

(BP)

-- BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

October 21, 1996

96-185

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SBC prayer & fasting thrust
now is interdenominational

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
10/21/96

SPRINGDALE, Ark. (BP)--Another step toward spiritual revival in the Southern Baptist Convention will begin Sunday, Oct. 27.

Four thrusts are involved in a week-long emphasis initiated by Arkansas pastor Ronnie Floyd in his convention sermon at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in New Orleans in June:

-- on Sunday morning, Oct. 27, Floyd urged pastors to preach on the subject of fasting and prayer, calling Baptists to fast and pray on Oct. 30.

-- on Sunday evening, Oct. 27, Floyd urged churches to hold a "solemn assembly" of prayer to call people to repent of personal sin and the sins of the nation, asking God for mercy on his people.

-- on Wednesday, Oct. 30, he urged churches to hold a day of humiliation, prayer and fasting for personal, church and national revival.

-- on Sunday, Nov. 3, in both morning and evening services, Floyd urged pastors to preach on the subject of personal, church and national revival, challenging God's people to do whatever it takes to see revival in America.

"This emphasis has been accepted with great enthusiasm across denominational lines," Floyd said Oct. 21, "as we have been able to share this call to humiliation, fasting and prayer on major Christian programs like 'Focus on the Family' and the '700 Club.'"

The emphasis, borne out of Floyd's own experiences in fasting and prayer, including two 40-day fasts, indeed has moved well beyond the SBC. Floyd told of the revival-oriented emphasis on James Dobson's "Focus on the Family" broadcast Oct. 9, aired daily on more than 2,500 stations in North America and in 40 countries.

Dobson recounted that he and his wife, Shirley, had learned of Floyd's initiative from watching Pat Robertson's "700 Club," in a segment taped in July while Floyd was leading an "Awaken America" campaign in nearby Chesapeake, Va.

Dobson noted that his wife, who has chaired the National Day of Prayer Task Force since 1992, had made the suggestion that Floyd appear on the "Focus on the Family" broadcast, and she also has asked Floyd to address the National Day of Prayer coordinators when they meet Jan. 24-25 in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Additionally, Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright has asked Floyd to address the upcoming "Prayer and Fasting '96" sessions Nov. 14-15 in St. Louis, a follow-up to a national prayer meeting Bright first held in Los Angeles.

Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark., also is president of the SBC Pastors' Conference, chairman of the SBC Executive Committee and a member of the SBC Program and Structure Study Committee which framed the SBC restructuring and heightened missions emphasis now under way across the convention.

In his address to the SBC, Floyd noted the "spiritual vital signs" of America -- and of many Baptist churches and church members -- cry out for God's intervention.

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Prayer and fasting are vital first steps for countering the rising rates of teen-age pregnancy, violence, pornography, abortion, homosexuality and adultery in the United States, Floyd said. And prayer and fasting are needed for the SBC, he said, noting that only 3.5 percent of the convention's 40,000-plus churches baptize 26 people or more in one year. "My friend, the churches of this denomination need a mighty, God-sent, Holy Ghost revival."

The convention at large, he noted, despite 17 years of conservative redirection, needs a spiritual awakening. The SBC's "revival to the Word of God" has been followed by an "organizational reformation," Floyd said, but the convention now needs "a fresh touch from God" that will result in repentance and reconciliation and send Southern Baptists out into a world in need of Christ, he said.

Only brokenness and repentance before God can rescue America -- and Southern Baptists -- from their spiritual crisis, Floyd said.

Addressing the Executive Committee in September, Floyd reiterated the urgency of calling "the people of God to repentance, to be holy, to exercise the righteousness of God that they have already been clothed with ... through Jesus Christ and the power he gives to each one of us."

Floyd noted: "While the rest of America thinks that the future of this country will be determined two days later in the ballot box, we are saying, 'No, that's not where the future of this country will be determined.'" It will be determined "in the prayer closet," he stated.

If Baptists and other evangelicals seek God by fasting and praying for revival this Oct. 27-Nov. 3, it would be "absolutely unbelievable what God may do," Floyd said.

Bright, in his book, "The Coming Revival in America," urges Christians to "ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the kind of fast God wants you to undertake." Biblical evidence of fasting reveals various durations of as little as one meal to as long as 40 days.

The extent to which a Christian fasts may range from an absolute water-only discipline to supplementing the period of abstinence with fruit and/or vegetable juices. Some fasts are intentionally conducted privately, though Scripture also describes regular and occasional fasts on specific and special occasions, respectively.

In a recent letter to Southern Baptist ministers, Baptist Sunday School Board President James T. Draper Dr. urged them to lead their congregations in meeting the challenge Floyd issued for specific activities and messages on the last Sunday of October and the first Sunday of November this year. Noting the challenge of a new millennium is great, Draper concluded, "Our resources are so inadequate, but our God is all-powerful."

