

Those Who Carried the Torch

These are not the best of times to focus on history. For most youth today, history is a boring and useless study. It just doesn't lead to an immediate job offer. Further, the professional and academic study of history has too often become little more than a weapon of ideological warfare. Historians are often committed to a certain world view or ideology. They then rummage through the annals of history to glean factoids that will bolster their ideological convictions. This approach to the study of history has been used to demonstrate the supposed inevitability of socialism, the relativity of all truth claims, the decline of western civilization and the politically correct assumption of the significance of every culture and ethnic group. One recent proposal by a government funded commission included an outline of what should be studied in world history. The outline included a twelve-page section on Mongolian horsemanship and a one-page sidebar on the Magna Carta. (The proposal was ridiculed by the public and eventually abandoned. The sponsors of the document are not known to have changed their views.)

But a person or an institution without a sense of history soon loses the way through the wilderness of change. Today we see assaults on every value and historical understanding which are the foundations of our civilization. These

remarks are designed to remind the OBU family of one major element in our heritage and to call us to reaffirm that heritage for future generations.

Even when value is given to the study of history, another significant issue comes in to view. Is history made by individuals whose lives determined the course of history, or is the movement of history basically determined by inevitable tides of ideology or other preordained outcomes? Do people make history, or does history create the individuals whose lives we celebrate?

Historians have struggled to find a comfortable place to stand between these two competing views. American school children were formerly taught their country's history in the context of national heroes such as Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, the two Roosevelt presidents and the great innovators such as Edison, Henry Ford, and Andrew Carnegie.

Frederick Jackson Turner proposed that American history was guided by the open spaces of land and the inevitable westward expansion of the nation. The Marxist view of history is that humanity is moving inexorably toward the triumph of the Marxist ideology and economy. In the process known as deconstruction, students are led to scour history and literature seeking evidence of the influence of various trends such as feminism, racism, gender drives, or whatever issue is currently trendy.

William McGaughey has written a sharp critique of the approach to history that is embedded in the Advanced Placement approach to the study of history.

[Pillworld Historysite.com, 11/29/2007] The work of the eight person committee successfully limited anything that happened before 1000 A.D. to a period referred to as “foundations” not worthy of more than fourteen percent of the study time available.

To anyone who thinks the early city-states of Egypt and Mesopotamia are historically important, or that the personal stories of Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed ought to be told in world history, the relegation of pre-1000 A.D. events to pre-history or “foundations” is plainly misguided. Events in that period also include the conquests of Julius Caesar or Alexander the great, the unification of imperial China, the experience of the magnificent T’ang dynasty of China and Gupta empire of India, the First Persian empire, the Abbasid Islamic empire, and the Hun or Viking invasions. The story of civilization gains many of its formative experiences during that time. World religion, in particular, cannot be properly understood if the period of its founders is slighted.

The reason for starting world history proper at the year 1000 A.D. is stated in a booklet put out by the College Board: “The period around 1000 is generally recognized in the field as a chronological break point centering on the intensification of international contacts among Asia, Europe, Saharan, and sub-Saharan Africa. This era is truly global in its focus.

The passage suggests that the Advanced placement committee equates world history with global history—in other words, with the emergence and development of a global community. “International contacts” are crucial to this history. And, indeed, many world historians at this time follow the ideological lead of William McNeill, the eminent historian from the University of Chicago who believed that contacts between different civilizations were the primary force in world history. This type of historian emphasizes trade and migration, currency flows, voyages of discovery, religious missionary work, etc. He or she virtually camps out along the Silk Road.

We see that academic ideologies have influenced the selection of materials for the Advanced Placement world history course. Political preferences also play a role. The politics of the post-Civil Rights era have influenced contemporary academic curricula. Thus, the course guidelines for Advanced Placement in world history state that “coverage of European history does not exceed 30% of the total course.

For the period between 1000 A.D. and 1450 A.D. the history of non-Islamic Africa, specifically Great Zimbabwe, is given its own section, presumably of comparable length to another section devoted to Chinese dynasty or to the Islamic world. Great Zimbabwe is known for the ruins of a single stone fortress in the land which today bears its name. Its empire was extended for a brief time over several hundred

miles of territory—hardly equal in historical importance to the Islamic or Chinese empires during the same period.

