy Jeyaraja Rao, a founding member of ABWU

The month was January. The date was the seventh in the year 2009. The setting was Kolkata (Calcutta), India, where once

United States

BWA Staff Attends US Presidential Inaugural Prayer Breakfast

Several members of staff of the Baptist World Alliance, including General Secretary Neville Callam, attended a prayer breakfast held to honor Martin Luther King Jr., and to mark the inauguration of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States.

The Interfaith Prayer Breakfast was held in the US capital of Washington, DC, on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Monday, January 19, a national public holiday within the US.

Guests at the prayer breakfast included Lee Tae-sik, South Korean ambassador to the United States, William Rudolph, rabbi at Congregation Beth El in Bethesda, Maryland, and 11-time Grammy Award-winning gospel singer and evangelist Shirley Caesar.

Keynote speaker Howard-John Wesley, pastor of Alfred Street Baptist Church in the Washington, DC, suburb of Alexandria in Virginia, stated that the occasion of the inauguration of Obama to the US presidency is a special moment to be marked. Wesley declared to the largely African American audience that this was a moment filled with excitement and celebration, but that “this is not the end of the journey, we have battles still to fight.”

The breakfast was one of several events of The People’s Inaugural Project sponsored by the Stafford Foundation. The Foundation was founded in 2002 by Earl Stafford Sr., an African American businessman and deacon at Alfred Street Baptist Church. It is a faith-based, nonprofit organization formed to help “the underserved, the marginalized and the distressed.”
again the Asian Baptist Women’s Union (ABWU) came together – this time for its 11th assembly celebrating its Golden Jubilee in the great city where it began.

There were 13 countries represented: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. There were 1,700 women in attendance representing 23 national women’s conventions/unions out of the 30 that are members of ABWU.

It was an exciting time as the women gathered at the Science City Convention Center in Kolkata for the assembly themed, “Receive, Rejoice, Reach Out.” Dorothy Selebano, president of the BWA Women’s Department, was the keynote speaker.

“‘Receive, Rejoice, Reach Out’ is really the theme of this year, indeed of this age. We are here to celebrate the beauty of the Lord Jesus,” said Selebano. “I’d like you to know that each and every person who is here is important – important to Jesus as an individual because we are here to do what God has called us to do. You have to stretch out and invite Jesus into your life. To receive is to find peace.”

Chiyo Murakami, president of ABWU, Atola Subong, vice president, Sonia Silbor, secretary, and Latika Paul, treasurer, worked hard in preparing a program where the women would receive the word of God, rejoice in diversity, and reach out to each other and the world.

“Women of ABWU have been given an assignment,” said Murakami. “We, who have been graced with forgiveness through the cross of Christ, and have been blessed with the joy of new life through the hope of the resurrection, have been called to follow Him in obedience. We have been commissioned with the task of reaching out to our generation with this forgiveness and joy. Women of ABWU have received the Lord’s command to love and serve our neighbor. We are called to service, we are called to prayer, and we are called to share the Good News.”

Many of the former ABWU officers were present to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. Mercy Jeyaraja Rao, one of the founding members of ABWU, and Murakami cut the anniversary cake. Rao then brought the message which reminded us that in 1958 the world was still recovering from World War II.

“Several of us came with deep scars from bitter experiences of those years,” said Rao. “Needless to say, there were anxious moments as to how such a coming together would be faced. God’s love enveloped us. We received each other with open arms; we rejoiced because we were God’s family; and we reached out to hold each other’s hands and said with sincerity, we are sorry . . . we love you . . . forgive us.”

At the ABWU business session, new officers were elected. Shook Jae Lee from Korea was elected president and Ofelia Caalin from the Philippines was elected treasurer. Other new officers are Sophia Shou Ping Yu from Taiwan and Judity Milita Das from Bangladesh.

Lepmonie Sangma, president of the India Baptist Women’s Union and chairperson of local arrangements, and her team did an outstanding job with all of the local arrangements. On the last night of the assembly, they provided a special Indian night celebration where everyone enjoyed Indian cuisine, cultural delights, and fun and fellowship.

“Women of ABWU have received the Lord’s command to love and serve our neighbor. We are called to service, we are called to prayer, and we are called to share the Good News.”
The Middle East is one of the regions in the world where Baptist witness is least represented, but there is a presence. Statistics suggest that there are more than 80 churches with approximately 5,500 baptized believers.

Yet, the Middle East is important as it is the Cradle of Christianity, the place where the largest religious faith in the world started before it became a global force.

Most Christians in the Middle East are Arabs, including in Israel, where Baptists have a small but significant presence in cities such as Nazareth and Haifa, which have significant Palestinian Arab presence with Israeli citizenship.

In this issue, we highlight the trials and travails, yet the hope that exists among Middle East Christians generally, and among Baptists in particular.
It is the desire of the Jordan Baptist Convention (JBC) to receive official recognition from Jordan’s monarchy. This recognition is important to the small convention of 20 churches and 1,200 members – one of the biggest in the Middle East – in order for it to operate with a level of freedom within the country.

It is hoped that the official opening and dedication of the Baptism Center in the Jordan Valley will hasten official acceptance. It is also hoped that a significant delegation that attended the dedication from the Baptist World Alliance, led by President David Coffey and General Secretary Neville Callam, will aid the process.

Key to the decision for the recognition of the JBC is Prince Ghazi Bin Mohammed, a cousin to Jordan’s King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein. Prince Ghazi is chairperson of the Board of Trustees for the official Baptism Site of Jesus Christ, and an advisor to the king. The prince played a leading role in the drafting of A Common Word, the Muslim letter signed by 138 Muslim clerics, scholars, and intellectuals that was sent to 27 Christian world leaders in October 2007, calling for dialogue between the two faiths in an attempt to forge world peace.

The dedication of the Baptism Center on March 20 on the banks of the Jordan River drew a crowd of more than 1,700, roughly twice the number expected. More than 120 persons were baptized during the event, a number far exceeding original expectations.

Yet, official recognition from the monarchy is not a given, and may not come easily. Any recognition from the monarchy is influenced by the obligation to balance freedom and security. In cases where evangelicals are suspected of aggressive proselytizing, there is likely to be hesitation in affording recognition.

Thus far, government approval of Baptists and evangelicals rests partly on the cooperation and the agreement of the Council of Churches, the group that represents most of the historical churches in Jordan, such as Catholic and Orthodox churches.

The process to get government approval is going apace. Realization that peaceful coexistence is necessary among all religious groups in the country, Christians and Muslims, is growing among Baptist leaders such as Nabeeh Abassi, former president of JBC and chief organizer of the official opening and dedication of the Baptism Center.

Evangelicals, which include the Nazarenes, Pentecostals, and other groups, now want to be involved in civil society and have developed six pledges to which 80 evangelical church leaders have signed on. A letter has been drafted and sent to the Council of Churches as part of the process to gain recognition from the government.

Some evangelicals are making efforts to exercise greater sensitivity in how they conduct ministry within their Muslim context. One such effort is in the use of language, such as avoiding the use of words such as “conversion,” which can be problematic in most Muslim settings, or choosing to use the term “Follower of Christ” rather than Christian.

In the baptisms at the Baptism Center on March 20, great care was taken to ensure that none of the more than 120 persons baptized was from a Muslim family, but from a Christian background.

During the time that the BWA delegation was in Jordan, separate meetings were held with Prince Ghazi and with young Islamic journalists and scholars. Baptist scholars such as Paul Fiddes, a professor at Oxford University in England and chair of the BWA Commission on Doctrine (Continued on next page)
and Interchurch Cooperation, were key to both meetings. The meeting with the young Muslims was frank and open, yet cordial, and was based on the BWA response to *A Common Word*.

General Secretary Callam led a delegation that met with the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC) on March 19. The aim of the JICRC is to assist in cultivating a culture of tolerance among people of faith who live in Jordan.

The BWA delegation engaged the members of the center in a discussion on the requirements for peaceful relations among people of different faiths. Callam told the meeting with the JICRC that the right of people to follow the religious way of their choice and to make room for others to do the same has been a major mark of Baptist witness.

Present at the meeting were Sami Gammoh, former Jordanian Finance Minister, Muslim scholar Hamdi Murad, and Executive Director of the JICRC, Nabil Haddad of the Catholic Church (Eastern Rite).

The dedication ceremony by the Jordan River drew other Baptists from the Middle East, including from Lebanon, perhaps the strongest Middle Eastern Baptist group; Syria, where there is a strong ministry among Iraqi refugees in the country; and from Israel, the majority of whom are Palestinian Arabs.