The mass mailing by the BSSB included an audio tape of the convention sermon by Floyd and a booklet he authored, "God's Gateway to Supernatural Power." The resource, which is available from the BSSB, includes Floyd's testimony along with practical guidelines for prayer and fasting. Call 1-800-233-1123 to order resources by Floyd, Bright and others.

"Unless and until we completely surrender to God's plan, we are destined to drift in a sea of disappointment, disillusionment and depression," Floyd writes. "We are in constant need of supernatural power. Our only hope is in the life and love of our Lord Jesus Christ. God's gateway to supernatural power is prayer and fasting."

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Tammi Ledbetter and Mark Kelly contributed to this story.

Change in Texas hunger gifts
stirs concern of SBC officials By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
10/21/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A Texas decision to change its policy of sharing hunger gifts received from churches with the Southern Baptist Convention's mission boards to include other mission groups has irked executives at three SBC agencies.

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The Baptist General Convention of Texas executive board in March approved a new funding method for hunger gifts and set four Sundays prior to Thanksgiving as the time to emphasize the hunger offering. Thus, instead of observing World Hunger Day one Sunday in October, many Texas Baptist churches are devoting every Sunday in November to the emphasis.

Instead of promoting a general hunger offering divided 80 percent to the SBC Foreign Mission Board and 20 percent to the Home Mission Board, the Texas convention now solicits specific ministry proposals from the mission boards as well as from the Baptist World Alliance and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate Baptist organization formed in 1991 and critical of SBC leadership.

The Texas decision has irked Jerry Rankin, president of the Foreign Mission Board; Larry Lewis, president of the Home Mission Board; and Richard D. Land, president of the Christian Life Commission.

"We regret that Texas Baptists have chosen to manage gifts to world hunger independently rather than cooperatively with the (SBC) mission boards," Rankin told Baptist Press. "It is sad that funds would be diverted to the BWA and other organizations for work in places such as Africa and Bosnia rather than supporting our Foreign Mission Board missionaries who are sharing the gospel and ministering so effectively in those needy and responsive areas of the world.

"We are confident many (Texas) churches, once they become aware of this policy to hold and divert funds, will want to send their gifts directly to the Foreign Mission Board where 100 percent will be used to support world hunger projects being administered by our missionaries."

Under the new policy, proposals are considered by a world hunger task force that includes representatives of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, the State Mission Commission, Woman's Missionary Union of Texas and Texas Baptist Men. The team then recommends projects for funding to the full Texas CLC at its spring meeting.

For the period from May 1, 1996, to Dec. 31, 1997, the Texas hunger task force recommended and the Texas CLC approved funding for more than \$1.2 million in hunger projects, including about \$718,000 to combat hunger outside the United States.

They granted priority approval to \$441,492 for rural development and other hunger-related projects through the FMB, \$160,252 for BWA World Aid and \$116,400 for CBF hunger projects. An additional \$240,000 will go to Home Mission Board-related projects.

Generally, world hunger relief funds from Southern Baptist churches have shown a drastic decline in the last 10 years, according to Larry Lewis. "This has caused me great concern.

"I regret that more and more funds to nationwide and worldwide causes are being extracted for state projects and to help fund other than SBC entities," Lewis said. "The need for such funds has never been more desperate either abroad or at home. Over 200 ministry centers in the United States depend on these funds to provide food for the needy in their communities. In times of natural disaster, hunger funds are a godsend for those left without food to eat. In many areas where hunger funds are used to the maximum, Southern Baptists are small in number and churches are few. We depend on the larger, stronger states to provide funds necessary to meet needs in those areas."

The SBC's Christian Life Commission, with a program assignment for hunger, recently employed a full-time person, jointly funded by the CLC, FMB and HMB, to solicit hunger funds.

Richard Land, CLC president, said he acknowledges the right of Texas Baptists to pursue their own independent course "on this terribly important issue."

"However, exercising one's rights is not the issue here, the issue is why Texas Baptists would choose to turn away from their fellow Southern Baptists both here and abroad to exercise their right to fund alternative hunger giving ministries," Land said. "The SBC mission groups continue to use all 100 cents of every dollar -- literally, a dollar in, a dollar out -- to feed malnourished and starving men, women and children around the world.

"Why some Southern Baptists would choose to turn from a strong tradition of cooperation, deliberately unlinking hands of mercy, to pursue this independent and reckless course is the tragic question," Land said.

Texas officials hope the new emphasis will increase hunger gifts overall.

"While the hunger emphasis falls on the Texas calendar in November, the offering is really a yearlong effort," said Joe Haag, associate director of the Texas CLC. "Since projects are funded throughout the year, we encourage churches to promote support for hunger giving throughout the year."