In this presentation I will assume that there are certain historical forces that move nations and peoples. As in Jesus' parable, human history is a struggle between the good intentions of God's vision for the world and those contrary forces that would undermine the good. This struggle will only be finally resolved by the intervention of Divine providence that will mark the end of human history and the triumph of God's perfect will for the world.

I further assume that in the midst of the universal struggle, the role of individuals is substantial both for good and evil. History is changed and historical forces are shaped by the intervention of heroes and anti-heroes.

The sons and daughters of OBU are prominent among those whose lives and contributions have contributed enormously to the world wide extension of Christ's influence and rule. OBU is and has always been a focal point for international missions. My intention is to explore the extent of this missionary emphasis and to examine some of the reasons for it. This attempt is not neutral academics, but rather the expression of a passionate desire that the missionary focus will be not only maintained but augmented in the future.

How shall we measure the impact of OBU on world missions? There are numerous tests that might be applied. We could report on the numbers of Bison

graduates who have served and are now serving overseas. How would the number compare with those of other colleges and universities? How does the percentage of OBU students entering missionary service compare with that of other similar schools?

A good starting point to answer these questions would be the statement released by OBU on July 27, 2007. It states that "A recently released report from the International Mission Board (IMB) shows that the Shawnee College has more alumni serving as IMB missionaries than any other college in the world . . . OBU has 242 alums currently under appointment of Southern Baptists' international mission-sending agency." The IMB reports that a total of 809 Bison alumni have served under the board's appointment.

OBU's contribution to the world wide mission effort of Southern Baptists is much more than numerical strength. There is among those missionaries a rich diversity of spiritual gifts and cultural backgrounds.

Many of the missionaries have been noted for their pioneering courage and evangelistic zeal. Ervin Hastey (1942) served 22 years in Mexico and was renowned for his effective gifts as an evangelist and for his excellence in the use of the Spanish language. He capped a successful missionary career serving in Richmond as the consultant for evangelism on a world wide basis.

Another noted evangelist from an earlier generation was Orvil Reid (1933). For 38 years Reid traveled through the cities and towns of Mexico demonstrating his remarkable physical strength and dexterity with stunts like breaking bricks with his hand, and even allowing a truck to drive over his chest while protected by nothing other than boards laid over him. Each demonstration served as an occasion to share a brief message about the importance of a clean life and healthy living. The focus always returned to the Gospel presentation through which many children and men heard the call to salvation.

Curtis and Betty Dixon represent another stream of the pioneering spirit and evangelistic passion. Graduating from OBU in 1956, they found themselves pushing the frontiers in Brazil before moving on to Portugal and later to Angola where they served in a violent and revolutionary time. They were never far from the battle zones and demonstrated the kind of commitment required by the Lord who called his followers to take up their cross and follow him.

OBU has long been renowned for its musical excellence. This superior program has produced missionaries who excelled in teaching people around the world to sing the song of the Gospel. We remember with pride the work of Glenn and Jeanie Boyd in Africa as they spoke, sang and shared the Gospel.

Another specialty which Bison missionaries have used overseas is that of Christian counseling. Roberta Damon (1956) took her relational skills to Brazil

where she and husband Bill served effectively for many years. When Bill returned to the U.S. for service on the mission board staff, Roberta's gift in counseling was soon recognized by a call to the staff of the First Baptist Church of Richmond, Virginia. She also serves as the Chaplain for the IMB staff.

Among OBU missionary heroes, gifted women hold an honored position. Rosalee Mills Appleby was a leader among Oklahoma Baptist youth in the early twentieth century. She was the first person to make a decision for missionary service at the inaugural session of Falls Creek in 1917. She and her husband David Appleby went to Brazil where she continued serving after her husband's death in 1925. She is a legend among OBU missionaries, and the quality of her life and ministry is remembered every year when the Life Beautiful Award is given in her memory to a deserving female student at OBU. Among those honored with the Life Beautiful award is Helen Gilmore who, following graduation in 1958, spent a career in Kenya, Africa and later married and accompanied her husband to serve in the Caribbean. The influence of Rosalee Mills Appleby was felt again by a thirteen year old Dorine Hawkins who listened intently to Mill's testimony at Falls Creek and cemented her own call to missions. Hawkins' call led her to a long and fruitful ministry as a leader in Brazilian Baptist life.

