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Land: Overwhelming condemnation
needed in black churches' fires By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
5/24/96

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee

WASHINGTON (BP)--Federal officials recently told a congressional committee they have yet to uncover a national conspiracy in the burnings of predominantly black churches' buildings in the South, but some panel members and witnesses called for more attention to the problem.

Richard Land, head of the Southern Baptist Convention's ethics agency, told the committee the "African-American community needs to hear the overwhelming condemnation of the burning of their churches" from the white community.

"While it is true that Southern Baptists have not always stood for racial justice and equality, God has, his Word has, and with his help, we do now and we shall in the future," said Land, president of the Christian Life Commission. "We have been reaching out, and will continue to reach out, to the church members victimized by these fires in concrete and supportive ways."

Land joined a panel of black leaders and pastors, which followed a congressman and a panel of federal officials, in testifying at a May 21 hearing on church fires in the southeastern United States before the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee.

The hearing was prompted by an increase in burnings of church buildings, especially of predominantly black congregations, in the last 17 months. Since the start of 1995, there have been reports of fires at 37 church buildings, 28 of them with predominantly black congregations, according to the Department of Justice. Of the fires affecting black congregations, 17 have occurred in 1996. Although not all the fires have been in the South, most have. From 1990 to '94, the department received reports of fires at only seven houses of worship. These do not include fires handled exclusively by local or state officials. So far, there have been no deaths reported.

The country is "facing an epidemic of terror," Patrick said.

"The concentration of arsons at African-American churches ... raises the obvious possibility of race/hate-based motives," said ATF Director John Magaw. "We have not yet -- and I emphasize not yet -- found any evidence of an interstate or national conspiracy, but until our work is done no motive or suspect will be eliminated."

Some black committee members and witnesses did not quickly accept that conclusion.

"Law enforcement has heavy baggage, and that's why African-Americans say, 'What do you mean there's no conspiracy?'" said Rep. John Conyers, D.-Mich.

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Twenty of the fires since 1990 have been solved, eight by federal investigators, said Deval Patrick, assistant attorney general and an African-American.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms is investigating 25 fires, while the Federal Bureau of Investigation is involved in the same ones plus 17 more, Justice officials said. In those incidents, the ATF handles the fire investigation, while the FBI deals with the civil rights investigation., they said.

The ATF and FBI have more than 200 investigators working on these fires full time, Patrick said. ATF is spending about \$180,000 to \$190,000 a week on the investigations, Magaw said. While their resources are adequate now, they "will not be able to maintain the level of intensity indefinitely," Patrick said. The four federal officials who appeared were asked to provide the committee with a list of what it can do to help them.

Some committee members and witnesses questioned whether the government is doing enough and whether the media is giving the problem appropriate attention.

A Texas congresswoman said she doesn't want to wake up one morning and see headlines about "a bloody mess" in an African-American church. Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee, D.-Texas, said "Something is about to happen, and I don't want to be a part of it. ... (I) want people to be able to worship in peace."

Conyers read from a letter he had written President Clinton calling on him to visit some of the burned church sites and to give a national address on the problem.

"Scant notice was given by national media until a church where the assistant pastor was a well-known professional football star was torched," said Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. "Unfortunately, we can't have football stars at every church to bring the attention we desire."

Lowery referred to a Knoxville, Tenn., church where Reggie White, the Green Bay Packers' all-pro defensive lineman, is a staff member.

Some witnesses reported the ministers and members of churches felt intimidated when questioned by federal officials about the fires.

"We have had complaints from some churches that the best response they've received from federal investigators is 'We have no leads,' and the worst has been to give lie detector tests to the pastor and members implying they burned their own church down," said Earl Jackson, an African-American pastor in Boston and the Christian Coalition's national liaison for urban development. Christian Coalition has offered a \$25,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of arsonists.

A black pastor from South Carolina and one from Tennessee whose church buildings were burned testified. The county in which his church resides still has cross burnings by the Ku Klux Klan about once a month, South Carolina pastor Terrance Mackey said.

