



THE MESSAGE BOARD
A Newsletter from
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Personal Reflections

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BWA Congress 2010

Part 2

One of the real joys of any BWA Congress is the realization of the global presence of Baptist life. To be present is to be immersed in the life of the global church with its joys and triumphs, its struggles and failures.

Just walking the halls I am greeted not only by Baptists from the many forms of North American Baptist life, but also by Baptists from Johannesburg, Durban, Manipur, Hyderabad, Jamaica, Chile, Sweden, Australia, Germany, Austria, China, Okinawa, Lebanon, Burma, Argentina, Great Britain—and the list goes on.

A few years ago, I wrote an article about “Page 15 People.” That article related how the news of a horrific train wreck in India that had claimed scores of lives was not found until page 15 of my newspaper, while the front page was filled with some “priceless” information about the latest Hollywood scandal. That juxtaposition spoke of the relative weight we place upon people’s lives according to their position, wealth, power or status. Here in the BWA, “Page 15 People” take on flesh and blood. One can no longer hear or read newscasts about situations in areas remote from us without picturing the church in those settings as brothers and sisters whom one has met and for whom one prays.

To be a global Christian is a challenge. We are inevitably shaped by our particular cultures and national interests. In a world that is organized by nation-states, the question that is posed to us by our baptism into Christ is whether our participation in the body of Christ both offers and demands of us a commitment to a perspective that rises above our particular nationality, culture, race or ethnicity. And if this community—the body of Christ—is our primary community, how does it affect our perspective on the other communities to which we belong?

That has been one of my struggles throughout my Christian journey, and one which I often think about as I sit in sanctuaries with an American flag on one side and the Christian flag on the other. The same is true for Christians in every culture and nation-state. How does our participation in the community of the church as our primary identification shape and influence our participation in every other community to which we belong?

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One of the testimonies I hear time and again from folks who have gone on short-term mission trips is that living in the community of the church within another setting has changed their lives forever. The experience of belonging to the world community of the church does give one a different lens through which to view the reality of world migration, sexual exploitation, the use of limited resources, the impact of wars and religious oppression, monetary policies and other concerns because one realizes how interlinked we are through Christ and through a world where no one country is immune from the actions of another. Distance is no longer a matter of geography, but of perspective.

Or, is the community of the church the primary locus of our identity? If it isn't, what is the significance of our baptism? If it is, what is the significance of our life?

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