About \$300,000 was disbursed for hunger projects through the end of August, Texas officials said. Through the end of September, Texas Baptists' giving for world hunger was \$466,328, more than 17 percent ahead of the same period last year. The total does not include designated funds given to the North Korea Famine Relief project that was promoted by the Texas Baptist Men and WMU.

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Ken Camp contributed to this article.

**Student ministry '96 stats
up in outreach, missions**

Chip Alford

**Baptist Press
10/21/96**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--(BP) Almost a quarter of a million college students were reached through Southern Baptist student ministry programs in fiscal year 1996, according to a recently released report from the Baptist Sunday School Board's national student ministry.

NSM's annual compilation of statistics showed 237,731 students participated in Southern Baptist student ministry programs during the year, up from 236,344 in 1995. The total number of students involved in missions also increased from 23,491 in 1995 to 27,056 this year.

Increases also were reported in the number of:

- blacks involved in student ministry (9,261, up from 8,979 in '95);
- ethnics involved in student ministry (5,105, up from 4,872 in '95);
- churches, Sunday schools or missions students helped start (362, up from 346 in '95);
- students involved in Bible study groups (34,905, up from 34,172 in '95)
- total contributions to student missions (\$3,286,281, up from 3,158,519 in '95).

"It's another encouraging report," NSM director Bill Henry said, adding, "It shows that student ministry is still an important investment for Southern Baptists."

Henry said he was especially encouraged that minority involvement in SBC student ministry programs showed an increase during the year.

"That's something we've been working on. We want to be effective in reaching people of all races and culture groups," he said.

There were some decreases in the '96 report, including:

- student conversions (5,535, down from 5,963 in '95);
- students involved (actively participating on an ongoing basis) in student ministry programs (103,099, down from 104,326 in '95);
- gifts to hunger relief (\$79,549, down from 98,767 in '95).

Henry said the latter statistic might be misleading, since a sizable missions offering was taken at Mission '95, a nationwide missions conference held in Louisville, Ky., which drew a crowd of more than 3,000 students.

"We were down in some categories, but there were none that looked particularly alarming," Henry said. "It was a good, solid year for us."

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ANALYSIS

Dole falters on moral issues,
religious conservatives say

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--Any hope Bob Dole had of mobilizing evangelical Christians whose support has been critical for Republican presidential candidates in the last four elections seemed to fall in his final debate with President Clinton.

Comments by religious conservatives gave Dole failing marks on his Oct. 16 performance at San Diego. In his Oct. 6 debate with the president, the GOP candidate had failed to mention either abortion or homosexual rights.

The former Senate majority leader stumbled in the second debate when asked to explain how he would return the country to godly principles and never explained why he described homosexual rights as "special rights" instead of equal rights. Dole failed to mention partial-birth abortion, even though he had signaled he would do so.

Though he affirmed support for a homosexual rights bill, the president also shied away from much comment on the issue but elaborated on his administration's promotion of religious freedom.

"That whooshing sound you hear is the Clinton campaign's sigh of relief that the president didn't have to defend partial-birth abortion," Family Research Council President Gary Bauer told The Washington Times. "It's also the sound made by Bob Dole's bat. Bill Clinton gave him a big, fat pitch on this issue, and the Dole campaign's response has caught nothing but air."

The only thing in his campaign Dole has done "to energize social conservatives -- and he has undone it since then -- was the speech long ago on Hollywood values," said American Family Association President Don Wildmon, according to The Times. "Since then he has done a considerable number of things that would cause social conservatives to rethink whether they can get enthused about him."

A Southern Baptist public-policy specialist cited failures by both candidates to address critical issues.

"President Clinton and Senator Dole both had a perfect opportunity to clarify for the American people their philosophies of morality and how they relate to a strong society and to address issues related to their own character," said Will Dodson, the Christian Life Commission's director of government relations.

"When posed with accusations about his own character, President Clinton chose to ignore the issue. I think it was appropriate for Senator Dole to raise the issue of character in this race. The Bible taken as a whole emphasizes the importance of holiness or righteousness to God. The history revealed in the Bible and history in general reveal a stark contrast between nations who are led by godly leaders and nations who are not."

Dodson said Dole in his campaign "has been shy about addressing the great moral issues which divide our nation. We need leaders who will unashamedly and passionately defend the sanctity of every human life and who will clearly state that right is right and wrong is wrong.

"We need to address the issue of homosexuality with greater candor," Dodson continued. "I would like to hear our leaders say that homosexuality is wrong. Moreover, I would like to hear them say that the threat that the homosexual movement poses toward America is not only greater immorality but amorality. I would like to see our national leaders oppose any movement which insists that their immorality is not immoral but is a right. I believe our nation would be rewarded by that kind of leadership and that godly people would rise up and call those kinds of leaders blessed."

