

OPINION

This column represents the views of the Old Gold and Black Editorial Board.

Baptist Convention severs useless ties

A delegate at the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina this week compared the university to a child being punished. "Do we disown the child? Do we disinherit the child? Whether we like it or not, Wake Forest is North Carolina Baptists' baby. Whether Wake Forest likes it or not, North Carolina Baptists are Wake Forest's mother," Wayne Martin of Weldon Baptist Church said during the meetings.

The convention tried to rein in its disobedient child this week by proposing the end of the fraternal ties between the convention and the university. The problem is that the child values its independence too much and is no longer willing to return to the nest.

A year ago, the convention threatened the same action because the university continued to sell beer in Shorty's even though the convention politely asked the university to refrain from alcohol sales.

No one should be surprised that the recent trustee decision to not stand in the way of the Wake Forest Baptist Church same-sex ceremony provoked action from the Baptists this year.

Next year the Baptists will vote to sever most of its remaining ties to the university, unless — in the words of the convention — the university shapes up its act.

Chances are, however, that the university will continue to make its own decisions and not bend to the wishes of the convention.

This final separation was inevitable.

The university has been making decisions that consistently go against the judgment of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The university has been separating itself from the convention since the early '80s. The convention just did what the university would probably want to do later and officially severed the remaining fraternal ties.

The convention wanted to hold on to traditions of the past and retain valuable heritage — which is understandable since the university used to be a purely Baptist college. The university wanted to jump head-first into the on-coming millennium and continue to build respect as a national liberal-arts university. These endeavors were at odds and, as with Simon and Garfunkel, the split was inevitable.

For those concerned, this change does not effect the university in any practical way.

Thankfully, the convention decided not to punish the students for the biblical crimes of the administration, and so the Poteat Scholarship — a scholarship for Baptist students — remains intact. It was honorable of the convention not to sever this tie. Very easily, it could have decided just to go cold turkey on the university, but it put the needs of the students first.

This move is mostly a symbolic severing. The university does not need the convention's permission to celebrate its Baptist heritage as it strives toward progress, leaving the convention behind.

The university still has its heritage and principles — the convention cannot erase 165 years of history.

'Religious' T-shirts exploit cultures

Hindu forms on T-shirts aren't fashion, they're sacrilege.

I feel like I've been punched in the stomach. Thoughts and questions are running through my head ... but they are superceded by confusion. On one hand, many American consumers are obsessed with "ethnic-looking" products and "mystical" Eastern

Neha Patel

GUEST COLUMNIST

religions and on the other hand some of those same people belong to certain religious groups that condemn the practices of other faiths.

Commercial America has become inundated with ethnicity — so many products have some sort of eastern style or influence. As *National Geographic* pointed out in its recent article "Global Diversity," "Americans will take anything and run with it." When I walk into a store, I see full racks of Indian-style shirts and jewelry. I see mehndi "body art" kits and temporary tattoos made to look like Indian designs. I am torn between being excited that people are being exposed to my culture and being outraged at the commercialization of deeply rooted ethnic practices.

Oddly enough, the exposure that people are getting is perfunctory — often the explanations are too brief, too biased and usually just plain wrong. *National Geographic* had something else to say about it, "Mehndi is just one of the many bits of exotica to become the mallrat's latest diversion. And when something becomes fashion, it becomes commercial." Honestly, I am not offended by people wearing mehndi; I am only offended by those wear it and have no idea of its cultural significance and background.

Beyond that, the only thing that bothers me about the use of Indian products and clothing is that I know that corporations are exploiting the people of my homeland. Small children are being forced to make these clothes that are "so quaint" and "so pretty"; they are vastly underpaid and mistreated.

One store, however, crossed the line between cultural exposure and ignorance.

When I walked into Aeropostale at Hanes Mall, I was surprised at the amount of Indian-made clothing in the store, but that didn't offend me. It was the rack of T-shirts they sold that offended me. The first one that caught my eye had the sacred word

I just want people to know that the forms are not simply "something cool and ethnic"; those forms are important to my faith, to my culture and to me. Yet there they were, being sold next to a T-shirt with a bulldog's head on it.