Callam, the main speaker at the dedication ceremony, said, “Today, as we assemble by the Jordan… we unite to mark the opening and dedication of this Baptism Center – a place where people from all parts of the world may assemble for a journey and an experience.”

The BWA leader expressed the hope that “the waters of the Jordan extinguish the crippling fires of hopelessness that burn in the hearts of those who have no knowledge of God.”

Also speaking at the dedication ceremony was former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Blair, who established a faith foundation upon demitting office as British Prime Minister, commended King Abdullah and Prince Ghazi for exhibiting courage in the inauguration of the Baptism Center. The Center joins buildings of other churches, including the Orthodox Church, which have recently been constructed on the official Baptism Site of Jesus Christ. Blair stated, “In dedicating this site, let us renew our faith in our God, our Lord, and in His message.”

BWA President David Coffey and Fawaz Ameish, Jordan Baptist Convention president and BWA vice president, expressed gratitude to King Abdullah and Prince Ghazi for facilitating the construction and dedication of the center.

Coffey read greetings from former United States presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, both Baptists, and from prominent Baptist pastor from the US, Rick
The Jordan Baptist Convention (JBC) is comprised of 22 churches with approximately 1,350 members, even though anywhere from 3,000 to 5,000 of Jordan’s 6.5 million people attend the convention’s Baptist churches.

Baptist work in the country began with Southern Baptist Convention missionaries in 1951. The JBC was established six years later.

In the early years of Southern Baptist work in Jordan, the International Mission Board founded a hospital in the town of Ajloun. The hospital was sold to the government of Jordan in the 1980s, but a Baptist camp is still there and is operated by the JBC. Currently, the conference center’s activities run almost year-round.

The JBC also operates two schools — one in Amman and the other in Ajloun. The Amman school has 1,250 students, with more than 500 of them in high school. Muslims make up 40 percent of the K-12 student body, from kindergarten to grade 12, and 60 percent of the students are Christians. The student body is five percent Baptist.

Among the graduates of the Amman school are members of the royal family such as Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, Abeer Muhsesein, Princess Sumaya Bint Al Hassan, Princess Rahama Bint El Hassan, Princess Badi’a Bint El Hassan, and the children of Princess Bessma Bint Talal, Farah and Ghazi.

In 2004, the school signed a partnership with Samford University in the United States to train all teachers on new teaching-learning strategies. In addition, quality improvement training was offered to administrators and department heads. This partnership had its positive impact on helping us achieve our goals towards building a professional learning community.

During the past seven years, the school ranked among the 10 best schools in Jordan. In addition, we won many national and international awards for academic, cultural, and sports achievements.

Presentation of the gospel through prayer and Bible reading and through the personal lives of the teachers is a vital part of the educational programs at both schools.

A convention-operated Baptist bookstore also can be found in Amman, and even though it does not make much money, it is a place where people “come to Christ.”

Institutions such as the schools and the bookstore provide a setting in which reaching out can be carried out in a way that is not threatening, which we believe is vital to the future success of the Baptist witness in our country.

We are pleased that Baptists in our country are growing in number and in spiritual maturity — and they have a good image among the people of Jordan.

Nabih Abbassi is the former president of the Jordan Baptist Convention.
The church experienced a period of stagnation in the late nineties. There were two churches with a few members in Homs and Damascus. It was during this time that I became leader of the Baptist Convention of Syria (BCS).

Since the end of the nineties till now, the Lord has brought a great revival through internal mission and evangelism. Churches have been planted and established in almost all the Syrian provinces. Now the BCS has 10 churches and five centers (churches in the process of formation): two churches in Homs, three churches in Damascus, two churches in Latakia, two churches in Tartous, two churches in Hama and Aleppo, and centers in different villages.

The primary work of the Baptist church in Syria is the preaching and the salvation of souls; striving to educate, build and train these newly saved souls to serve according to the talent given by the Lord; and inciting them to go out and serve.

There is an urgent need for the construction of places of worship, as well as for transportation, due to long distances Christians have to travel. Furthermore, we have a shortage in ministers and we do not have a conference center. These are current prayer concerns of the BCS.

We thank the Lord for the quick answer to prayers during the last few years regarding training. There is now an Institute of Theology in Homs and discipleship classes in almost every church. We organize five conferences a year, the majority consisting of training sessions, Bible studies and evangelism.

Baptists in Syria have a good relationship with Muslims, who make up 90 percent of the country’s population. The churches are trying in multiple ways to deliver the truth for all. These include the distribution of Bibles, spiritual books and tracts; assistance to the poor, both Muslims and Christians; and the delivery of the Gospel according to conditions and opportunities, and in ways that will make persons feel that we are brothers and friends, all from the same origin, and that all human beings need salvation.

The BCS maintains a good relationship with the government and in return Baptists have a good deal of freedom to worship and to exercise our activities in the country.

All glory is to the Lord Jesus.

Da’as Haddad is the president of the Baptist Convention of Syria.
How old is the Egyptian Baptist church is a question I always answer by referring to Matthew 2:14: “Joseph took Jesus and his mother to Egypt.” We see the coming of Jesus to touch our land as the beginning of the blessing God has bestowed not only upon the Baptist church, but upon all our people.

However, we can trace the beginning of Baptist work in Egypt back to 1931. It did not start by a visiting foreigner, but by Rev. Sedik Gergis who returned from the United States after completing his seminary education to be the first Baptist in Egypt; to be a missionary from Egypt to Egypt. He started working alone in the villages, moving slowly, praying that the Lord might send laborers for the harvest.

Today, we have only 15 evangelical Baptist churches. That makes us such a minority in a country of 78 million with a Muslim majority and about 10 million Christians, mostly traditional Coptic Orthodox. Our small number of churches is a fact that raises questions. What went wrong? Why didn’t we continue growing? It reflects the difficulty we have had in establishing churches as a minority! It also shows that we lost our Baptist vision of mission. Fear and the feeling of being persecuted are other reasons. On the other hand, we admit that we have been preaching and speaking, but with too little “doing” in the field of practical ministry in a community with big problems and needs.

Our biggest challenge for now is planting churches. Egypt is an international country, a mixture of races and ethnic groups, displaying a wide range of cultural and social diversity; Nubian, Bedouins, Nomads, Berbers and others; all living together for thousands of years. Our church has been placed “between the lion’s jaws.” The first jaw is Muslim religious fundamentalism that imposes a fanatic lifestyle condemning even moderate Muslims. The other jaw is the permissive lifestyle Egyptians blindly adopt as a result of globalization.

The picture of a mosque standing opposite a church is one that carries a lot of meaning. We are the nation that Jesus visited and the country of a Muslim majority with the strong Azhar Mosque, a center that trains “Sheikhs” to go from Egypt to all the “ends of the world” spreading the call to Islam. Egypt presses for good relationships between Muslims and Christians, though there have been periods of tension and unrest.

As for our small convention that is led by a devout president, Rev. Wahba Gayeed, we can say that it has become very active in seeking to plant new churches. We seek church planting by sending individual full-time church planters or teams for the “two handed gospel campaigns,” sharing the message of the gospel with one hand and meeting people’s physical needs with the other.

Recently, the Lord has blessed us with a land of 16 acres for a conference and training center and we are raising needed funds and making plans for the building of the center. We hope that the center and the attitude behind it – to raise and train real leaders – will mark the turning point and will be a step toward holistic mission to regain the Baptist spirit and to influence our community.

(Continued on next page)
Our churches have been away from the world family for so long. As we were praying for a real return, the visit of BWA President David Coffey was a real encouragement for us. It was a voice that came to us declaring to us that we are not alone, but members of a big family that has a big mission.

Today, seven million of the 10 million Christians in Egypt do not have seats in the existing Egyptian churches, and to that the countless numbers of other needy Egyptians crying for help! What can a few Egyptian Baptists do? A lot – as we share the full message of the Gospel.

If the river Nile runs along Egypt providing enough water for all Egyptians, can the church move with the living water to heal the land? Our prayer for the coming Baptist generations is to understand the necessity of moving outside the walls of the church to reach those outside; moving with the promise:

“Blessed be Egypt my people… and the LORD shall be known to Egypt.”
Isaiah 19:25, 21

Mounir Sobhy Yacoub is the pastor of First Baptist Church of Cairo in Egypt.