The missionary calling and gifting touches a wide variety of skills. One of those skills is that of communication through writing. It is noteworthy that three

prominent editors of The Commission magazine, long the key communication tool of the Foreign Mission Board, were OBU graduates. Frank K. Means (1934) had a distinguished career as a mission's professor at Southwestern Seminary. He went to Richmond as the secretary of education and promotion for the FMB in 1947. During this period which ended in 1954, Means was editor of The Commission magazine at which time it reached its all-time highest circulation. Later editors of The Commission included Floyd North (1936) and Leland Webb (1954).

Another significant example of missionary literary skills is the ability of missionaries to master foreign languages and write urgently needed teaching materials for use overseas. Frank Patterson graduated from OBU in 1928 and later became the director of the Baptist Spanish Publishing House. His service there from 1943-1970 was marked by the production of doctrinally sound teaching materials that did much to solidify a generation of Spanish-speaking Baptists in their understanding of the faith. Patterson was a prolific writer of lessons, tracts and books.

It comes natural for Bison graduates to have a passion for the needs and suffering people of the world. The late Wilbur Lewis typified that passion. After graduating from OBU, he went on to medical school and became a doctor. His calling took him and his wife Gladys to Paraguay to serve at the Baptist Hospital in Asunción. Working under extreme handicaps of professional jealousy and a

requirement that he pass every exam in the Paraguayan medical school curriculum, Lewis persevered and pioneered in the field of open heart surgery.

The missionaries leaving Bison Hill have excelled in many areas of ministry. Eugene Hill (1932) went to China in 1935 with his wife Louise. This missionary stalwart became famous for his expertise in the Chinese language. He served in various administrative roles in Southeast Asia including that of mission Chairman and Treasurer. He was renowned as a theologian and professor at the Graves Theological Seminary in Canton, China. In 1956, Hill accepted the invitation to serve as the secretary for missionary education and promotion. Even during his years in Richmond, he had a major ministry teaching and preaching among the Chinese community.

For much of their history Southern Baptists were perceived as being isolated from other Christian mission efforts. Baptists were seen to be more interested in doing than they were in writing about missionary strategy and wider relationships. There was a drastic change in both the perception and reality with the appearance of Avery Willis (1956). An effective and dynamic missionary in Indonesia, he developed on the field the methods and materials later brought back to the U.S. under the name of Masterlife. These materials have been widely used throughout the world. Willis became a major force in leading the International Mission Board into a cooperative and even a leadership role among evangelical mission agencies.

The mission task relies on all of these and other specialties to succeed. There is also a need for administrative leadership, and OBU has been and continues to be a major source for such leadership. The current and past administrative staff is marked by products of Bison Hill. For a whole generation of missionaries in Latin America, Frank K. Means was the embodiment of the Foreign Mission Board. He served as area director from 1954 until his retirement in 1976.

At one time three of the top ranked administrators of the International Mission Board were OBU graduates. They were David Steverson (1983), Vice President of Finance; Avery Willis (1956), Senior Vice President for Overseas Operations; and Don Kammerdiener (1958), Executive Vice President.

Today the mission current continues to run strongly at OBU. Some students arrive already aware of God's missionary call on their lives. Others hear that call for the first time while they are here. OBU continues to send out a stream of spiritually motivated and well prepared candidates for missionary service around the world. Such a reality does not automatically project into the future.

Simply to rehearse this listing of missionaries from Bison Hill is an act of frustration, for the ones mentioned are nothing more than a small sample of the great stream of OBU missionaries. Hundreds of others have felt that missionary calling and have been faithful to carry it to fruition. Still others of the current

generation of missionaries are serving in places around the world where governmental and religious hostility make it imprudent or unsafe to publicly identify them. Their names and needs are known to the Lord who called them and to their most intimate supporters who undergird their ministries.

Our second lecture will ask the questions of how OBU became a missions dynamo, and what it must do to maintain that status.