"Om" on it and "Aeropostale" printed underneath. Then I saw three more with various pictures of forms of the Hindu god and again "Aeropostale" printed beneath. Again, I would not be as offended if they would put an explanation of the picture on a tag or on the back of the shirt. I just want people to know that the forms are not simply "something cool and ethnic"; those forms are important to my faith, to my culture and to me. Yet there they were, being sold next to a T-shirt with a bulldog's head on it.

I realize that the company is not being malicious in this endeavor, but selling culture in this way is perpetuating ignorance. It pains me that my faith is being treated so unfairly — if a company were printing shirts with a picture of the head of the Pope or of Jesus on them and selling them in this way, there would be a public outcry. In fact, I doubt that any secular company would even use Christian symbols in their clothing, thus avoiding the risk of being offensive. When I saw those shirts, I felt like I had been punched in the stomach. I was speechless. All I know now is that I never want to go into that store again.

I hope that as a member of the university community I can have the support of my peers with a letter campaign to Aeropostale, which will start after Thanksgiving break. Meanwhile, all I ask is that everyone refrain from shopping there until the shirts are either fitted with an explanation, or until they are pulled from the shelves for good.

My other purpose in writing has the same concept at heart: — respect for religion. I have put off broaching this subject for the past two years I have been at this university, but a recent event has pushed me to express what I have been feeling. The Southern Baptist Convention published a pamphlet during the Hindu Festival of Lights, known as Diwali, asking Southern Baptists to "pray that Hindus, who celebrate the festival of lights, would become aware of the darkness in their hearts that no lamp can dispel." The booklet describes Hindus as "more than 900 million people lost in the hopeless darkness of Hinduism." To get more information about the booklet and about the controversy surrounding it, please check out the

article in *India Abroad* (<http://www.indiaabroadonline.com/PublicAccess/ia110599/SpecialReport/OutragedGrps.html>).

I have treated the Christians on this campus with respect and often admiration, and I have made efforts to learn about their religion. I know many of the most ardent Christians at this university, and I admire some of them because they strive to live the life that Jesus did. I am not angry about this intolerance and ignorance about my religion — in fact, I laughed at the misconceptions that the booklet incorporated (that we worship 330 million gods when in fact we believe in that all gods of all religions are just faces/forms of one god). I am hurt and confused by it.

I realize that some people interpret the tenets of Christianity to make evangelism a vital part of faith, but I feel that forcing people to accept your religion is only detrimental to your purpose. Teaching by example as Mother Teresa did is the best way to make me understand what you believe. Hinduism focuses on peaceful worship, emphasizes love and seeks the rejection of materialism — not too different from Christianity at the core.

Since the time of the British invasion of India, missionaries have tried, in passive and some rather forceful ways, to "civilize" and "teach heathens what is right." Not all missionaries work aggressively, and some have made a huge difference in the lives of people all over the world. I would dare to say that those who have made a positive impact were those who have respected the culture of people they worked with, loved those people as human beings deserving of dignity and showed their own beliefs by living as an example. I understand the outrage over the recent incident of violence toward a missionary in Orissa, India. While I don't condone that violent behavior, I can understand the resentment that the poor, under-educated villagers must have felt toward an outsider coming in and telling them that their way of life was wrong.

I have often questioned my place at this university and the distribution of this pamphlet to over 40,000 churches across the country does not make me feel any more comfortable here. There have always been conflicts between faiths and between sects within religions, and there are always extreme views on anything. The Hindu voice needs to be heard for people to know how these intolerant campaigns make us feel.

Hindus do not believe in conversion so I don't personally hold with the idea, but I do respect the right of other religions to practice and believe what they wish. I just wish other religions could do the same for my faith.

Student group is wise to 'take back the night'

The Women's Initiative for Support and Empowerment truly lived up to its name when it introduced the Take Back the Night march to the university Nov. 16.

The march supports the fight against violence toward women. This tradition began over two decades ago, but the sentiments stretch back much longer than that; the event directly influencing the birth of the Take Back the Night movement occurred in 1877 in England.

Thirty people showed up for this inaugural march at this university. Only two men participated. Although these numbers are slightly disappointing, they are a beginning.

Hopefully, WISE will succeed in beginning a tradition for this university and in the future, hopefully more students will participate in the march.

It would be impressive if students could join together for such an important movement. Students need to realize that violence toward women affects both sexes. Not only that, it affects all generations.

