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Historical Commission
Answers Committee of 15

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention's Historical Commission, in annual session here, drafted and approved a response to concerns expressed about its operation by the Committee of 15.

The Committee of 15, formed by the SBC Executive Committee to study and appraise the SBC and its agencies, submitted its four-year study to the Executive Committee in February. The Executive Committee forwarded the concerns to the Historical Commission without taking any action on them.

The Historical Commission's elected board noted that the Committee of 15 had expressed many of the commission's own concerns, took issue with several of the committee's concerns and noted that meager funds severely hampered its efforts in dealing with certain concerns.

Responding to a Committee of 15 concern that there may be "considerable loss of historical materials" related to convention agencies, leaders, churches and associations, the commission said:

"We heartily agree with the committee's concern. . . The lack of adequate Cooperative Program support, however, has made it impossible for the Historical Commission to do much that needs to be done.

"For example, the commission is engaged in an effort to procure taped oral history interviews with all past presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention. Much of their insight and understanding of Baptist life and work will be lost to future generations unless recorded while they are still alive and able to share. . .

"It is imperative that we procure these now. In view of this fact and the lack of adequate funds for this program, even in the face of extreme economy measures, the commission has found it necessary to supplement the Cooperative Program allocation by using \$3,000 from its program reserves two consecutive years to cover daily operating costs."

The commission agreed with the Committee of 15 that the commission needs more visibility to make its services more fully known. The concern regarding "visibility is directly related to our ability to finance our visibility," the commission noted.

The response indicated that several other concerns were intertwined with financial problems.

The Committee of 15's "areas of concern" on the Historical Commission included two which questioned the use of the commission's Dargan-Carver Library and its relation to libraries in the six SBC seminaries.

"The commission is not 'duplicating libraries already in existence at the six seminaries,' nor are 'full copies of everything' being maintained in the libraries of the Historical Commission and the seminaries," the commission declared.

The seminaries, the commission said, "have developed libraries which cover the whole curriculum of theology, religious education and church music. In contrast, the Historical Commission library is a specialized library focusing on the history and work of Baptists.

"Since Baptist history is a part of the church library curriculum in the seminaries, their libraries must necessarily maintain basic resources of the history of Baptists, but none of

these libraries has a collection of Baptist historical materials comparable to the Baptistiana maintained by the Historical Commission in its research center, Dargan-Carver Library.

"Of necessity," the commission continued, "there is some duplication between these libraries, for all need basic books, periodicals and other resources on the life and work of Southern Baptists for their patrons. Such duplication in libraries located in different geographical areas is essential to accessibility for study and research."

The commission further noted that only it conducts "a systematic, comprehensive program to procure and make readily accessible for research all that has been written by and about Baptists. . ."

The response added that "the commission serves as a means of unifying and coordinating the Baptist collections in the seminaries. For example, by means of microfilm, the commission has been able to coordinate the files of associational annuals of the seminaries, Baptist state collections and other libraries into complete or almost complete files for numerous states.

"The commission helps to assure the preservation of and to broaden the accessibility to rare books, periodicals and other Baptistiana by microfilming these materials and making prints available to libraries of seminaries and universities.

"Dargan-Carver Library, our Baptist research center in Nashville, is one of the largest and most complete denominational libraries in the world," the commission said. "Its resources make it possible for Baptists to study every facet of their life and work and thereby understand more fully their heritage as well as their contemporary life and work. . .

"The procurement of materials continues to be a basic concern, but the commission has in recent years shifted its major emphasis to the utilization of these materials.

"Until the materials are procured it is impossible for them to be utilized," the commission said in response to a Committee of 15 concern which said, "It seems to us that a library proves itself more by how much it is used than by the number of its books."

In reference to Committee of 15 concerns on long range planning, the commission said, "Since its beginning in 1951, the Historical Commission has pursued specific long-range and short-range goals for the procurement of materials and the utilization of these materials in study and research.

"The self-study made by the commission in 1972 resulted in the formation of specific, one, five and ten-year goals. These goals are periodically reviewed by the commission. Continuing effort will be made in this direction in keeping with the suggestion of the Committee of 15."