The Baptist movement was initiated in Iraq in 1986 at the hands of a Lebanese pastor burdened to share the message of the Gospel – and Baptist doctrines – with fellow Arabs. The ministry remained under low profile until January 2004 when the first Baghdad Baptist Church was inaugurated.

With God’s grace and the support of the global body of Christ, the ministry is expanding in Baghdad as well as in Northern Iraq. The Lord has provided in that we have been able on several occasions to reach out to our fellow internally displaced and suffering Iraqis with relief aid as a gesture of support and care. On several occasions, the local newspapers have commended us – and the Lebanese Baptist Society for their relief programs in Iraq – noting that we have reflected true Christian values and ethics in distributing to the needy without discrimination of any sort. That in itself is a wonderful witness to who we are in Christ.

We have many a challenge in Iraq today, yet at the same time there is a role for us to play. Our countrymen and women are desperate for peace – and we are called to be peacemakers. Though a minority, we have an important role to play. We are called to lead lives that are a witness to the majority population, and we can only do so when in all we do and say we reflect Christian values and so earn the trust and friendship of our fellow Iraqis. Only then can we be effective. As fellow Iraqis, we have a common ground that we can build on and this is why with God’s grace we have good relations with many people.

Though today life in Iraq is rather tough, still we hold on in response to our calling that we may be light.

By a Baptist in Iraq

(EGYPT continued)
The Baptist movement in Lebanon started in 1893 with one person – Sa’eed Jureidini, a photographer – who on a trip to the USA visited the Third Baptist Church in St. Louis, Missouri, where he came to know Christ as His personal Savior, and was baptized. Upon his return to Lebanon, and while resuming his work in downtown Beirut, he immediately set out to share with others the Lord’s transformational work in his life. In 1895, a delegation from Third Baptist Church, St. Louis, visited Lebanon and ordained Sa’eed, the first Baptist pastor in Lebanon. That same day, Sa’eed baptized eight new born-again believers and so founded the first Baptist congregation on Lebanese soil, in Beirut.

In 1920, and following the drastic consequences of World War I, Baptist delegates from the USA, Canada and Europe specifically delegated to the Southern Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board (FMB) the responsibility of supporting the growing Baptist movements in the region, including Lebanon, Palestine and Syria. The FMB sent several couples to work in the Near East. This boosted the Baptist ministry in Lebanon, and a number of key people became believers. Their names are written in history as well as on the palm of the Creator’s hand. They were led by the Spirit of God to be Baptist pioneers and they spread the Gospel all over the country.

With God’s grace, the freedom of worship that Lebanon continues to enjoy today, as well as its strategic geographic location as a gateway to the Arab World, enabled our country to take the lead on Baptist ministry in the Middle East.

In 1948, Finlay Graham and his wife, Julia, came to Lebanon from Palestine. In 1960, and in response to identified needs, the Grahams founded the Beirut Baptist School and the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS), followed by the Baptist Publications – known today as Dar Manhal Al Hayat (Source of Life) publishing house.

In 1998, the Southern Baptists handed over all three ministries to what is known today as the Lebanon Baptist Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD), or the Lebanese Baptist Society, a locally founded body that with God’s grace and guidance took each of these ministries to yet another level of service with the purpose of “empowering the church in the Arab World through social and educational development.”

As the LSESD, we feel that God has placed us in a position of leadership in the Middle East/North Africa region, and we are responsible to Him to influence upcoming generations to commit their futures to Kingdom work. And indeed we set out to do so in partnership with the global Baptist and evangelical body of Christ.

As a result, today the ABTS has become a missional educational movement, seeking to expand and impact local and regional communities. Our students come from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and others.

(Continued on next page)
With a mandate to “bring about positive transformation in thinking and practice between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East and the West,” ABTS’ Institute of Middle East Studies, since its initiation five years ago, has held annual Middle East Conferences that challenge its attendees – Arabs and Westerners – with new missional and missiological approaches that are more effective and more sensitive to our context. Another ABTS ministry is the Educational Ministries Resource Center, the purpose of which is to “provide human and material resources for facilitating excellence in strategic educational ministry in the Middle East and beyond.”

In response to the dire need for Arabic language Christian resources, LSESD’s Dar Manhal Al Hayat (DMAH) publishing house pursues a mission to make available and accessible such resources through translations and local writings. More than 40 new books have been published in the last four years – and many others are currently in process. DMAH partners with ABTS in the publishing of much needed theological resources in the Arabic language. Moreover, the GateWay Bookstore was established in November 2008 as an outlet to facilitate access to these resources in Lebanon. DMAH partners with Arab publishing houses and ministries to render its Christian resources available for the wider Arab public.

LSESD’s Beirut Baptist School (BBS) continues to be a unique platform for Christian witness with more than 92 percent of its students from a non-Christian background. The high level of education remains an effective incentive for families to enroll their children at BBS despite its Christian identity and ethos. Hence, the lives of BBS’ student body of around 1,300 (and through them their families and a larger community) are touched by the weekly Chapel and Bible study classes – more so since at BBS equal attention is given to both the academic and the spiritual tracks.

In response to identified needs, the LSESD has recently founded two new ministries: community relief and development and the Baptist Children and Youth Ministry that focuses on the empowerment of local children and youth ministries – holding camps for children in partnership with western churches, and capacity building conferences for youth leaders.

We have learned to look at our challenges as opportunities! As such, though we – as Arab Christians – and as Baptists – are a minority, our role is to be salt and light in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Arab World, striving through our lives and through platforms for Christian witness and ministry to reflect the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

For additional information, visit:

Arab Baptist Theological Seminary website: www.abtslebanon.org
Dar Manhal Al Hayat Publishing House website: www.dar-manhal-alhayat.com
Beirut Baptist School website: www.bbslebanon.org
LSESD Baptist Children and Youth Ministry website: www.bcymlebanon.org

Nabil K. Costa is the Executive Director of the Lebanese Society for Educational & Social Development and the Middle East Representative for the European Baptist Federation.
Baptist work started in Palestine around 1954 with Southern Baptist Convention missionaries. Among the first ministries established were the Gaza Baptist Church, a hospital, and a school for nursing, which has since gained widespread reputation in Gaza. The concept was to provide ministry to the whole person – body, soul, and spirit.

In 1968, a Christian Public Library was opened. Three years ago, the Lighthouse School was founded in partnership with other Christian organizations, with a current enrollment of 185 students, from kindergarten upwards.

A health clinic for women has been temporarily closed due to the fact that several Baptist families, including my own, were evacuated from Gaza due to the persecution faced by Christians. We hope to restart the clinic upon my return to Gaza in the summer. However, relief work continues, such as food distribution to help those who are in great need.

I’ve spent almost my entire life in Gaza. For most of those years, we lived side by side in love and respect with our Muslim neighbors. However, things started deteriorating six years ago and now the situation has become both difficult and dangerous for Baptists and other Christians. Much of this danger comes from small militant Muslim groups in Gaza.

We live between two fires – the fire of Israeli occupation, and the fire of militant Muslims. We are in the same boat as our Muslim neighbors whenever Israel attacks Gaza. Several members of the Christian community have died because of the Israeli aggression on Gaza.

The recent war that ended in January was the darkest and the bloodiest I have ever seen in Gaza. Since 1967, more than 1,375 Gazans have been killed and more than 5,000 injured due to Israeli actions, almost half of whom were women and children.

In the most recent war, many persons could not find a safe place as there are no shelters in Gaza. One of our relatives, a 15 year old girl, Kristine, died as a result of the Israeli bombing. Her father, a medical doctor, could not help her. People were traumatized by the intensity of the bombing. The innocent people of Gaza are the ones who pay the price.

The Gaza Baptist Church building was not spared as it suffered damage when Israel bombed the nearby police station which is within 10 meters of our church building. A number of windows and frames were blown out.

On the other side, we suffer from attacks by militants. Rami Ayyad, a member of the Gaza Baptist Church, was executed by militant Muslims in October 2007 because of his Christian faith.

The major news organizations report mainly on the killing by Jews and Palestinians of each other. But they are only reporting the symptom, not the problem. The root problem is the continued control of the life of the Palestinian people by Israel. The root problem is the occupation. We need to get rid of the Israeli occupation and at the same time find security for Israel.

There is also need to find ways to protect the minority Christian population in Palestine. In the wake of the execution of our dear brother Rami Ayyad, the Gaza secret police told us that they are not able to protect us. The people who murdered Rami are still free. What should we do as Christians living in Gaza?