As the next-to-last of 20 people who asked questions in the town-hall format, Ron Kite, a minister, said to Dole, "This great nation has been established by the founding fathers who possessed ... very strong Christian beliefs and godly principles. If elected president of the United States, what could you do to return this nation to these basic principles? And also do you feel the office of the president has the responsibility to set the role example to inspire our young people?"

Dole talked about returning power to the states. He said, "Certainly the president of the United States ... has a responsibility to young people ... to everyone, by example. And when it comes to public ethics, he has a responsibility." He talked about the ethics controversies surrounding the Clinton administration. In his rebuttal later, he said he had prayed with his wife and daughter before the debate because "it is God's will, whatever happens, if it's God's will, it will happen. A constitutional amendment for voluntary prayer in school, in my view, would be a great idea. I support it. The president opposes it."

In response to the next question, Clinton said, "We don't need a constitutional amendment for children to pray, and what I did was to have the Justice Department and the Education Department, for the first time ever, issue a set of guidelines that we gave to every school in America saying children could not be interfered with in religious advocacy when they were praying, when they were doing whatever they could do under the Constitution just because they were on a public school ground. And I think anyone who has experienced this would tell you that our administration has done more than any in 30 years to clarify the freedom of religion in the public square, including in the public schools."

Beyond the reference to school prayer, Dole failed to mention the moral issues over which the Republican and Democratic parties are divided.

In response to the same question, Clinton said, "This is the most religious, great country in history. And yet interestingly enough, we have the most religious freedom of any country in the world, including the freedom not to believe.

"And what I've tried to do is to support policies that would respect religion and then help parents inculcate those values in their children.

"One of my proudest moments was signing the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which says the government has got to bend over backwards before we interfere with religious practice."

Clinton also cited his support of character education in the public schools, the drug-free schools program and the V-chip for parental control of television viewing.

"That's the kind of thing we need to do -- give people like you and our families the power to give those values to our children," the president said.

Earlier, a questioner asked Clinton about his position on the Employment Non-discrimination Act, which extends to homosexuality work place rights reserved so far for such classifications as race, gender and age.

"I'm for it," the president said. "That's my policy. I'm for it. I believe that any law-abiding, tax-paying citizen who shows up in the morning and doesn't break the law and doesn't interfere with his or her neighbors ought to have the ability to work in our country and shouldn't be subject to unfair discrimination."

Clinton then left the issue for another subject.

To the same question, Dole said he is "opposed to discrimination in any form, but I don't favor creating special rights for any group. ... as far as special rights, I'm opposed to same-sex marriage ... "

Yvette Duby, a minister in the Metropolitan Community Churches, a predominantly homosexual denomination, returned to homosexual rights for the last question of the evening. She told Clinton she did not understand why Dole was using the term "special rights."

The president said Dole would have to answer for himself and added, "We have a lot of differences in our country, and some of us believe that other people's decisions are wrong, even immoral. But under our Constitution, if you show up tomorrow and obey the law and you work hard and you do what you're supposed to do, you're entitled to equal treatment."

Dole never explained his reference to "special rights." He reiterated his opposition to discrimination and included "lifestyle," a category which would seem to include homosexuality, as a classification deserving protection.

During the same week, both campaigns targeted Christians and homosexuals with radio advertisements.

Dole's campaign sponsored a radio spot on Christian stations decrying Clinton's support of late-term abortion and homosexuals in the military. The president's campaign placed an ad on Christian stations saying Clinton opposes late-term abortions, even though he vetoed a ban on partial-birth abortions, which occur in the second half of pregnancy.

The Clinton ad also promoted the president's signing of the Defense of Marriage Act, which affirms states' authority to refuse to recognize homosexual marriages. After members of the homosexual lobby protested, the campaign removed that portion of the ad.

In response to that controversy, the Republican National Committee, according to The Washington Post, ran spots on homosexual-oriented radio stations in San Francisco which said: "Ever wonder if someone who claims to be a friend was talking about you behind your back? Classic Clinton: Running a family values ad against abortion and same-sex marriage on Christian radio while telling you he's a pro-choice, gay rights supporter. Can you believe this guy?"

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CORRECTION: In the (BP) story, "David S. Dockery inaugurated as Union University's 15th president," dated 10/18/96, please correct the fourth and fifth paragraphs to read:

"Union University is respected far beyond the State of Tennessee, and I congratulate the trustees and administration in this high hour of the institution's history," Chapman said. "Although election of a man is part of our process, it is not Dr. Dockery's election by men that makes him a spiritual leader, only God can make spiritual leaders."

"David Dockery is a man of integrity and honesty; he's full of wisdom and the Spirit. May all those who receive a diploma from his hands know that they've received a torch to carry God's light into the world."

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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