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Self-Criticism Linked
To Baptist Vitality

4/26/74

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists cannot maintain their vitality as a people and denomination without permitting self-criticism, the chairman of the convention's Historical Commission said here.

Robert A. Baker, professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, made the comment in reference to a question from the floor, following his presentation of an address on reflections on the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), its history and people. He spoke during the commission's annual meeting.

Baker said Southern Baptists cannot have vitality without criticism. And it is very important to allow "self-criticism and to smile at ourselves."

Six speakers, including Baker, addressed the commission, discussing Baptist and church history from their own perspectives.

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Baker, who recently completed a book on The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People, said in his address that Southern Baptists have displayed a "remarkable vitality in their history." He cited the "amazing geographical expansion during the past three decades," Southern Baptists' creativity in organizational and structural forms and their "remarkable sense of identity."

Any denomination that "majors on less than serious commitment to call people to the ultimate meaning of the will of God in the face of Jesus Christ will not long be effective. Southern Baptists have grown because of this commitment while others declined, he said.

In the question and answer period, Baker declared his firm stance behind the continuing autonomy of the local Southern Baptist church. Ecclesiology among Southern Baptists "is becoming too heavy," he said.

"If we're not going to allow each church to be autonomous, we'd better fold up our tents. . . . If we lose the autonomy of the local church, we've lost the battle," he concluded.

Other speakers referred to Baptists' role, directly or indirectly, in America's history and to the coming (1976) U.S. Bicentennial observance.

Historian Robert Hartje of Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, and author of the book, Bicentennial, USA, called for a "grass roots" involvement in the Bicentennial. It is "a time for reconciliation--slowing down the whirlwind and reconciling people with each other and their environment," he said.

". . . In the enthusiasm of celebration we may be able to replace some of the broken pieces in the hastily-built structure that is our nation. . . .

"It is in this perspective that we look to the church for its involvement. . . ." Hartje noted. He cited the church's "significant stake in the history of America--in its successes, failures, advances and retreats, in its glory and its sin.

"The church has served America as creative and interpretative power and. . . has also been a moral force and guide," along with its weaknesses, Hartje said.

Richard A. McLemore, outgoing president of the Southern Baptist Historical Society, said, "The Bicentennial of the American Revolution offers an appropriate time to review the experience and development of Baptists during this critical period of their history."

Approaching Baptist history from a view of Christians and citizenship, Foy Valentine, executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, observed:

"Someone has said that there is no such thing as an American principle of the separation of church and state; it is a Baptist principle that has distinctively shaped the nation's character."

Baptists in America's early history suffered banishment, ridicule and rejection but they would neither willingly withdraw from the political world nor conform to it in cowardice," Valentine said.

"They chose rather to involve themselves in it so that they might move it toward the Christian ideal. This they did with far greater success than the world around them ever dreamed possible," Valentine concluded.

James E. Wood Jr., executive director for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington, D. C., said Baptist witness to religious liberty has "long been regarded by many historians and theologians alike as the greatest contribution of Baptists to Christianity and American civilization."

"Unfortunately, many Baptists in the United States today lack any real awareness, knowledge, or understanding of this historic Baptist witness to religious liberty. The principle all too often appears obscure to or best taken for granted by many modern-day Baptists.

"Baptist witness to religious liberty needs to be reaffirmed and reexamined by every Baptist generation," Wood said.

Owen Cooper, SBC president and a layman, spoke on Southern Baptist progress at a commission luncheon, becoming the first active convention president to participate in an annual meeting of the agency.

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Brazilian Baptists Top
Missions Offering Goal

4/26/74

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil (BP)--For the first time in six years, Brazilian Baptists have exceeded their home missions offering goal, their equivalent to Southern Baptists' Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.

The Brazilian Baptist Home Mission Board, which currently supports 163 active missionaries, received \$345,380 as of April 2 for the special offering. Their goal was \$343,750.

Used to aid Baptist work in Brazil, the offering is taken in conjunction with Home Missions Day, which coincides with Brazil's Independence Day, Sept. 7.

The home missions offering represents 80 per cent of the Brazilian board's proposed budget for 1974, according to Roberta Hampton, Southern Baptist missionary press representative. Another 10 per cent comes from a plan similar to Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program (unified budget), and the remainder comes from miscellaneous gifts and receipts.