Through the Lighthouse School and other ministries by Baptists, good seeds have been planted in the hearts of many people in Gaza. Even though we are always at risk, I believe the church will survive the persecution that it faces. The Gaza Baptist Church continues to meet in small groups on Sundays at around 5:00 pm.

We encourage your prayers. Stand with us. We want to be in Gaza because God calls us to reflect His love to our neighbor. We continue to be inspired by Rami’s testimony and faithfulness.

We believe God’s word and His promises that we will never be alone. We also know that we belong to a bigger family – the family of God around the world – the body of Christ. Your standing with us will inspire us to keep going forward in the fulfillment of God’s call on our lives.

Hanna Massad is pastor of the Gaza Baptist Church in Palestine. He is currently on sabbatical in the United States.
By Bader Mansour

Farewells were said as a determined young man left his family in Safed, the crown jewel of the mountains overlooking the Sea of Galilee, to make his way to America. In 1909, under the love and guidance of Dr. George W. Truett, Shukri Musa found the desire of his heart and was baptized into the fellowship of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas.

In the spring of 1911, the Baptist Churches of Southern Illinois sent Mr. Musa, now an ordained pastor, back to his people in Safed. Many hearts were stirred by the soundness and power of his witnessing. One young man, Louis Hanna, became convinced of the truth of the Baptist faith and interpretation of the New Testament and requested baptism. Thus the first Baptist member in Palestine was baptized May 10, 1911 in the stream that flows through Wadi el Lemun (Valley of the Lemon), near Safed.

(From “Southern Baptist Golden Anniversary, Palestine-Israel,” 1911-1961, Dwight Baker)

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict is referred to many times as a conflict that is “100 years old.” It is in this background that Baptists in Israel are preparing to celebrate 100 years since Baptist work began in Israel/Palestine in 1911 and developed into a thriving church in Nazareth. The Nazareth Baptist Church was founded in 1926 and still stands today and is referred to as “the Mother Church” within the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel (ABCI). The 1948 war scattered many of the Palestinian Baptist believers who became refugees in neighboring countries. Baptist work had a new beginning following the war and one of the landmarks was the establishment of Nazareth Baptist School in 1949. This KG-12 school – from kindergarten to grade 12 – is considered today to be one of the best schools in the country with its graduates influencing the community in different ways.

The Baptist community in Israel numbers 3,000 people making up 20 churches in Galilee and Central Israel. Of these churches, 16 are native Arabic speaking churches in places like Nazareth, Haifa, Cana of Galilee, Shafamer, Kufur Yaseef, Toraan, Ramle, Acre, Rama and Eilaboun. They are organized together under the ABCI. The current chairman of ABCI is Monther Naoum, who is an ordained elder at Shafamer Baptist
Church. He is also chairman of the Evangelical Convention in Israel that brings together all evangelical churches and para-church institutions in the country. The Association is going through some major organizational changes to meet the challenges of the era now that the missionaries have left and a new generation is emerging. Recently, a draft constitution was proposed to replace an old constitution from the 1960s.

The Baptist community in Israel is trying to make an impact. Living in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society can be tough. It isn’t easy being a minority group. Arab-Israeli citizens are considered second class citizens who receive less state benefits than Jewish-Israelis. “Between a rock and a hard place” describes it well.

Even though the churches are growing in number, they have a great need for development. Lots of the pastors are untrained and some have to work more than one job in order to survive. Many churches do not own a church building and meet in rented apartments, which limits their activities. Even the crown of the Baptist witness in Israel, Nazareth Baptist School, is located in an outdated building in central Nazareth with hopes to move to a new, modern campus.

With all these difficulties, the small Baptist community in the land where God became flesh and dwelt among us is experiencing revival and growth. The dynamic outreach ministry led by Ashraf Abishai has greatly blessed the surrounding communities in Galilee, and involves many volunteers from ABCI churches. Many families have opened their homes to begin Bible studies and hear the Word of God in different towns. The ministry has fruits where people are coming to accept Christ as their personal savior. Recently, 35 new believers were baptized in the Jordan River on one occasion and many more are coming forward. Some young people are making decisions to study for the ministry.

A major step toward realizing and meeting the need for training local leaders was the opening of the Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary (NETS) in 2007, which is a Baptist initiative with other evangelicals invited to participate. There are around 30 students in the seminary today, many who are active leaders in their churches already. They study in the beautiful “Nazareth Baptist Missionary House” that was purchased recently and is in walking distance from the town’s major historical sites.

Baptists are peacemakers and work for social justice in the Holy Land. From one side, they are united with fellow Christians in the Palestinian Territories who are under lots of pressure. At the same time, they have fellowship with Messianic Jews in Israel, another persecuted group that tries to witness to the peoples of this land. This unity of the followers of Christ has been a counterbalance to fanatics from all sides, including Christians who favor one side or another in the conflict. Baptists in the Holy Land are raising the banner of love and forgiveness, walking in the footsteps of Jesus, ministering in some of the same locations where Jesus himself ministered 2,000 years ago, trying against all odds to be salt and light in the land with 100 years of conflict that does not look like it is coming to an end soon.

Please visit the Association of Baptist Churches website, www.baptist.org.il.

Bader Mansour is the Secretary of the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel.
Baptist witness in Turkey is in its infancy. Started in 1999, what is today the Protestant Baptist Church in Turkey is seeking to establish a distinct Christian identity in a predominantly Muslim culture.

It is not easy.

Turkey, though a secular state, is predominantly Muslim, and several radical elements have attacked and killed Christians. Yet, Baptist Christians state that such persons are but a very small minority in the nation, as Turkey is a country with a healthy democracy with enshrined religious freedoms. This confident claim about radicalism’s small numbers is made despite the fact that the Baptist pastor has been assigned a body guard by the government after threats were made against his life.

The deputy governor of Izmir, Haluk Tuncso, confirmed the country’s commitment to peaceful co-existence among the different faiths, an assurance he gave to Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Neville Callam in a meeting held in Izmir in March.

The deputy governor expressed his personal support of an initiative by a group of individuals of different faith backgrounds, Muslim, Christian, and other faiths, that would promote pilgrimage by Christians to Ephesus, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Pergamum, Sardis, Thyatira, and Smyrna (Izmir) – all of which are mentioned in Revelation chapters two and three and are located in what is modern western Turkey.

The program to make Turkey a heritage site for Christian pilgrims has been endorsed by Callam. Speaking at a press conference to announce the program, Callam expressed the hope that “people in this part of the world will recognize the importance of these sites to Christians.” He stated that “for Christians, this is a holy land, and being a heritage site would help Christians to connect with western Turkey.”

Baptist pastor Eltan Cevic is among those who fully support the program for Turkey to promote itself as a place of Christian heritage. Indeed, the country is already heavily trafficked by tourists, particularly from Europe, such as Germans, and Asia, such as South Koreans. Its deep history as the seat of the ancient Hittite kingdom; as a place where Alexander the Great traversed; importance as part of the Roman Empire; its Byzantine heritage; as the center of the Ottoman Turk Empire; and as a place of importance for Christians and Muslims, make Turkey one of the richest archeological, heritage, and cultural sites in the world.

The country’s Christian heritage is not known by its own people, and its great potential as a place for Christian pilgrimage is an unfulfilled potential.

Cevic aims to change that. Rather than irking Muslims with aggressive evangelism, he is reaching out to his fellow Turks to help remind them of their great contribution to Christian history, and how such recognition may be good for Turks and the country.

It is a brand of Christianity that evokes a welcoming presence rather than one of pursuit. While being true to the Christian tradition, Cevic believes that working with Muslims and respecting the religion of his fellow Turks is vital. While not compromising the preeminence of Christ, he sees the need to cooperate with Muslims in ways that generate goodwill among his countrymen.

Yet, evangelism is important to Cevic. He supports the house church movement, and has oversight of one house church that has begun in a town of 125,000 that is eight kilometers or five miles from the city of Izmir, the third largest city in Turkey. He is working closely with a pastor in the Black Sea region, who, though his church was originally of another Christian tradition, has been convinced that Baptist faith and theology fits more closely to his core beliefs. That pastor, too, has been assigned a body guard by the government after he was kidnapped and tortured for his faith and told to leave town before he was released.

It is possible that both churches will form the core of what may become a burgeoning Baptist movement in the country. Callam, who made a pastoral visit to the country between March 21 and 25, met both pastors and extended the hand of support of the worldwide Baptist community.

Turkey, perhaps, may become an example of how a small Christian community can exist, and thrive, within a less than welcoming culture.
A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE
TO THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS

By Ross Clifford and Rod Benson

We are experiencing what former U.S. Federal Reserve Bank chairman Alan Greenspan calls “a once-in-a-century type of event” – a global financial crisis.

