

# Southeastern News

**Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary**

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## ACTION, KNOWLEDGE, REFLECTION ESSENTIAL TO GROWTH, PROFESSORS SAY

WAKE FOREST, NC - Action, knowledge, and reflection are the three basic elements of growth in faith according to William P. Clemmons, G. Thomas Halbrooks, and Bruce P. Powers, professors at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. They chose the topic "Coming to and Growing in Faith: Historical Development" for their two-day joint presentation of the fall Faculty Lectures.

Initially the three professors surveyed the methods used in dealing with faith development since the beginnings of the Christian church. They said, "The early church developed a complex of foundational experiences by which persons were brought to faith: worship, the catechumenate, and baptism. After bringing them to the faith relationship, the early church launched them into the process of growth in faith emphasizing good works (Christian action) but also including knowledge and reflection."

The church of the middle ages, they continued, "developed a ladder of perfection in which the laity was limited primarily

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to one means of growth in faith: good works." But the reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries "dismantled the ladder of perfection and sought to restore a balance in the three means of growth: knowledge, action, reflection."

Turning to Baptist history in the United States, it was noted that Baptists in the nineteenth century "stressed dramatic conversion and placed little emphasis on growth in faith. The Sunday School was used primarily for bringing persons to faith, not for growth in faith." When Baptists later began to think about how Christians grow in faith, at first most "tended to answer in terms of physical and intellectual maturation." Some others, though, said that "growth in faith is purely spiritual" and began "to construct processes for Christian growth drawn from interpretations of the Bible, centered primarily around the removal of sin and a movement toward holiness," the lecturers said.

Clemmons, Powers, and Halbrooks then looked at the problems of Southern Baptist religious educators today in "the process of enlisting and developing Christians." They said, "We are discovering our need to describe precisely the model on which we will base our process of bringing persons to, and guiding their growth in faith," cautioning, "If one is invited to 'just believe' with no corresponding call to a lifelong journey of faith, then our evangelism is suspect. Bonhoeffer (a noted theologian) called it 'cheap grace.'"

The professors feel that religious education today is caught between two extremes, that which stresses psychology and human

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development totally, on the one hand, and that which would say "Christian growth is strictly a spiritual concern." The second emphasis has, according to the professors, "created a second 'zap' process of Christian maturity beyond conversion called being 'Spirit-filled' and saying the capacity for giving a verbal witness to another person is the primary mark of Christian maturity."

The spiritual growth triangle of knowledge, reflection, and action, they pointed out, "is influenced by the uniqueness of the individual, the maturational life-cycle, our communities of faith, the places where we live, work and play, the general world setting we find ourselves in historically and culturally, and our openness in all these areas to the Holy." They added, "Christian growth may be stated as enabling persons to become whole in the best biblical, theological sense of that word. This is a process begun in conversion where one experiences new life in Christ and is committed to a continual opening of one's life to God in many transformations."

In closing their presentation, the trio said it was the task of Southern Baptist religious educators "to enable this process. We must face with diligence in the next decade the model on which we build our faith development process. It must take into account our particular Baptist understandings of faith and at the same time be placed squarely on solid footings in the sciences of human development. It must continue to emphasize conversion as a beginning, but equally be serious about the commitment to a lifetime of deep inward, outward and corporate changes as one is confronted daily with the Gospel demands."

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