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SBC President Has Less
Exalted View Of Office

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)--With three months under his belt as president of the 11½ million-member Southern Baptist Convention, Carl E. Bates confided here that he now has a less exalted view of the presidency of the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

"The office, while it is one of great honor and should be respected, is regarded by most of our pastors (in the SBC)--and by me before the election--as being far more powerful and influential than it actually is," the pastor of Charlotte's First Baptist Church said.

"When I was elected president of the convention, I did not suddenly become qualified to speak on national and international affairs, and this is expected of the president," he continued.

"Nor was I automatically qualified to speak on all the issues which Southern Baptists are facing," he added. "Neither was I qualified to give all the answers which would be helpful in solving all these problems."

He said he viewed the office of president of the convention as basically being the presiding officer of the annual meeting--an event toward which he already is looking. The 126th annual session of the convention is to be held in St. Louis, June 1-4, 1971.

Bates said that though it is early he does not predict carryover into St. Louis of "the hostile spirit" of the Denver Convention.

"I have never sensed such hostility in any meeting I have ever been a part of," he said. "I was appalled at the way Dr. Criswell was treated and the way some men conducted themselves on the floor."

The Denver convention, he said, gave evidence that certain elements of convention life have become polarized.

"But the majority of Southern Baptists are right where they have always been--right down the middle," he said.

Bates said he was amused at the many ways he was characterized following his election--"as a conciliator, as a middle-of-the roader, as a conservative, and as a down-to-earth liberal."

He said he hopes the description of him by the press as a "healing influence" for the ills besetting the convention proves correct.

Bates said he felt it would show that Southern Baptists are "less than mature Christians" if they allow division to come among them.

"The mark of immaturity is to disagree with a man and as a result of your disagreement rule him off or shut him out from your circle of friends. This is prima facie evidence of immaturity, spiritual and otherwise," he observed.

The press of answering the mail--60 to 100 letters each day--and the other duties of his office--meeting with various SBC committees, countless requests for speaking engagements and all the other things that go with being the top elected officer of the SBC possibly are beginning to chafe, he indicated.

"I am a pastor," he said. "This is my first love. I have found in this job as convention president that when I come to the pulpit on Sunday without having engaged in the care and cure of souls, I do not feel the freedom to preach that I have felt in previous years."

Despite the flood of mail, Bates still answers every letter himself and is even reluctant to let his secretary sign a letter he has dictated for fear the person to whom the letter is sent will feel he has been treated impersonally.

"People are important," he said. "If they write you a letter, they don't want a computer response."

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Some of the letters show an amazing misunderstanding of Baptist polity, Bates said. Many simply do not understand that a Southern Baptist church when it becomes identified with the convention, for no church really "belongs" to the convention--it is only affiliated with the convention through support of the SBC world-wide missions outreach--the Cooperative Program, he said.

"There is a great misunderstanding...of our relations with the agencies of the convention," he added. "No Baptist church has to buy Southern Baptist literature if it chooses not to do so, and no Baptist pastor has to buy a Southern Baptist commentary if he chooses not to do so."

Of all the letters he has received, one sticks out in his memory. It was addressed to "Comrad Bates, President of the Communist Baptist Convention of the South." Bates tried to reply, but his letter was returned unopened. The original letter writer has apparently used a false address.

The press of time in answering nearly 100 letters a day has cut into the morning study period Bates formerly reserved for study and sermon preparation. Before his election, Bates spent the mornings studying and the afternoons counseling, visiting in homes and hospitals and other pastoral duties.

Now, when he is in town, Bates insists on "engaging in pastoral care. I still take my turn in the hospital and in the homes where trouble and sorrow have come," he said.

The vast majority of the 2500 members of the Charlotte church have been very understanding about his absences, Bates said. He credited C.C. Warren, former pastor at the church, for training the members concerning the life of an SBC president, Warren was SBC president in 1956-57.

Bates said he already has had enough invitations to preach in other churches to keep him out of his church on Sundays for the next two years. But he has turned them all down.

"I said to my church when I made up my mind to let my name be placed in nomination for the presidency that if I were elected I would promise to be here on Sunday and Wednesday nights," Bates said. Thus far he has kept the promise. He preaches twice on Sunday mornings, again on Sunday night and leads two prayer meetings--one for children and the other for adults--on Wednesday evenings.