First came the subprime mortgage crisis, then government takeover of home mortgage lenders, the collapse of Lehman Brothers and other major financial firms, and flow-on effects to other sectors and other national economies. Consumer spending is down, trade contracting, unemployment rising, public sector bailouts and financial stimulus measures multiplying, and public sector borrowing at record levels. The crisis was triggered by the tendency for individuals and institutions to act for their own short-term benefit while passing on long term risks to others, combined with lax regulation of financial institutions. Some also argue that misplaced confidence in the “equilibrium” view of economics, whereby the prices of stocks and other securities tend toward their proper value and markets self-regulate, is partly to blame.

The effects of the credit crisis are significant for governments, businesses, families, and ministry. The impact of unemployment has serious consequences for financial security and wellbeing. There is a knock-on effect as uncertainty builds, skills are lost, and companies adjust to declining consumer confidence.

Some businesses have no choice but to retrench workers, or to cut wages or hours. Some face bankruptcy, while others take advantage of the economic climate to cut staff and reposition for growth with an emphasis on short-term profitability.

There is often a decline in donations and in income from investments – although agencies that invest with Christian financial institutions normally benefit from their prudent investment policies. Ministries can expect retrenchment, delays in staff appointments and building programs, and a shift to cheaper and more efficient ministry programs. On the other hand, an economic crisis helps wind back extravagances and expands the volunteer workforce.

What Are the Solutions?

No one should put their trust in money or markets. Historically market capitalism has delivered enormous material benefits to millions, but there are also unintended negative consequences of rapid economic growth such as inefficient distribution of wealth and power, consumerism, and climate degradation.

We live in a fallen world, and legislation and regulation are important instruments to protect people and communities from the impact of wrong attitudes and actions – in the same way that laws protect road users from speeding or intoxicated drivers.

For example, governments may agree to establish a robust oversight of the activity of international financial institutions, and engage in more frequent and diligent reviews of national financial systems. They may tighten banking and insurance industry regulation, and impose caps and other restrictions on executive pay.

The aim of such measures should not be punitive but to foster economic growth through a mix of appropriate state regulation and ethical private initiative, including new approaches.

Similarly, churches and individuals can shape the future through a renewed commitment to spiritual formation, biblical stewardship and generosity. Too often, followers of Jesus slip into a mode of living which separates faith and work, and find it difficult to maintain a distinctive lifestyle and ethics. God calls us to a more holistic understanding of our place and mission in the world.

We live in a fallen world, and sin has its fingerprints on every aspect of existence – from personal holiness to interpersonal relations to large-scale economic behavior and institutional structures. Our task is to witness to the truth, to be “salt” and “light” where God has placed us, and to use the gifts and abilities God has given us to pursue justice, mercy and godliness.

The Australian media has just reported that the salary of the CEO of an Australian clothing manufacturer has more than doubled to AU$1.8 million at a time when 1800 employees are being stood down. Those of us in positions of relative wealth have a responsibility to model ethical leadership, and to embrace sacrifice and restraint.

We need to exercise wisdom, applying careful analysis and reasoning before making economic decisions. We need to pursue moderation, especially in relation to the immediate satisfaction of physical and psychological appetites, in order to enjoy contentment, and to be free to invest and to give. We need to possess courage, especially when overwhelmed by fear and greed, to take principled action in the face of real risk.

We also need hope. Those who put their trust in God will not be disappointed. In every crisis, God is present and active, caring for us, providing for us, and giving purpose to each of our lives.

Ross Clifford is Principal of Morling College, Sydney, Australia, and Chair of the BWA Commission on Christian Ethics. Rod Benson is an ethicist and public theologian with the Tinsley Institute, an activity of Morling College, Ethics Consultant to the Baptist Union of Australia, Public Affairs Director of the NSW Council of Churches, and a member of the BWA Commission on Christian Ethics.

By Ross Clifford and Rod Benson
During 2008, predictions were that the world’s economic woes would have savage effects on organizations that operate on a not for profit basis. Predictions of major decline in giving to not-for-profit organizations were legion.

Over the past year, many church-run institutions have seen a widening gap between their expectations and the reality of their income. These include theological colleges, publishing firms and various ministries. The main reason for this trend is the global economic meltdown that many nations are trying to combat.

A recent Wilson Research Strategies/Dunham & Company poll of Christian adults in America found that, owing to the economic situation, nearly 50 percent of these adults reduced their giving to charity. Forty-six percent of Christians surveyed — representing 62.5 million Americans — indicated they had reduced their giving to charity “as a result of the sagging economy.”

The poll found that “those most impacted by the faltering economy are persons over 55 years of age, the “demographic segment of the population that is most supportive of non-profit organizations.”

“Fifty-five percent of households with incomes of $40,000-$60,000 [said] the economy . . . impacted their contributions, while . . . 40 percent of households of $60,000-$100,000 [said] the same thing.”

Nor has the BWA escaped the effects of this economic meltdown. At the BWA office, we took steps to reduce spending and sought divine guidance for securing the continuance of the work to which we have all committed ourselves through the BWA.

Remaining convinced that the BWA serves in response to a conviction of divine calling, we sought fervently to discern God’s will for the ongoing work of the movement. Members of the BWA staff endeavored to offer our best to the mission at hand and trusted God’s proven faithfulness to those who participate in God’s mission in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We regularly reviewed and made changes to the methods we used in order to maintain contact with the worldwide Baptist community to cement global Baptist solidarity. BWA staff members visited Baptist groups and member bodies in all regions of the BWA and we communicated regularly with all who make financial contributions to the Alliance, utilizing a range of available technologies and approaches to fund the mission.

Member bodies and friends of the BWA have been faithful to God in supporting the BWA and we ended the year in a much better position that we thought likely in late September 2008.

Member body contributions and also other contributions to the General Fund declined by 5.6 percent and 2.5 percent respectively. However, contributions to the restricted funds reflected an increase.

Simultaneously, we managed to keep expenditure at 4.6 percent below budget. This resulted from the cooperation given by BWA staff members. Vacant positions remained at the end of a year during which, for example, members of the BWA ministry team took on new responsibilities to meet the need. I am very grateful to every BWA staffer for the cooperation they have given in the face of the situation about which they were all aware.

We are deeply indebted to the members and partners of the BWA whose commitment to the global Baptist movement was severely tested. In spite of the difficulties they faced, they rose to the challenge and supported the BWA.

We have undertaken a detailed analysis of the pattern of financial support the BWA has been receiving over the years. On the basis of this work, we are clearer about the need to vastly increase the number of donors to the Alliance. We hope, for instance, that those who know the organization best will demonstrate their commitment to the organization by contributing to its financial wellbeing. Thanks to all of you who actually register your personal commitment to the BWA by contributing financially to help the Alliance fulfill its mission.

The Caribbean has not been spared the effects of the global economic problems that have preoccupied the attention and concern of world leaders and others over the past several months. It is understandable that in some notable ways the current situation would be felt most acutely by those countries and regions of small and persistently struggling economies to which the Caribbean region belongs.

The church in the region has been particularly challenged to become more involved than ever in matters of welfare and development. The Caribbean Baptist Fellowship is concerned that its member bodies will become fully involved in this enterprise. It has sought to encourage them to this end. At the same time, as a Fellowship, we are not unmindful of certain critically important lessons that are to be learnt from what has happened and continues to happen.

The exposure of our idolatries, the failure of responsible stewardship, the lopsidedness of our development strategies, the folly of the assumption of invincibility based on wealth accumulation and the willful distortion of the connection between means and ends, are just some of the things that are being brought to our attention.

As a Fellowship, we are committed to join our action in pursuit of wholesome development strategies for our people with prophetic-ethical proclamation of the Gospel, with its liberating alternative vision of reality.

— From the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship

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The current free market system is wrong . . .

It is a profoundly unjust system where the poor are exploited.

The challenging task of debating the strengths and weaknesses of a capitalist system needs to be supported by some careful self-examination of personal lifestyle.

Christian disciples should accept the fresh challenge of adopting a personal lifestyle of simplicity, contentment and generosity. Thirty years ago Dr. Ron Sider wrote his Lausanne paper on “Living more simply for Evangelism and Justice” where he outlined a number of important definitions about personal lifestyle:

“We also accept the distinction between necessities and luxuries, creative hobbies and empty status symbols, modesty and vanity, occasional celebrations and normal routine and between the service of God and slavery to fashion.”

