

Lotz urges church to return to faith of 'pre-Christendom' _71105

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By Tony Cartledge

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GRAPEVINE (ABP)—Participants in the Baptist World Alliance “belong together because we belong to Christ,” Denton Lotz told more than 500 supporters at a dinner in Grapevine celebrating the global Baptist group’s 100th anniversary.

The dinner preceded the annual general assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. CBF was accepted as an official BWA member body in 2004, a factor that contributed to the Southern Baptist Convention’s decision to withdraw from BWA. Since then, state conventions in Texas and Virginia have applied for full BWA membership.

Contributions from CBF, the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the Baptist General Association of Virginia, and other supporters have “more than made up” for the loss of funds from the SBC, once BWA’s largest contributor, Lotz said.

Taking a cue from Philippians 4:8, Lotz said he wanted to focus on positive things, citing Baptist success stories from Nigeria, Cuba, Bulgaria, Turkey, Russia, Burma, and China—places where Baptist work is growing despite difficulties and sometimes persecution.

The problem with Baptists in North America and Europe is that “we think we’re living in Christendom, but we’re not,” Lotz said. Christendom tends to be too cozy with the government, too intellectual and out of touch with genuine expressions of faith, he said. Pentacostalism is the fastest-growing form of Christianity in the world, he said, largely because it is more open to New Testament expressions of faith.

“We need to go back to pre-Christendom,” Lotz said, to follow the lead of the earliest Christians, before the church institutionalized religion.

North American and European Baptists sometimes act as if they are ashamed to be Baptist, Lotz said, while Third World Baptists are proud to be distinctively Baptist.

“The future of Baptists is to discover our roots and who we are,” Lotz said.

Lotz was introduced by CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal, who said, “We want to be good members” of BWA.

Baptist World Aid director Paul Montacute talked about disaster-relief efforts coordinated by the BWA humanitarian arm in the wake of last December’s Indian Ocean tsunamis. BWA partners raised more than \$20 million for the effort, he said, noting that years of continuing recovery work are needed in the area. Montacute also spoke of “silent tsunamis” of death from HIV/AIDS and from famine in sub-Saharan Africa, and of deadly persecution of Christians in places like Sudan, Uganda and the Congo.

Baptists must help, not only with funds, “but by taking political action,” he said.

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