



# BAPTIST PRESS

News & Advice of the Southern Baptist Convention

460 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, Tennessee 37219  
Telephone (615) 244-2355  
W. C. Fields, Director  
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

## REGIONAL OFFICES

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Editor, 161 Spring Street, N.W., Atlanta, Georgia 30303, Telephone (404) 523-2593  
DALLAS R. T. McCartney, Editor, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) RI 1-1996  
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Editor, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

## BUREAU

BAPTIST SUNDAY SCHOOL BOARD Lynn M. Davis Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203,  
Telephone (615) 254-1631

July 5, 1967

## NEWS ANALYSIS

599

### Conference Discovers Common Believers' Church Heritage

966

By W. Barry Garrett

LOUISVILLE (BP)--Scholars from 13 denominations of the "Believers' Church" tradition discovered "a common scripturally-based heritage" during the Conference on the Concept of the Believers' Church here (June 26-30).

The group said that this heritage "is relevant for contemporary life" and that the same ideas are gaining wide acceptance in other churches.

The "believers' church" tradition is grounded in the concept that the church is comprised of members who have made a voluntary commitment to Christ. This would eliminate infant baptism and an established church. Believers' churches normally stress separation of church and state and reject a hierarchical church structure. Their emphasis is on the laity and the priesthood of all believers.

The conference was the first of its kind in the 500 years of the free church movement. Other similar groups have met occasionally, but none of these have been as wide in scope and purpose as this meeting.

Sponsored by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary the conference was the outgrowth of a proposed meeting of "baptizer" theologians in 1964 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. That meeting, called by the Mennonites, never took place.

James Leo Garrett, professor of theology at Southern Baptist Seminary, was chairman of the inter-denominational planning committee that arranged for the conference. He said that the meeting was called to discuss the relevance of the concept of the believers' church to conditions in the mid-twentieth century.

So profitable was the meeting that it was hoped that similar meetings could be held every three or four years. The present inter-denominational planning committee was left intact, hoping that arrangements could be made for the next meeting in two years.

Chairman Garrett pointed out that the conference was not an "ecumenical" meeting in the formal sense. It was not a meeting to which denominations officially sent representatives. He said that there was no thought of exploring either grounds or possibilities of merger for any of the denominations.

On the other hand, this conference must be viewed in the light of increasing dialogue between like-minded people. It could be possible that the meeting may have set a pattern for future interfaith relations and discussions among evangelical groups of the believers' church tradition.

In addition to the 150 participants from believers' churches there were observers from the Roman Catholic Church, the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

The planning committee sent out 500 invitations to persons nominated by members of the interfaith committee. Persons from the following groups accepted: Assemblies of God, Baptists (eight denominations), Church of the Brethren, Brethren Church, Churches of Christ, North American Christian Convention,

Disciples of Christ, Church of God (Anderson, Ind.), Friends (two denominations), Mennonites (five denominations), Brethren in Christ, the Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ.

These persons came from 26 states and the District of Columbia, four provinces of Canada and five nations outside North America.

The program was built around the theme of the believers' church as a believing people, a people in community, a people under the word, and a people in the world.

599

Thirteen major addresses were delivered on various aspects of these themes.

This led to one of the major criticisms of the meeting. The speeches were on the whole too "academic." Rather than genuine dialogue, the meeting was scholars talking to scholars.

It was observed that the believers' churches in their origins were essentially movements of laymen. In this meeting, however, the laymen were noticeably absent. Although there were six or eight present, if the laity is considered to be persons in unofficial church or denominational capacities, there were none present.

Another point of weakness of the conference was that it was strong in history but weak in present day meaning. The speakers, even though they said that the believers' church principles were relevant to today's world, did not develop this idea to any large extent.

In spite of these weaknesses, the conference may well prove to be one of the most significant in the history of the free church movement.

For one thing, the simple fact that the meeting was held means that steps are being taken to rediscover the meaning of 15th and 16th century free church principles for current Christian problems.

The conference said that the believers' church heritage includes acknowledgment of (1) the lordship of Christ, (2) the authority of the Word, (3) church membership regenerated by the spirit, (4) the covenant of believers, (5) a need for a perpetual restitution of the church, (6) the necessity for separation from the world, (7) proclamation and service to the world, and (8) a special conception of Christian unity.

One of the big values of the conference was that it afforded an opportunity to promote understanding and dialogue among groups with widely-divergent viewpoints. Occasionally the discussion dropped to the level of debate, but it was held largely to the level of dialogue.

At the concluding session, opportunity was given for the observers to express their reactions to the conference. Bernard Quinn from the Roman Catholic Bishops' Commission for Ecumenical Affairs, Washington, D. C., said that the meeting revealed the enormous task ahead for "interpreting to each other the meaning of our respective traditions."