Nor has the BWA escaped the effects of this economic meltdown. . . .

We took steps to reduce spending and sought divine guidance for securing the continuance of the work.

The last quarter of 2008 we have witnessed a frightening deterioration in the leading western economies and even the burgeoning economy of China saw its exports register the biggest decline in a decade. We have encountered previously unthinkable figures like $700 billion rescue funds and the International Labour Organization reporting that as many as 51 million jobs worldwide could be lost in 2009 because of the global economic crisis.

The temptation in the current crisis is to succumb to a mood that the world of macro-economics is too complex to grasp and we ought to leave it to the experts. The problem is, some of the “experts” are culpable for the financial crisis and as Christians we should be calling for a closer relationship between morality and the free market. Many Christians support a free-market system (where goods and services are traded on an open market with little interference from central government), but the current crisis underlines the need for some major reforms.

The current free market system is wrong-

1. It is destroying planet earth
2. It is sustaining global poverty
3. It is undermining peoples’ lives by making them work too hard
4. It permits a tiny minority of wealthy individuals to control vast sums of capital
5. It is a profoundly unjust system where the poor are exploited

We need to support those Christian voices who are calling for new international trade rules. Stephen Rand is a Baptist who has been in the frontline of campaigning for greater justice for the poor of the world. In an interview with Christianity magazine he says he finds it obscene that the system of free market capitalism is one where a child dies every three seconds and he wants the system changed.

He tells the story of people like Nandi.

She is dying and her mother does not have the food to feed her. The farmer who used to employ her has gone out of business because cheap imports of grain from a wealthy first world country have undercut his prices and made it impossible for him to compete. Those imports were so competitively priced because international trade rules imposed on Nandi’s country prevented it from subsidizing local farmers while at the same time allowing wealthy first world countries to do just that.

The global credit crunch will have profound effects on members of the Baptist family in many parts of the developing world as the commitment of rich countries to meet their aid targets comes under pressure because of a failing domestic economy. During my recent visit to Egypt I spent time with the Zabbaleen, the garbage people of Cairo, who are employed to collect and dispose of much of the city’s waste. The Zabbaleen generally perform this service very cheaply or for free, making a living by sorting the waste materials for reuse or recycling. Their income is little more than $1 per day. Every year is a credit crunch for the Zabbaleen people.

The BWA has addressed complex issues in recent years drawing on the expertise of gifted practitioners. This is the season when we need to bend our minds to consider what a global “Kingdom Economics” might look like.
For some time the European Baptist Federation (EBF) had become increasingly concerned about the religious freedom situation of the Baptists in Azerbaijan. We received reports of new believers being discriminated against in their employment and often pressured by the state secret police. We were aware of difficulties of newer Baptist churches in officially registering their churches, thus remaining outside the law and vulnerable to harassment and persecution. And we have had the cases of two Baptist pastors, Zaur Balaev and Hamid Shabanov, arrested and imprisoned on what we believe are false charges. As a result of an EBF-led campaign, including a letter signed by former United States President Jimmy Carter, along with strong support from the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), Pastor Zaur was released after some months in prison.

This formed the background for a joint EBF/BWA Religious Freedom Monitoring Group which visited Azerbaijan from January 11-15. The visit was made possible because of generous help from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Carter Offering for Religious Freedom.

The delegation consisted of Tony Peck, EBF General Secretary and BWA Regional Secretary for Europe; Christer Daelander, EBF Religious Freedom Representative; Ebbe Holm, a Danish human rights lawyer; and Parush Parushev, the Academic Dean of International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague who has established good contacts with the Azerbaijani Embassy in Prague.

We were very glad that our invitation to the BWA to partner our visit meant that Paul Montacute, Director of Baptist World Aid, was also able to join us.

Careful preparation took place before our visit to ensure that we could meet with the Chair of the Government Committee on Religious Communities, and with the Baku office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). We also arranged meetings with officials of the British, Norwegian and USA Embassies.

An early meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Religious Communities made clear the official government view that there were “no problems” with the treatment of the Baptists. We were invited to talk to other religious communities about their situation and visits were arranged for us with Muslim, Jewish and Orthodox leaders.

What became clear to us, however, was that having adopted a state model of “secular Islam,” the Azerbaijani government is very nervous about any religious group whose members actively practice their faith. They monitor some “Wahabi” Muslim groups where the state is concerned that a strict adherence to Islam might lead to fanaticism and terrorism. Concerning evangelical Christians such as Baptists, the question was raised with us as to whether these groups are really good and loyal citizens of Azerbaijan. Part of our role as a monitoring group was to assure the government that the Baptists in Azerbaijan are part of a worldwide movement of Baptists who are encouraged to support their national governments and regularly pray for their political leaders.

During the Soviet period, the few Baptist churches in Azerbaijan were for the Russian population and the remaining three Russian Baptist churches are registered and have full legal status. But since the early 1990s, a remarkable mission movement has taken place among the indigenous Azeri people, nominally Muslim, and there are Baptist churches worshipping in Azerbaijan

Like other former Soviet Republics, the State of Azerbaijan, in the Caucasus Region, has faced many challenges in these past years of its independence. A secular Islamic state and oil-rich, it has nevertheless struggled to improve its record in human rights and religious freedom.
now approximately 700 Azeri Baptist believers. It is these Azeri Baptists who are subjected to the most pressure by the authorities. We met a wonderful group of Azeri Baptist young people, some of whom had lost their jobs when they became Christian believers, and a few who had been subject to physical violence. Such is the “cost” of their discipleship.

We were able to examine in detail documents submitted by two churches for their legal registration, which had been refused by the government. We were then able to raise these two cases in our second meeting with the Chair of the Committee for Religious Communities. These and other issues were presented in an open letter to the state president specifically addressing the issues of harassment, obstacles put in the way of church registration, imprisonment of pastors, and also a request that the early 20th century Baptist church building in Baku confiscated in the Soviet period be returned to the Baptists.

And what were the results of our visit? We are encouraged that a few weeks later Hamid Shabanov has in effect been set free, though his conviction has not been quashed. We will continue to monitor the other issues we raised with the government. And above all, we came away from Azerbaijan encouraged and humbled by the dedicated discipleship of our Azerbaijani brothers and sisters in Christ who even in dark times continue to witness unflinchingly to the light of Christ.

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**Book Note**

Steven R. Harmon,  

Early Baptists drew on the patristic tradition such as the doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Christ, with origins in the fourth century and later.

These claims are made by Steven Harmon, associate professor of divinity at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama, in the United States, and a member of the Baptist World Alliance Academic and Theological Education Workgroup.

Some early Baptist confessions and statements of faith, Harmon says, are traceable to “post-New Testament patristic Christianity,” evidence that early Baptists adopted a *Suprema Scriptura* hermeneutic rather than a strict adherence to a *Sola Scriptura* dogma. This adoption of patristic theology shows clear examples of “a catholic spirit among early Baptists.”

Evidence of the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Apostles’ Creed can be found in John Smyth’s *Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles* of 1609, The *Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam* in 1611, the *Orthodox Creed* of 1678, and other early Baptist confessions and statements.

But due to a developed “Baptist tradition of antipathy toward tradition,” modern Baptists have often ignored, or rejected, their patristic heritage. Harmon contends that Baptists need to retrieve “the ancient ecumenical tradition that forms Christian identity.” His claim is that such a task is nothing less than “a recovery of the surprisingly catholic ecclesial outlook of the earliest Baptists, an outlook that has become obscured by more recent modern reinterpretations of the Baptist vision.”

Harmon, who is also a member of the BWA Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation, believes that this retrieval and recovery of a forgotten or ignored tradition should be done primarily in the worshipping community, as “worship is formative and normative for the theology of the church.” Such worship is most fully expressed through “word and table,” that is, the reading of scripture and the sermon, and sharing in the Lord’s Supper. The practice of the latter, he contends, receives short shrift through Baptists’ “deeply entrenched anti-sacramentlism,” which leads to “an aversion to weekly communion.”

The patristic theologian invites Baptist theological educators, students, pastors and laypersons to join him in this conversation on Baptist catholicity.
The Executive Committee (EC) of the Baptist World Alliance, which met March 3-4 in Falls Church, Virginia, considered several matters, some of which are to be brought forward to the General Council (GC) meeting in July in Ede, Netherlands.

The EC approved a resolution brought by the Budget and Finance Committee to reduce the 2009 budget by 29 percent, in response to a loss of 36 percent in investments suffered by the BWA during 2008.