His church is "still hurting, still crying on the inside," said Algie Jarrett, pastor of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Tennessee's Hardeman County. "I just can't comprehend why some person would go around and burn the house of God."

The perpetrators of these fires need to know "that for most people these arsonists dwell in the ooze at the bottom of the criminal barrel along with child molesters, drug pushers, pimps and pornographers," Land said.

"Whether the arsonists and the racists are successful in burning down the bridges of racial reconciliation in America will depend largely on the American religious and legal communities," he said.

"In a very real and profound sense the racism which leads to such atrocious acts of violence is a spiritual problem which will only be resolved finally by spiritual means. However, the fact that racism is at its root a spiritual problem and will be vanquished ultimately only by spiritual means does not mean that legislative and judicial remedies should not be, must not be, applied to racial discrimination and bigotry."

Land called on the government to make certain rigorous investigations are being conducted and to force the guilty to make restitution to the churches.

Some committee members and fellow witnesses commended Land for such a statement from a Southern Baptist leader. Conyers expressed gratitude for Land's inclusion of the Southern Baptist Convention's 1995 resolution on racial reconciliation with his testimony and expressed hope the SBC, SCLC, NAACP and Christian Coalition could work together on this issue.

"I wanted to be here to let you know the Southern Baptist Convention is ready to work with anyone at any level to eradicate racism," Land said. "To us, it is not a question of right and left but right and wrong."

Some black witnesses and committee members blamed what they called an atmosphere of hate produced by conservative politicians and talk-show hosts as inciting the fires.

Liberal Rep. Maxine Waters, D.-Calif., urged the black pastors not to accept money from the Christian right to help them rebuild, because she and others were their real friends.

Members of the Christian right listen to "Rush Limbaugh all week" and in their churches "they're not being taught to love anyone but themselves," Waters said.

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Homogeneous churches:
Racist or evangelistic?

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
5/24/96

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--"In all too many instances the most segregated hour of America is 11 o'clock on Sunday morning ... and the most segregated school of the week is the Sunday School."

Little has changed since Martin Luther King Jr. made that claim 33 years ago. The Southern Baptist Convention boasts of more than 1,500 African American churches and nearly 5,000 language congregations, but people from different racial backgrounds rarely sit side-by-side in worship.

Is that racist or simply an effective way to reach people for Christ?

The answer has been debated for years, but the 1995 Southern Baptist resolution on racial reconciliation brings it up for review. Some charge that churches with predominantly one ethnic group are racist and unbiblical. Supporters of homogeneous churches contend that non-Christians shouldn't be expected to cross cultural barriers on their way to salvation.

Homogeneous churches, or those of mainly one ethnic group, do not conform to the image of Christ, said Ted Ward, former professor of education and missions at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill. "Those churches are not seeing the whole story of what God wants to do," he claimed during a home missions conference last year. The New Testament model is for cultural and socio-economic differences as described in Colossians 3:11 to be "submerged under the oneness of Christ."

Jim Summers, pastor of Miami's Northwest Baptist Church, agreed. "I believe with all my heart that the homogeneous principle is not a biblical principle." Summers' church is multi-racial, with flags from 41 countries hanging in the auditorium to represent members' home countries. "My church reflects what heaven's going to be."

Charles Chaney, Home Mission Board vice president for starting churches, said the biblical issue is not cultural mix but whether a church accepts people who have received Christ. "When you refuse to offer fellowship to those who have said 'Yes' to Jesus Christ, you've given up your right to be a New Testament church."

Chaney supports multi-cultural churches, which he calls urban culture churches because they typically thrive in cities with racial diversity. "But I'm not willing to say they're the only kind of church we need. We need multiple strategies in a multi-cultural society." Churches that remain homogeneous, Chaney said, can demonstrate racial reconciliation by working with an association of churches that recognizes the value of each culture.

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Multi-racial churches can be less effective in evangelism because asking non-Christians to be comfortable there is expecting them to "be as mature, if not more mature, than people with a long history of Christianity," Chaney said. "It's requiring them to have Christian principles relating to race before they ever become Christians."

