

Relationships rule now, Miller tells Texas Baptists_12604

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Relationships rule now, Miller tells Texas Baptists

By Ferrell Foster

Texas Baptist Communications

RICHARDSON — Developing relationships with non-believers is the crucial beginning point in evangelizing people in today's postmodern culture, said author and teacher Calvin Miller.

Miller, a professor at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala., spoke in two settings at the Texas Evangelism and Missions Conference at First Baptist Church of Richardson. First he spoke to a gathering of about 100 Texas Baptists and then preached during a worship service. In both settings, he dealt with the importance of relationships in reaching people in a postmodern environment.

Calvin Miller

Evangelism "is sometimes not as hard as we make it," Miller said during the worship service. The key is for the Christian to find similarities in his life and the life of another person.

Miller said he plays “the little game of like” in relating to other people. He asks, “How am I like this person? How are they like me?”

Today's relationships take place in a “plastic world” geared to entertainment but in which few people seem to be happy, the professor said

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But “the happiest business in all the world is the joy that comes to the soul winner” when someone comes to Jesus Christ in faith, he added.

The joy of evangelism is caught up in the possibility that “when I've related to you enough, you may know Jesus,” Miller said.

In the smaller gathering, Miller elaborated on the importance of relational evangelism in a new “sensory apologetic” that rises out of the need to reach postmodern people who do not have an agreed-upon heritage, ethical code, standard of truth and religious priority.

In his sensory apologetic, “relational” is the first step. “You have to make friends with people in order to win them to Jesus.”

The second step is “experiential.” This refers to what people have experienced, not just factual data.

“The most powerful witness has always been testimony,” Miller said to illustrate the point.

Third is the artistic. Miller spoke of the importance of story, which enables an audience to move together toward understanding.

All of this together prepares the non-believer for dogma, the unchanging requirements of God.

In building his case for a sensory apologetic, Miller told of “the disjuncture of postmodernism” as competing worldviews have moved culture from a dominant theism toward other belief systems.

Theism had been the ruling idea in the West for centuries. It had three core values—conversion, exclusivity and doctrine, Miller said.

But Western culture has been changing. First, it has seen the growth of naturalism, in which people are seen merely as part of nature, not as God-

created beings above nature.

Second, there is monism, a mystical preoccupation with the self.

Monism and naturalism have combined to produce “new age” thinking, while naturalism and theism have come together in theological liberalism.

Those viewpoints represent much of where the postmodern culture is today, but changes in the church also have negatively impacted evangelism, Miller said.

Many churches “have fallen prey to the loss of transcendence,” he said. “We have no vista points any more. Heaven is ill defined. Hell has come to not hardly exist” in many people's minds.

An anti-intellectual bent also has taken hold in evangelical Christianity. Miller noted how this notion conflicts with his own makeup.

“I have a tremendous desire to know and to learn. I have a tremendous desire to see people come to Christ,” the professor said. “I want to out-think the world … (and) out-love the world,” he said.

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