Quinn compared what is going on in Roman Catholicism with what he heard at this conference. He said, "Through a maze of conflicting circumstances and differing starting points, we face a common problem--how to preserve the intensity and vitality of Christianity."

Robert C. Dodds, director of ecumenical affairs for the National Council of Churches of Christ, complained that "one important voice is largely lacking in Councils of Churches, and that is the voice of radical Protestants."

He appealed to the groups present, most of whom are not associated with the Councils of Churches, to join in the ecumenical discussions.

Although no plans were formalized for another meeting on the concept of the believers' church, the door was left open for some seminary, college, congregation, denominational office or other agency to call for a conference. Whatever group does invite another conference should be able and willing, it was pointed out, to bear some of the financial burden and administrative coordination.

-30-

Hawaii Pastor Expresses  
Concern About Miami Beach

600

7/5/67

84

WAIKIKI BEACH, Hawaii (BP)--A Baptist pastor in Hawaii returned here after attending the Southern Baptist Convention in Miami Beach, Fla., with "a heavy heart about our Miami Beach Baptist Church."

"Please pray for them even more than you pray for us," wrote Herman S. Ray in an open letter to the Southern Baptist Convention.

"They are weaker than we are in an equally strategic and needy place," wrote Ray, pastor of the Little White Chapel in Waikiki, which sponsors chapel services in three hotels on Waikiki Beach.

The First Baptist Church of Miami Beach has about 50 members.

-30-

600

July 5, 1967

601

3

Baptist Press

SBC Missions Gifts  
Reach Half-Way Point

420

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention contributions to world missions during the first six months of the year exceeded slightly the half-way mark in the convention's budget, an end-of-the-month financial report indicated here.

For the six-month period, a total of \$12,595,955 was contributed through the SBC Cooperative Program, the unified budget plan of the denomination which supports SBC programs of work.

In addition to the \$12½ million through the Cooperative Program, designated contributions to specific missions causes reached \$18,246,891.

The combined designated gifts and Cooperative Program contributions brought total world missions gifts in the SBC to \$30.8 million for the half-year period, an increase of more than \$1.7 over total contributions for the same six-month period in 1966.

It was an increase of \$1 million in Cooperative Program contributions in comparing the 1966 and 1967 figures, and an increase of \$754,042 in designated gifts.

"Cooperative Program receipts for SBC causes during the first six months of 1967 show a 8.7 per cent increase, compared with a 4.3 per cent increase for designated causes for the same period," said Porter W. Routh, executive secretary of the SBC Executive Committee which prepared the financial report.

"This is encouraging," Routh said, "but we must also face the fact that this represents 52 per cent of the annual budget, compared with 54½ per cent of the budget at the same period last year.

"In the light of the growing world need and continued inflation, all of us as Christians should seriously consider readjusting upward our giving to the causes of Christ through our church," Routh said.

During the month of June, Cooperative Program receipts totaled \$2,093,842 and designated contributions were \$929,110, a total of \$3 million for the month.

Most of the \$30.8 million contributed during the six-month period went to support Southern Baptist foreign mission efforts.

The SBC Foreign Mission Board received \$20.6 million during the six months in designated and Cooperative Program receipts.

The SBC Home Mission Board received \$6.3 million to support SBC mission efforts on a nation-wide scale in the United States.

Six Southern Baptist Convention-affiliated seminaries received \$2.4 million during the six-month period.

Biggest financial support came from Baptists in Texas, who gave \$2.1 million during the first half of the year through the Cooperative Program, and an additional \$3.9 million in designated contributions.

Georgia was the only other state giving more than \$1 million in six months through the Cooperative Program, while six states gave more than \$1 million in designations: Texas, North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Alabama (in order).

-30-

Seminary Extension Offers 602  
Course In Gospel of Luke

7/5/67

140

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Seminary Extension Department of the Southern Baptist Convention, for the third year in a row, will offer a course in the study of the book to be emphasized in the January Bible Study for 1968 in Southern Baptist Convention churches.

The course in the study of the Gospel of Luke was prepared by Frank Stagg, professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, who also is author of the study course book on Luke's Gospel to be used in the 1968 January Bible Study.

The course will be available both by correspondence and in centers, beginning the last of August.

Textbooks will include two small commentaries: The Gospel According to Luke, "The Layman's Bible Commentary," by Miller; and The Gospel According to Luke, "The Cambridge Bible Commentary," by Tinsley. The course will cost \$11.65 including tuition and the two textbooks.

-30-

601-602