An inveterate quail hunter, he hopes to have time to hunt some after the season opens later this year, but much of his other leisure activity has been victimized by the press of presidential duties.

He continues to depend, he said, on his wife Myra to keep him straight.

He has set no personal goals for his presidency, he said. "If I can manage to serve my church fairly well and carry out the responsibilities of the presidency, I will be satisfied.

"I feel that Southern Baptists are working their way toward one of their finest hours. Out of all of this debate that is a part of our experience now could issue some of the most rewarding years we have ever known.

"If my impression is not a false one, we could be on the verge of a great revival in Southern Baptist life," he concluded.



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September 21, 1970

Florida Convention May Retain Same Stetson, Palm Beach Relationships

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Two committee recommendations asking that current relationships be continued between the Florida Baptist Convention and Stetson University and Palm Beach Atlantic College were presented during the convention's State Board of Missions meeting here.

Board members received the reports as information and committed them to the board's administrative committee for compilation and recommendation to the convention, but did not vote on accepting or rejecting the recommendations.

The two committees suggested that no changes be made in the relationship between either Stetson or the West Palm Beach college.

If the convention in November approves the report, the action would be in contrast with actions in November of 1969 when the convention defeated by a five-vote margin (382-377) a motion to cut Stetson's \$310,000 allocation in the 1970 budget.

The same convention voted to appoint two committees to study the relationship between Stetson, located in DeLand, Fla., and Palm Beach Atlantic College, West Palm Beach. The Stetson committee was asked to recommend whether to end the present relationship, to adopt a new plan of relationship, or to reaffirm the present relationship.

Stetson, an 86-year-old Baptist institution named for hatmaker John B. Stetson, is not owned and operated by the convention, though its president and three fourths of its trustees must be Baptist. The school has a self-perpetuating board, with board members nominated by a committee appointed jointly by the convention and the school's board.

Palm Beach Atlantic College, founded in 1968 with classes meeting at First Baptist Church, West Palm Beach where its president, Jess Moody is pastor, is an institution of the Palm-Lake Baptist Association of churches in the West Palm Beach area.

Though the Florida Baptist State Board of Missions did not act on the two committee reports on college relations, it did approve the report of a special committee studying the role and work of the Baptist Student Union (BSU) in Florida.

If adopted by the convention in November, the name of the student program in Florida would be changed to "Baptist Campus Ministry."

The committee also made recommendations spelling out specific objectives and program emphases for strengthening work among students in both colleges and high schools throughout the state.

The board voted to recommend to the convention a total 1970-71 state Cooperative Program budget of \$4.3 million, an increase of \$200,000 over the 1969-70 budget. Of the total, \$2.3 million or 54 per cent would go to Florida convention causes, and \$1.9 million or 46 per cent to Southern Baptist Convention mission efforts.

The board also recommended a 1970-71 state convention operating budget of \$3.6 million, including the \$2.3 million in Cooperative Program receipts, plus \$1.2 million in other income, some of which is already on hand.

The operating budget would include the same \$310,000 allocation to Stetson University that prompted a three-hour debate last year.

More Missionaries
Evacuate Jordan

RICHMOND (BP)--Two more Southern Baptist missionaries have been evacuated from troubled Jordan, arriving safely in Beirut, Lebanon, according to John D. Hughey, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's secretary for Europe and the Middle East.

Hughey, after talking to Missionary Paul Smith in Beirut, added that two of the missionary physicians now in Beirut probably will return to Jordan shortly to continue work in a Baptist hospital there.

Dr. John A. Roper Jr., and Miss Jeanie Grisham, a missionary journeyman, drove to Adjoulan, Jordan, to Beirut without incident, arriving their about midnight, Sept. 24.

Dr. Roper and Dr. Dean T. Fitzgerald, already in Beirut getting his family settled, will doubtless return to Jordan shortly, to continue their work in the hospital, Hughey added.

Dr. Roper's family and that of Dr. L. August Lovegren were already in Beirut. Dr. Lovegren and an Arab physician are evidently bearing the doctors' workload of the hospital now, Hughey reported.

Miss Maurine Perryman, who operates a Baptists' girls school in Jordan, has moved onto the hospital compound with Miss Violet Popp, who is continuing her work as a nurse at the hospital.

The workload of the hospital is heavy, and the school is still operated sporadically, Hughey said. On the day prior to his latest call from Smith, the school was open for half the day and Smith says it was "probably the only one open in Jordan."



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