While agreeing that people don't like to move outside their culture, a professor of preaching and practical theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in California said emphasizing evangelism rather than reconciliation is a current heresy.

"Southern Baptists have bought deeply into the premise that God's primary purpose of the church is to grow, and you grow by evangelism," William Pannell said during a Feb. 29 teleconference on racial reconciliation. "If any group of people defines ministry of church in such a singular, almost exclusive way, it will rarely go to the idea of reconciliation in a radical way at the local level ... One begins to see reconciliation as a side issue; something you can do when you get around to it or if somebody burns the town down."

The Apostle Paul defined the church's ministry as reconciliation, Pannell noted, but Chaney said the first step in reconciliation is being right with God. Chaney also said being multi-racial does not guarantee that a church has overcome racism or that the church is reaching everyone in its community.

While Pannell says evangelistic zeal keeps churches from being more ethnically inclusive, Ward and Summers say churches remain homogeneous out of fear.

"Pride and fear motivate our concern to be among people we can more easily trust, Ward said. Summers put it in Southern terms: "It's fearful when you live in a place where everyone doesn't say, 'Ya'll come back now ya' hear?' Differences mean challenge, and challenge means change. We're frightened by the unknown."

In 1989 Willie McPherson feared the unknown. He started churches in predominantly black communities, but his Home Mission Board office was part of a larger church extension department until restructuring formed separate divisions for starting Anglo, black and language churches.

McPherson said he saw the new structure as segregation, but now he sees its value. "I was told we were doing it to be more effective in reaching people for Christ, and that's been true. I thought the restructure said Southern Baptists were moving back to the 1950's, but it said Southern Baptists are concerned with reaching everyone with the gospel, and this is the most effective way."

McPherson added, however, that the Home Mission Board's strategy works because people are "groupish and culture oriented. Until society changes, we're going to have churches made up of one culture."

And until everyone in the United States is fluent in English, Southern Baptists will need homogeneous churches, said Russell Begaye, HMB director of language church extension.

"Our goal is to win as many people as possible in our generation," Begaye said. "To reach that goal, people must hear the Word in their language and in the context of their cultures."

Many world religions, for example, promote multiple gods: one to prevent earthquakes, another to thwart disease and another to deter mental illness. People with that background may hear the gospel and accept Christ as a god to protect them from hell. Churches unwittingly neglect the doctrinal needs of internationals if they do not address the issue of polytheism, Begaye said.

At the same time, some cultural expressions are compatible with Christianity, such as a Chinese church celebrating the Chinese New Year or a Messianic Jewish congregation observing Passover.

Choosing a church that identifies with a specific heritage does not make a person racist, Begaye said. It usually means the person feels accepted, and the need for acceptance crosses racial lines. "Otherwise every Southern Baptist ought to go to the church closest to them. If you drive by one, you're discriminating."

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Note: Additional resources available:

-- "Key Growth Words for the 21st Century" -- an essay on multicultural and multicongregational churches written by Charles Chaney, Home Mission Board vice president for church extension. Available on SBCNet in Home Mission Board library.

-- Tape of Feb. 29 teleconference on racial reconciliation available from Home Mission Board ministry section, (770) 410-6465.

-- "Multicultural church pastors: Diversity can be enriching" -- March 1, 1996 Baptist Press story by Linda Lawson

Churches respond
to racial diversity

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
5/24/96

MANASSAS, Va. (BP)--If you visit First Baptist Church of Annandale, Va., the usher may hand you a headphone along with the bulletin. And if you enroll in discipleship training at Lochlmond Baptist Church in Manassas, Va., be prepared for a cultural exchange.

In suburbs of the nation's capital, the two churches are working on their own version of race relations.

The Annandale church includes Korean, Spanish and English-speaking members who worship separately most weeks but meet together on the first Sunday each month. With headphones and translators, each person hears the message in his language simultaneously, said pastor Wayne Yawn. Bulletins are printed in three languages so everyone can participate in the music and responsive readings. Yawn and the associate pastors -- one who speaks Korean and one who speaks Spanish -- take turns preaching the sermons.