Some college students are already planning for their future, doing their best to ensure that whatever children they have will have a good life. Should they not also begin to prepare for the safety of their children now? It's an odd concept, but if the progenitors of the civil rights movement did not have their children in mind when they were fighting for equal rights, the movement might not have had the vigor or the success that it did.

It is a lucky woman who feels safe walking around at night, and this movement is a noble attempt at trying to allow all women to feel safe.

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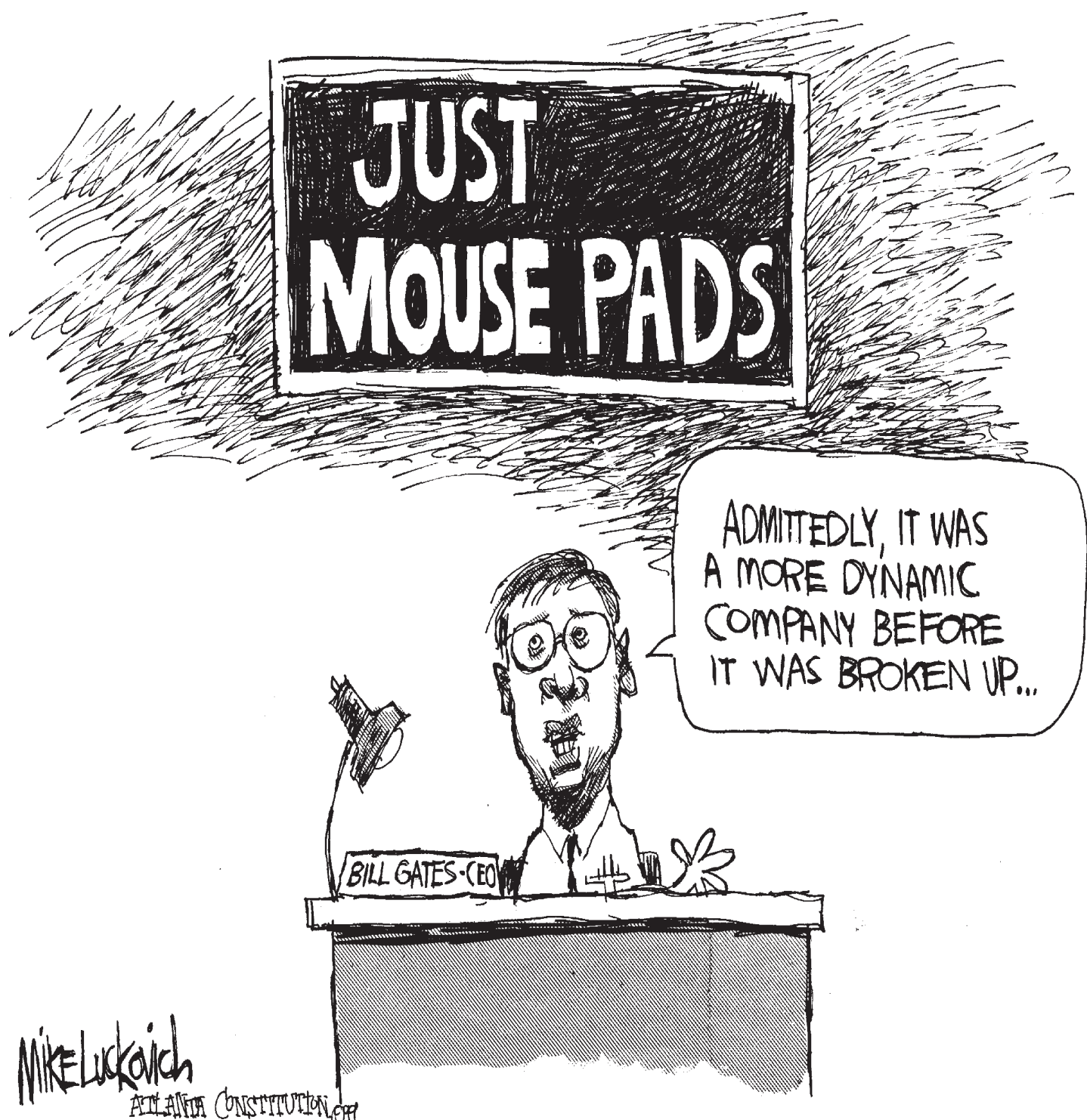
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