The investment loss, which occurred as a consequence of the global economic crisis, resulted in a reduction in the level of reserves held by the BWA, which were built up over the previous four years. Despite the loss suffered on its investments, the BWA nevertheless experienced an increase in the level of contributions to restricted funds, which are designated for special uses such as aid, development, mission, evangelism, and training.

In response to the levels of giving to the international Baptist body, BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said, “We are deeply indebted to the members and partners of the BWA whose commitment to the global Baptist movement was severely tested. In spite of the difficulties they faced, they rose to the challenge and supported the BWA.”

Structural changes

Several structural changes were considered by the EC. These included the restructuring of the Divisions of Evangelism & Education and Study & Research. In the document, “Rationalizing the structure for the operation of E&E and S&R,” it was proposed to the executive that the two divisions be merged into one that would be named the Division on Mission, Evangelism and Theological Reflection, and that would comprise seven commissions. The new division would reflect both historical and contemporary concerns of Baptist life, take into account the relevant clusters of commitment that were affirmed by the BWA, and would have a more direct impact on the ministry of Baptist churches, associations, conventions, and unions affiliated with the BWA. The matter is to be further discussed and voted on in July in the Netherlands.

The Executive Committee decided that the Division of Mission Advancement, which was introduced in 2005 on a three-year experimental basis, be disbanded and that the leaders of its two portfolio areas, Communications and Promotion and Development, report directly to the General Secretary.

The Constitution and Bylaws Committee presented proposed changes to the BWA bylaws in order to bring the bylaws in line with constitutional amendments that were voted on by the GC in Prague, Czech Republic, in July 2008. Bylaw changes include the composition of the EC, the
election and roles of vice presidents, and the establishment of an audit committee, among others.

A report from the BWA Consultation with Regional Leaders proposed that the general secretary of each of the six regions be made BWA associate secretaries, rather than being regional secretaries, the current designation. The proposal, to be further discussed in Ede, called for the six regional leaders for Africa, Asia Pacific, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America and North America to be nonvoting members of the GC.

**Announcements**

Several significant announcements were made during the EC meetings. Raimundo César Barreto Jr. of Brazil is being recommended by the Personnel Committee for the position of Director of the Division of Freedom and Justice (F&J). The recommendation will be presented for a vote at the next meeting of the GC. If appointed by the GC, Barreto would be the first person to become director of the F&J Division, which was established on September 1, 2008, following the decision of the GC in July 2008 to create the newest division of the international Baptist organization.

Leena Lavanya from India was also announced as the 2009 recipient of the Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award. Lavanya is being recognized for her work among the poor and dispossessed of India. Her “Serve Trust” organization operates several ministries, including homes for the aged, lepers, and adults and children living with HIV/AIDS, among other ministry endeavors, such as a computer school aimed at females and poor youth, and a skills training program for female sex workers and their daughters. The award will be presented to Lavanya during the GC meeting in Ede.

The EC honored Joanne Hendricks, Accounting Services Manager, who retired after serving the BWA for more than 10 years. A plaque was presented to her.

The Officers Search Committee, which has responsibility for proposing the names for BWA president and vice presidents, informed the meeting that the proposed names will be determined by the end of April and will be presented at the GC meeting in the Netherlands in July. The election of officers for the BWA will take place during the Baptist World Congress in Hawaii in 2010, and those elected will serve until 2015.

The International Program Committee for the Baptist World Congress updated executive members on the progress being made for the 20th congress to be held in Honolulu, Hawaii, July 28-August 1, 2010. A shortlist of speakers has been made. Topics, writers, and a publisher for the Bible study material, to be used during the congress, have been identified.

The year 2009 marks the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Baptist movement. Both the BWA and the European Baptist Federation (EBF) will celebrate the event. Executive members were informed that the BWA Annual Gathering in Ede, Netherlands, to be held July 27 to August 1, will incorporate events to mark the anniversary, while the EBF reminded the meeting that it will host “Amsterdam 400,” to which all Baptists are invited, and which precedes the BWA meetings. Amsterdam 400 will be held July 24-26. The first Baptist church was founded in the Netherlands in 1609.

Several other reports were received by the EC, including from each division, department and region of the BWA.

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Celebrating What God Has Done

by Karen Bullock

In 2009 the global Baptist family celebrates with great joy what God has done as we salute our 400th anniversary! The ministry that Baptists have offered across these four centuries is interwoven with the stories of individuals and communities of faith from every corner of the world. This year we retell our family stories to our congregations, to our children, and to our children’s children once again. We remember the best of Baptist life together and link the generations each to each in this marvellous heritage of faith.

Who were the first Baptists? And how did we become such a family? For our earliest Baptist brothers and sisters, the 17th century was a time of beginnings: first church, earliest declarations of faith, initial denominational structures, and the witness of suffering that forged the concept of religious liberty for all people.

**Baptist Beginnings, 1609**

As the 17th century dawned, England was an explosive country. Citizens were legally required to be members and adhere to the teachings of the state church. Refusing to do so resulted in fines, whippings, and imprisonments. Religious and political forces clashed violently with a new growing conviction among many Christians that a truer expression of God’s church should be characterized by faith in Jesus Christ and separated from restrictions of a state church system. Many dozens of Christian brothers and sisters acted courageously in 1607 when, despite threats to life, home, and property, they fled their homeland and sailed to Amsterdam, Holland, a self-proclaimed City of Refuge. More than anything else, they desired the religious freedom to search the Scriptures and worship according to the pattern they found in its pages.

These believers were offered shelter and employment in the bake-house of Jan Munter, a Waterlander Mennonite, whose business lay close to the Amstel River near the present-day Rembrantsplein section of the city. Here the English refugees, led by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, worked, worshiped, and hashed out their theological convictions across cleared supper tables lit by guttering candlelight. In just two years’ time they had rejected infant baptism and founded a new church.

In its first believer’s baptismal service, Smyth first baptized himself and then the rest of the small congregation. Each person baptized was an adult who had confessed belief in Jesus Christ. Following the service, the tiny group formed a church whose voluntary membership was based upon a personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ and the baptism of professed believers only.

This radical decision in 1609 marked the moment when these religious dissenters became the first Baptists. But theirs was not an easy road and challenges confronted each step. As they wrestled with how best to relate to other communities of faith, Helwys returned home to England in 1611 with about 10 members and settled at Spitalfield, just outside the northwest city wall of London. There they planted the first Baptist church on English soil. Helwys quickly published the first defense for religious liberty in the English language, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (1612).

He proclaimed that the English King had no power to control the religious beliefs or practices of his subjects; instead, regardless of religious belief, each individual must have the freedom to respond to the Creator and to read and interpret Scripture.

Persecution followed. Helwys was taken to Newgate prison, where he died. Yet within a generation, more than 54 Baptist churches thrived.

**Baptists Today**

Four hundred years later, our Baptist family story is still the result of God’s calling, gifts, and empowering. Baptists still uphold a New Testament Church model, preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, follow in believer’s baptism, and practice inter-church cooperation and brotherly union. Baptists at their best have continued to affirm and defend the freedoms for all people embraced by our earliest brothers and sisters. Overarching all has been God’s sustaining grace.

Shoulder to shoulder around the globe, the Baptist family stands as grateful communities of faith, families, and individual believers. We bow our heads acknowledging our dependence on God, confess our need for reconciliation and healing, and pledge our renewed proclamation of Christ. We look into each other’s eyes declaring our encouragement for the work God is doing in His various ministries. We commit to one another our prayerful and financial support for the work among us. We solemnly seek the Father for continued direction, enabling, and empowerment as His work goes forth to accomplish His purposes. We seek courage in the living of these days.

Every day this year we remember . . . and as we remember, we praise the Promiser who keeps His Promises. In Him alone rests secure our Baptist hope and future. Let the generations rejoice!

Karen O’Dell Bullock is Fellow and Professor of Christian Heritage and Director of the Ph.D Program at B.H. Carroll Theological Institute in Arlington, Texas, USA, and Chair of the BWA Commission on Baptist Heritage and Identity.
Leena Lavanya of India is the 2009 recipient of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award.

Lavanya, referred to by some as the “Baptist Mother Teresa,” is being recognized for her work among the poor and dispossessed of India. Her “Serve Trust” organization operates several ministries, including homes for the aged, lepers, and adults and children living with HIV/AIDS.