The headphones cost about \$100 each, but Yawn considers it a worthwhile investment despite some early resistance. Some Anglos left the church over the attempt at integration, and some Korean members preferred isolation, Yawn said.

"As long as we separate ourselves, we raise suspicion. If our concern is to transform society, we have to break down these groups. We try to get people to have an on-going personal relationship with Jesus that involves social interaction."

The monthly service includes baptism and the Lord's Supper. During baptisms, the pastor who speaks the language of the person being baptized performs the ordinance. As soon as the new Christian rises from the water, he is embraced by the other two pastors standing in the baptismal pool, Yawn said.

The headphones are also used for business meetings and church fellowships. "We're one church with one set of committees and one budget," Yawn said. "Everybody works together."

In Manassas, Lochlmond Baptist Church, a predominantly Anglo Southern Baptist church, shares its building with an Hispanic Pentecostal church and is in partnership with a black non-denominational church.

Chris Rackley, Lochlmond pastor, said the interdenominational cooperation is important because, as a friend of his says, "When Christ returns, he's coming for a bride, not a harem. If Christ is coming back after one church, we've got to learn to worship together."

Rackley and Henry Colter, pastor of the black congregation, met at a community prayer breakfast. Colter's young congregation rented space for worship but needed a bigger facility for such meetings as revival services and a church anniversary.

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"We said they could use our building as long as they invited us," Rackley said. The black church has since moved to a larger space, but the initial loan of the building led to a church partnership that ranges from joint ministries to sharing office equipment. The Hispanic church is less involved in joint ventures because of the language difference.

Last fall the black and Anglo congregations met together for discipleship programs such as "Experiencing God" and "The Mind of Christ." The churches' praise and worship teams produced a joint musical for a Good Friday service, "and the place was jam packed," Colter said.

Both pastors said the experiences taught their members valuable lessons. "If we look past our differences, then the Holy Spirit can have his way with us," Colter said.

Rackley added: "We're about at a place where people of the two congregations have pushed the differences to the back of their heads. 'We know no one any longer after the flesh,'" he said, quoting II Corinthians 5:16.

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Cutline on SBCNet.

Incorporators act on SBC and
NAMB's behalf before trustees By Herb Hollinger

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5/24/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--In the proposed charter of the North American Mission Board, which will be presented to 1995 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in June in New Orleans, Georgia law allows a provision for someone to act on the new agency's behalf before trustees can be elected in 1997.

That "someone" is "incorporators."

According to James P. Guenther, Nashville attorney and legal counsel to the SBC, the actual creation of this new corporation, NAMB, will occur soon after the 1996 convention approves the amendment to bylaw 15 and "well before" the 1997 convention convenes in Dallas.

"This timing is dictated by the legal requirements involved in the creation of NAMB, the merger into it of the three present entities, and the need to have the corporation ready to act immediately after the gavel goes down at the 1997 annual meeting," Guenther told Baptist Press.

The corporation will come into existence before the 1997 convention elects its trustees, Guenther said. Georgia law accommodates the convention's need to have someone act on its behalf before the trustees are elected.

"For instance, the incorporators are permitted to cause the publication of the required 'notice of intent to incorporate,' to reserve the name of the corporation, and file the articles of incorporation and any other necessary documents with the government. The convention will act to name those persons who will be NAMB's incorporator and the convention will act to vest in those incorporators these and other responsibilities."

Thirteen people have been nominated as incorporators and will be listed in the charter document presented to the 1996 New Orleans convention meeting. Six of these have been selected by each of the three present entities in the merger selecting two of the incorporators. The other seven were selected by the Implementation Task Force, including two from the SBC Executive Committee.

Under the Covenant for a New Century restructuring plan, approved in Atlanta in 1995 by the SBC, the denomination's agencies will shrink from 19 to 12, including the merger of the Brotherhood Commission, Radio and TV Commission and the Home Mission Board into a North American Mission Board. The restructuring plan stipulated the NAMB's offices would be in Georgia. The SBC Executive Committee, following the 1995 meeting, created the Implementation Task Force to coordinate the restructuring.