Miss Hampton says that for Samuel Mitt, who has been executive secretary of the board since 1968, "The liberal giving of Brazilian Baptists to the special offering indicates approval of a new plan of action adopted by the board for 1973-1982." Brazilian Baptists will celebrate 100 years of work in 1982.

Mitt, the first Brazilian home missionary to head the board, has emphasized self-support for churches and increased missionary salaries. During his first year, Brazilian missionaries' salaries were increased 30 per cent.

In 1972 the board adopted a plan for periodic increases during the next five years. Churches are also being urged to accept a larger percentage of support for their Brazilian missionary pastors.

Two Southern Baptist missionaries serve on the Brazilian Baptist Home Mission Board staff--Miss Hampton, promotion consultant, and Ronald N. Boswell, recently-elected planning and strategy consultant.

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Famine Relief Continues
In Drought-Stricken Niger

4/26/74

RICHMOND (BP)--Reports from Maradi, Niger, indicate famine relief for the starvation-stricken thousands here continues peacefully in spite of recent political developments. Southern Baptist missionaries are opening a second medical aid station in Dakoro, 70 miles north of Maradi.

The recent change of government is expected to have no ill effects on missionary work. The military action was confined to the capital city of Niamey and peace now prevails, and the new government will carry out the commitments of its predecessor, according to a Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board spokesman.

Walter M. Moore, Southern Baptist missionary to Ghana, temporarily transferred to Niger for relief work, will travel to Dakoro three days a week to aid several thousand refugees there. Rachel Bandy, Southern Baptist missionary journeyman and nurse, will remain to continue medical care for the 24,000 refugees in the area. She was also transferred from Ghana for the special relief work.

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Other Southern Baptist missionaries in Niger include Mr. and Mrs. H. Jerold Palmer Jr. and Mr. and Mrs. Robert D. Williams. Both couples are in Niger to aid in the development of a Christian trade school at Maradi.

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Southern Baptist Missionary
Addresses 15,000 Muslims

4/26/74

TYRE, Lebanon (BP)--For the first time in the history of Southern Baptist mission work in the Middle East, a missionary spoke publicly on the Christian faith to a crowd of 15,000 Muslims in the stadium of a Muslim Shiite school near here on Easter eve.

The gathering, part of a demonstration on behalf of Palestinians, featured Imam Musa Sadr, Lebanon's highest Muslim leader and Missionary J. Conrad Willmon of Alabama, according to Mrs. J. Wayne Fuller, missionary press representative.

Willmon interpreted his opportunity to address such a group as a chance to "put faith into practice by spending Easter in a visible sharing in the suffering of others."

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Missionaries Optimistic
About Change in Portugal

4/26/74

LISBON, Portugal, (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries are optimistic about the affect that governmental changes will have on Baptist work in Portugal.

Missionaries also expressed gratitude that the recent revolution produced few casualties. John M. Herndon, Southern Baptist missionary in Lisbon, states that the seven-member junta in control "promises an election soon" and "urges normal activities." All seems to be calm, according to Herndon.

Herndon also said that the Portuguese people seem happy about the revolution and news that the junta is promising individual freedom and freedom of the press.

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SBC Meet May Hear Proposal
For Evangelism Commission

4/26/74

By Toby Druin

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas in June is expected to be asked to give evangelism more exposure in denomination by creating a new Commission on Evangelism.

But Arthur Rutledge, executive director of the Home Mission Board (HMB), which now directs the convention's program of evangelism development, says a new name for the agency--possibly National Missions and Evangelism Board--would achieve the same purpose.

Frank Minton, pastor of Far Hills Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio, is expected to offer the motion at the Dallas convention to remove the program of evangelism development from the HMB and give it separate status as a commission.

Minton says his reason for seeking the new commission is to give evangelism greater exposure and a higher priority in the denomination.

Interviewed for a story in the May issue of Home Missions magazine in early March, Minton reiterated his intention to seek the new commission in late April. He said the recent restructuring of the HMB program implementation section, which includes the division of evangelism, makes it even more imperative.