Serve Trust operates a school for children in one of the most depressed areas of Narasaraopet, a town of approximately 100,000 in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. In another town, Chilakaluripet, Lavanya operates training programs for female sex workers and their daughters with the hope that these women and their daughters would break the cycle of prostitution.

Chilakaluripet reportedly means “the place where prostitutes live,” and is populated by descendants of women who were once concubines of kings, who have since evolved into a caste where their role and function is prostitution. HIV/AIDS infection is high among this population, where many men depend on the earnings of the women by being pimps or part of the mafia.

In addition to operating a free HIV/AIDS counseling center, Lavanya distributes rice and lentils to female sex workers and blankets to Hindu beggars, many of whom live on the streets or in depressed communities.

Lavanya is the granddaughter of B.R. Moses, a former BWA vice president and seminary professor, who raised her until she was 18 years old, in keeping with a Telugu tradition of grandparents raising the first grandchild. The Telugus are a people group that lives in several states, mostly in Southern India, among whom Baptists have a significant presence. Her maternal uncle, Bontha Moses Sudheer, is a pastor and a member of the BWA Commission on Freedom and Justice.

Lavanya began her ministry after attending the Baptist Youth World Conference in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1993, in response to a challenge by noted speaker Tony Campolo for youth to fully surrender their lives to Christ.

The Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award will be presented during the meeting of the BWA General Council in Ede, Netherlands, in July.
In Memoriam

Thomas Corts, former president of the Baptist-affiliated Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, in the United States, died suddenly on Wednesday, February 4.

Corts was actively involved within the Baptist World Alliance since 1985. At the time of his death, he was a member of the BWA General Council, vice chair of the Commission on Baptist Heritage and Identity, and a member of the Study and Research Executive Committee and the Academic and Theological Education Workgroup.

In remembering Corts, BWA President David Coffey said, “Tom was a great ambassador for the Baptist movement worldwide and a mentor to us all with his outstanding gifts of grace and wisdom.” Coffey stated that Corts “was a faithful friend and advocate of the Baptist World Alliance and we remember with appreciation how he served us with great distinction on numerous occasions.”

BWA General Secretary Neville Callam, in recalling his visit to the Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in September 2007, described Corts as “a distinguished Baptist leader and an outstanding educator” who was “a most humble and gracious host.”

“Corts was a perceptive commentator on the church’s responsibility to nurture her young for Christian discipleship in both the private and public spheres,” said Callam. “We offer condolences to his wife, Marla, and their entire family.”

Corts was president of Samford from 1983 until his retirement from that position in 2006, whereupon he was named president emeritus. The school had several noted achievements during Corts’ tenure. Among the highlights were the purchase of Samford’s London Study Centre, significant growth in the school’s endowment, construction of more than 30 campus buildings, and an increase in student enrollment.

He was a former chairman of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). He also served as president of SACS, the American Association of Presidents of Independent Colleges and Universities, and the Association of Baptist Colleges.

After his retirement, Corts served as executive director of the International Association of Baptist Colleges and Universities, which represents 52 Baptist higher learning institutions. In 2007, he was appointed by former US President George W. Bush to coordinate US international education aid.

A public memorial service took place on Sunday, February 8, in the Leslie Stephen Wright Center Concert Hall on the Samford campus.

Corts leaves his wife of 44 years, Marla, two daughters, and one son. He was 67 years old.

Simon H. Sircar, former president of the Bangladesh Baptist Church Fellowship (BBCF) and past principal of the College of Christian Theology-Bangladesh (CCTB), died on February 8.

Sircar was described by BBCCF General Secretary, Leor Sarkar, as “a spiritual father, mentor, theologian, renowned pastor, preacher, evangelist and most respected Christian personality in Bangladesh.” The BBCCF leader also referred to him as a “pioneer of church planting.”

The highly regarded preacher pastored the Savar Baptist Church in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, prior to becoming president of CCTB for 23 years, retiring from that institution at the end of 2006. He was the first Bangladeshi to hold a doctor of theology degree.

At the time of his passing, Sircar was a member of the Academic and Theological Education Workgroup of the Baptist World Alliance.

He leaves wife, Ashima, and sons, Bapi, Happi, and Rafi.

Peter Tongeman, former president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB), died on March 12 from a rare heart condition. He was 79 years old.

Tongeman received his ministerial training at Spurgeon’s College and went on to pastor several churches in England, including in Luton, Northampton, and New Milton.

A member of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) Youth Committee from 1965-1970, Tongeman was involved in the 7th Baptist Youth World Conference held in Berne, Switzerland, in 1968. He also served as secretary for the BUGB young peoples’ department, and was president of the BUGB in 1995.

“Peter Tongeman was a true internationalist and ambassador for the life and witness of the BWA family,” said BWA President David Coffey. “He attended some of the first gatherings for the European Baptist Federation and the BWA in the difficult period following the Second World War in Europe and he always carried in his heart a vision for gathering God’s global family together for fellowship and inspiration.”

“He was a diligent pastor, creative preacher and accomplished writer, poet and musician,” said Coffey.

Tongeman is survived by his wife, Ruth, and other family members.
At long last, I was in Manila! Only five or six hours more by road and I would be in Baguio, the historic Philippine city, named in 1909 the “Summer Capital of the Philippines.” An area 5,000 feet above sea level, the city has seen successive foreign occupation by the Spanish, American and Japanese until 1946, the year of Philippine independence. Baguio is the place which hosts both the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary (PBTS) and one campus of the Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary (ABGTS).

It was while attending the celebration of the 50th anniversary of ABGTS and the 41st Annual Lide-Walker Bible Conference at PBTS that I met two formidable Asian Baptist scholars who have given a total of more than 100 years in Christian service on the Asian continent and beyond.

Masahiro Kanoy was born in Japan where he taught Old Testament in the Theology Department of the Kanto-Gakuin University. With the worldwide student riots in the sixties, the school was closed until 1972 when the Japan Baptist Union (JBU) started a Mission Training School in borrowed space on a university campus in the country. Meanwhile, for 34 years, Kanoy continued serving as pastor of the Kanto-Gakuin Church which named him Pastor-Emeritus in 2001.

A graduate of Andover-Newton Seminary in Massachusetts in the United States and of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, also in the USA, where he studied Semitic Languages, he also studied at the Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem and at the St. Paul’s University in Tokyo where he earned his doctorate.

Having been a staffer in a religious institution that had been closed forcibly, Kanoy kept a safe distance from the newly established training school, agreeing to join the staff there only in 1983. He eventually rose to the position of president in the institution. He was still serving the institution when the JBU renamed it the Japan Baptist Theological Seminary and relocated it to Totsuka-ku in Yokohama.

Asian Baptists celebrate Kanoy’s contribution as a member of the team that translated the Bible into the Japanese language. Serving from 1973-1987, Kanoy still remembers the time he spent on the first translation into Japanese of the book of Leviticus and on the editorial team for the New Common Bible translation.

Another outstanding Baptist scholar is Lien-Hwa Chow. Born in Shanghai, China, in 1920, Hwa credits Miss Isabella Coleman, a missionary to China and Taiwan, for introducing him to the Christian faith. A servant of God who offered himself selflessly in the service of several Christian organizations, he served as pastor in Taiwan for more than 50 years.

Hwa, who has been a visiting scholar at Princeton Seminary in New Jersey, USA, Union Theological Seminary in New York, USA, the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey in Switzerland, and Regent’s Park College, Oxford, UK, was a professor for 31 years at the Taiwan Baptist Theological Seminary. Later, he served as dean, then president, of ABGTS for 12 years.

Of significant note is Hwa’s contribution in the area of Bible translation. He played a major role as translator and co-chief editor of the Revised Chinese Union Version, the most widely used version of the Bible in Chinese. He was translator and co-chief editor of Today’s Chinese Version, and is currently rendering the same service toward the revision of this version. One of his “current” projects is as translator and chairman of the Chinese Inter-Confessional Bible, being produced jointly by Roman Catholics and Protestants.

Impressive is the combined list of publications by Kanoy and Hwa, who are recognized in Asia as sages to be revered. They are two of the outstanding Baptist scholars, now in their eighties, whom Baptists all over the world are able to celebrate when we consider God’s gracious gifts given through the Baptist family. The dedication to providing an example of true Christian discipleship and to nurturing Asian leaders for contemporary Asian churches and institutions make Kano and Hwa worthy of emulation.

We hail these two Baptist stalwarts as sages in the East.
Hear the Spirit

at the

20th Baptist World Congress

July 28 – August 1, 2010

Hawai‘i Convention Center, Honolulu, Hawai‘i

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