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Although Georgia law gives the incorporators the power to adopt the corporation's bylaws, Guenther said "The convention will not ask the incorporators to do that since the convention's constitution gives the trustees which the convention elects the power to adopt NAMB's bylaws. The Georgia law permits incorporators to elect the board of trustees, but the convention's polity calls for the messengers to the SBC to elect the trustees."

Georgia law also calls for the incorporators to convene the new trustees in an organizational meeting following the June 1997 SBC meeting.

Included in the agenda for that meeting: adoption of bylaws, election of officers, banking resolutions, employment policies, pension agreements, insurance contract resolutions and resolutions delegating authority to NAMB's officers. The incorporators will have proposed resolutions, bylaws, and nominations ready for consideration by NAMB's board, Guenther said.

The result will be, Guenther added, that when the organizational meeting adjourns, NAMB will be fully operative.

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Formerly illiterate, he
earns seminary degree

By Nancy Carter McGough

Baptist Press
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COCHRANE, Alberta, Canada (BP)--Once Eddy Emerson gains a concept, there's no stopping him.

Emerson was functionally illiterate until he was 28 years old. Up until then he could only read a few basic words, such as "and", "the", "to", "mother" and "father."

But on May 4, 20 years after he was taught to read by a school teacher at his daughter's elementary school, Emerson earned the associate of divinity degree at Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary, in Cochrane near Calgary.

His grade-point average was 3.82 out of 4.0. In letter grades that is a high "A."

"When I first came here my greatest fear was that I couldn't function at this academic level. But after the first term I knew I could do it," he recalls, adding, "I'm a self-motivator. At first I slugged it out the hard way. Then I developed a system in which I put information together in order to study for exams."

That tenacity kept Emerson in school as a youth until he earned his high school diploma. He says he did it by being socially promoted and by cheating on tests. Sympathetic classmates would give him test answers. He would convert multiple choice answers -- A,B,C,D -- into numbers. He could then memorize up to 100 random numbers at a time.

When he finally acknowledged to his daughter's teacher that he never learned to read, she began teaching him phonics using flash cards. Within six weeks he was reading at a third-grade level. Within a year he was reading at a twelfth-grade level.

It took him several more years to respond to the call to ministry he first experienced as a 15-year-old boy, not long after his conversion at a revival at First Southern Baptist Church, Phoenix. An unsuspecting Sunday school teacher called on Emerson to read from the Bible. The experience was so humiliating that "I didn't set foot into church for ten years."

Now as a church leader Emerson says, "I never ask people to read. I ask for people to volunteer to read."

He and his wife, Dori, chose to come to Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary after visiting their friends, Bill and Naomi Hunke, at the school. Hunke was the seminary's interim president at the time.

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Emerson became active in the school's student council. Dori was the seminary's recruitment officer and worked in the seminary library. The two became founding members of Mountain View Christian Fellowship, Calgary. In recognition of their faithful commitment to a new church start, Emerson received the seminary's John B. and Isobel Cunningham Christian Service Award.

Just before graduation, he was called as pastor of Bell Rock Baptist Church, Village of Oak Creek, Arizona. He will be bi-vocational, continuing his secular expertise as a teacher of seminars on boiler controls. Boilers are used in large buildings for heating, food processing, and in many other industrial applications.

Emerson is certified as a literacy teacher through the Southern Baptist Convention's literacy program.

"If I could encourage anyone to read or to help someone else to read, I would do it.

"Learning to read is like being blind and all of a sudden learning to see. Once you can read you don't have to have someone tell you everything. You can read it in books. Almost all knowledge is in books. That was a real revelation to me."

He acknowledges a non-reader can certainly benefit from listening to tapes of the Bible, but, "You can't really study it that way. God can speak through tapes of the Bible, but it's hard to do in-depth studying.

If we help people to read it enriches their lives. It gives them something of more value than money. It's been a blessing in my life."

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Nancy McGough is editor of the Baptist Horizon, newspaper for Canadian Southern Baptists. (BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers.

