

‘Christ Our Hope in Life & Death’

By PAUL J. SCHARF

There is a statement that I often heard from my mentor, Dr. John C. Whitcomb. It was humorous, but also profound—usually offered as a title for a photo he had just taken.

“The name of the picture,” he would famously say, “is, ‘There’s still hope!’”

Of course, our hope in life and death is ultimately found in Christ alone (Rom. 8:38-39). Many have come to appreciate the need for such hope in a more profound way over the past two years. “Christ Our Hope in Life & Death” was our theme this week as we gathered in Albuquerque, NM, for the annual convention of IFCA International.

That theme was expounded upon and experienced in a variety of ways—through preaching in plenary sessions, music, workshops (covering a number of theological and practical topics), business and planning sessions, chaplains’ trainings, women’s and children’s programs, and—of course—meals and other downtimes.

I must confess that I specifically purposed to use my time strategically as an exhibitor for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, and found the week to be incredibly productive in that regard. Truthfully, I did not follow every twist and turn of the convention—and it already provides enough options to overload anyone who would try. However, I think I can say that there were few surprises, and little news was broken. The overwhelming sentiment that I sensed was that it was simply wonderful to gather in fellowship with likeminded brethren and share a brief respite from the rigors of life and ministry. In fact, I heard a number of testimonies regarding the good spirit of the attendees.

Organized in 1930, the IFCA offers an ecclesiastical home for those committed to Biblical inerrancy, creationism, dispensationalism, premillennialism and pretribulationism, within a baptistic framework. Yet, it also allows liberty for individuals to hold to finer distinctions within their own congregations and ministries—and their own consciences. And that ties right into the theme of next year’s convention, which will be held at the Northern Kentucky Convention Center, in the Cincinnati Marriott at RiverCenter, in Covington, Ky.—near the Ark Encounter—from June 26 to 30. It will focus on “Fighting the Good Fight: Reclaiming Biblical Fundamentalism.”

Dr. Richard Bargas, executive director of IFCA International, offered a preview of the 2023 convention.

“This theme will hopefully flesh out our desire to return the focus of fundamentalism to its Biblical roots and the need to continue to contend for the faith and uphold Christian orthodoxy,” he stated.

Bargas added: “We recognize that many who would call themselves fundamentalists have blended in cultural traditions along with a propensity to fight with one another over doctrinal minutia and preferences.”

Under Bargas, who became executive director in 2019, the IFCA has made purposeful strides toward fulfilling its mission with new zeal.

“We want to refocus our hearts to accomplish the IFCA’s goal, to remain grounded in Scripture while advancing the cause of Christ,” he said.

General session speakers for this year were Bargas, Rev. Chad DeJong, Dr. Alex Montoya and Dr. Anthony Wood. Susan Heck was the women’s speaker. Steven Lee, founder of SermonAudio.com, also addressed the convention regarding the construction of The Vault on the campus of Bob Jones University.

A total of 344 people registered for the convention. There were 35 exhibitors, including colleges, seminaries and missions organizations. A total of 21 general breakout seminars were offered.

The IFCA awarded the 2022 Faithful Servant Award to Dr. Robert Provost, the former president of Slavic Gospel Association, for his years of dedicated and strategic ministry in the former Soviet Union.

“For pastors, especially, who are often inundated with so many burdens, and minister to people who are often crushed by the consequences of sin, the encouragement and strengthening of the Word of God is greatly appreciated and timely,” Bargas stated.

As we witness signs that point toward the end of this age, it appears to me that the fellowship between likeminded Christian leaders is growing closer. The sense of urgency has become more intense. Disagreements over minor issues feel less and less important. Time spent together seems more precious. Although our hope is ultimately in Christ, humanly speaking we can also share that hope with one another.

As I sat at my exhibit on Monday afternoon and saw the registrants entering the hotel, my thoughts were summed up in the words of Dr. Whitcomb: “There’s still hope!”

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