The HMB directors recently approved a change that gave Fred B. Mosley exclusive duties as associate executive director and made Gerald Palmer director of the program implementation section, which includes the divisions of evangelism, missions, chaplaincy, associational

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services and church loans. Mosley previously served as both associate executive director and director of the program implementation section.

Minton contends that the addition of a separate program implementation section leader places the division of evangelism director, C. B. (Bill) Hogue, a step farther down in the planning and decision making process.

The name change alone, so it would get more exposure for the division, would not gain the result Minton is seeking, he said, in light of the new HMB structure. Minton suggested a separate evangelism section and a new name possibly would meet his demands but said his present plans are still to seek a new commission.

Establishment of a new agency must be approved by majority vote of messengers at two successive conventions. The Home Mission Board's proposed name change could be accomplished by a majority vote at one convention.

Rutledge says the Association of State Executive Secretaries recently asked that the word "home" in the board's title be changed to "national" to reflect that the convention is now a national body. National Missions and Evangelism Board would honor both requests, Rutledge says.

Regardless of whether a new name is chosen or a new commission formed or the emphasis remains as it is now, Rutledge says, evangelism will remain central to Home Mission Board efforts to cross barriers with the gospel.

He notes that the report of the Committee of 15 concluded "the Home Mission Board is basically a board of evangelism."

"When we state our purpose, our planning base," he says, "evangelism saturates it."

Rutledge says he certainly is not opposed to a study of the matter. "I am anxious to see the convention's evangelism program reach its maximum effectiveness," he says.

But he calls attention to the Committee of 15's conclusion that evangelism development can best be implemented in its present setting with the HMB.

"When the pluses and minuses of forming an Evangelism Commission are listed," Rutledge says, "it is not clear that a new commission would strengthen the evangelistic effectiveness of Southern Baptists. It would likely increase the exposure of the program, but it might also reduce the resources and produce a more limited base from which to lead. There is room to hold that such a move would weaken evangelism."

Minton first confronted the convention with the evangelism commission proposal in 1972, asking and winning approval in Philadelphia for the matter to be investigated by the Committee of 15, which studied all SBC agencies over the past four years. The committee recommended that the evangelism emphasis remain with the HMB.

Based on conversations with pastor friends and replies to letters he sent to 200 other pastors, Minton says he believes there is grassroots support for his motion.

About 30 replied they supported Minton's proposal. "That pretty well sums up that the local pastor wants it," he said. "He feels the need."

Minton says he has no objection to the present efforts of the board's division of evangelism or its staff and acknowledges that the Southern Baptist Convention is in one of its greatest periods of evangelistic thrust--baptisms have totaled more than 400,000 the last three years.

Commission status, such as that of the SBC Radio and Television Commission, Minton contends, would put evangelism in a better position for increased funding.

The Radio and Television Commission's 1973-74 budget is \$1,581,000 but budgets for commissions such as the Brotherhood, Christian Life, Stewardship, Education and Historical Commissions aren't even near half of the division of evangelism's \$997,000 annual budget.

Minton will suggest the new commission receive that portion of Cooperative Program unified budget and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering funds now budgeted for the evangelism division.

An unidentified Texas pastor, speaking up for the commission, reportedly said he had heard the suggestion that another special offering, "The George W. Truett Memorial Offering for Evangelism," be started to undergird the commission.

Committee of 15 chairman E. W. Price Jr. of High Point, N. C., said, "It just does not seem practical to me that a commission would be the best means to promote evangelism." He said "The Home Mission Board has a direct line to the states and evangelism is now one of its primary concerns."

Former director of the division of evangelism, Kenneth Chafin, said he had recommended to the Committee of 15 that evangelism remain with the Home Mission Board.

He urged a realistic look at Minton's motion but added, "I don't see as much at stake whether it is a commission or division. If it were treated as other commissions have been, it would be better off as a division. We've starved other commissions to death."

Chafin, now pastor of South Main Baptist Church in Houston, underscored the strength of the division as a part of one of the four SBC boards.

"In some interagency battles, if I hadn't had the clout and prestige of the Home Mission Board on my side, I would have been swallowed up," Chafin explained.