Baptist state paper group's
100-year history written

By Wm. Fletcher Allen

Baptist Press
5/24/96

BRENTWOOD, Tenn. (BP)--The tumultuous history of the Southern Baptist Convention has been written and re-written many times by many authors.

The convention, founded in 1845, has survived national and world wars, economic depressions, internal bickering and contention, controversy, and natural disasters. And though history has been recorded, who were the observers who recorded week by week, year by year, the events that shaped the SBC?

Four years ago the Southern Baptist Press Association (now called Association of State Baptist Papers) decided to tell the story of those people and that organization.

The SBPA approved a plan to commission the writing of its history, "warts and all," to bring its constitution into the modern era, and to employ a part-time executive director. The writing of the history took much longer than the other two objectives.

And now, the history will roll off the press June 5. Written by Bill Junker from Brentwood, Tenn., retired from the Home Mission Board where he served as director of editorial services, "Contending for the Right to Know" is hard-back, and contains 288 pages of adventure and courageous editors.

Who are the heroes of this story of journalists and pastors, innovators and gadflies?

You can read about them in the official history of the Southern Baptist Press Association.

When the SBC last year celebrated its 150th anniversary, the SBPA was taking note of its 100th birthday. So it was begun in 1895, with E. E. Folk, editor of the Tennessee Baptist and Reflector as its founder. When the SBC was only 50 years old, Folk and his compatriots stopped talking about organizing and did it. The idea caught on, though ridiculed at first by several editors who thought the early annual meetings were nothing more than pleasure trips.

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It is not strange that birthing an association of state Baptist papers was difficult. There was controversy about it before it began, and controversy about membership eligibility and the name. Some editors even refused to attend the first meeting.

Twelve current state Baptist papers trace their origins to the years prior to 1895. J.B. Cranfill of Texas rightly claims some of the credit for founding the SBPA. He shared the same idea as Folk, but evidently the Tennessee editor issued the call.

Folk stated a major reason for the association when he called for the first meeting:

"We may simply say it will, we believe, tend to promote a greater spirit of fraternity among the editors and other representatives of our Southern Baptist papers, and so will be in the direction of building up our common Zion. We may also, we think, be of much benefit to one another along business lines in giving one another suggestions and information as to advertisements and other matters of a practical character."

There were others reasons, of course, and they are evident in the records, along with names such as Z.T. Cody, T.T. Eaton, J.B. Gambrell, Josiah W. Bailey, T.P. Bell, their peers, and those of later generations who dealt with different issues but similar problems.

It burgeoned from the early days when families and friends were invited by the editors to join them aboard the train and venture to Florida or some other warm place. When Folk and other editors reported on the meetings, they were sure to thank pastors and churches who hosted them. Copies of programs reveal the editors discussed problems that still affect the papers, such as postage costs, subscription inducements, advertising, the ever-present letters, and how to report the news.

Junker goes back to the beginning of SBPA. By thorough research, he tells of events of the world, the SBC, and the corresponding actions of the state papers and the SBPA in each era of its 100 years. One editor served as a scout with Gen. Robert E. Lee during the Civil War. Another carried a pistol at all times. Editors often used the editorial page to chastise other denominations, often calling the leaders by name.

They were not hesitant in critiquing each other and berating Southern Baptist leaders. One, J.R. Graves of Tennessee, was the father of Landmarkism and edited the Tennessee state paper for 40 years. In the early days, most were pastors, and some were good in business enterprises. Many owned their papers.

Junker takes the reader with the SBPA through the perils of sinking economy, personal and state convention priorities, changing methods of gathering and printing the news, to today's scene where computers, telephones, automobiles and airplanes, and worldwide networks of wire services, all play a role in the success of state papers and the association.

While Junker's message is intended to convey the ongoing saga of the SBPA, the story reveals much of the personalities of the editors and the papers as well. In many instances, they helped shape the SBC and their own state conventions. Laughter and tears abound on these real and lively pages of history; a history that tells it like it was, and is.

Contending for the Right to Know is published by Providence Publishing House of Franklin, Tenn. Cost per book is \$15.95 plus \$3.00 shipping. Copies will be available in the News Room at the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in New Orleans in June.

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