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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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WrapupSBC Educators Face Issues;
Reaffirm Christian Distinctives

By Robert O'Brien

NASHVILLE (BP)--As Southern Baptist educators grappled here with issues facing higher education, a constant theme surfaced--a sense of urgency that Baptists maintain top quality educational institutions which support the local church and serve the denomination.

Representatives of 71-member colleges, schools and seminaries of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools (ASBCS) and the denomination's Education Commission spent three days agonizing over issues common to all educators:

Rising educational costs, government and accreditation, Title IX, faculty development, competency-based educational programs, improving methods of development, flexibility to face the "surging forces" of modern society which threaten to inundate educational institutions.

But the educators from across America's largest Protestant-evangelical denomination recognized and affirmed the truth of a statement by SBC President Jaroy Weber, which was echoed by others of their number.

"Unless students come from these schools knowing about God, Christ, the Bible, the church and the world, education is in vain," Weber, pastor of First Baptist Church, Lubbock, Tex., told presidents, deans and other educators at the annual meeting.

"Christian education," Weber said, "should give us a God who is eternal, yet personal; an authority--the Bible--which is relevant; and a fellowship--the church--which is redemptive and meaningful."

The church, declared E. Bruce Heilman, president of the University of Richmond (Va.), "is the most viable repository of moral standards. Both church and college should be committed to each other."

Heilman joined other participants in urging no relaxation of efforts to maintain "first rate educational institutions."

But they must be institutions, he said, which show "no compromise in being what they profess to be"--church-related schools which realize that "belief in theological implications makes education complete."

Also, the educators were told, Christian education must operate in an atmosphere of openness, willingness to accept and give constructive criticism, non-coercive presentation of Christ and the Christian world view to students and willingness to allow students freedom to seek truth and have individual rights.

All this must be done, participants were told, without sacrificing Christian distinctives and standards, without heavy-handed disregard for complex governmental, legal and societal pressures which deal with student rights and freedoms and without the extremes of authoritarianism on one pole or permissiveness on the other.

Admittedly, a tall order, said Grady Cothen, president of the SBC's Sunday School Board, as he laid out those alternatives in a series of three lectures.

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As the ASBCS's annual H. I. Hester lecturer, Cothen, a former college and seminary president, explored societal trends which would swamp efforts by Christian education to remain viable.

Using the trends as a backdrop, he offered theological, philosophical and practical alternatives to avoid surrender by Christian education in the face of growing secularization.

But Cothen refused to predict the death of Christian education, which, he said, possesses an "attractive hope in higher education." Society has "not covered you up yet," he said. "Indeed, most of your schools are stronger now than they ever have been."

Weber, Cothen and others, while urging support of the church and denomination by schools, also made another point clear: the churches and denomination owe support to the schools.

"The denomination should do something to encourage the churches working (with students) on the cutting edge, not just leave it to the educational institutions," said Weber, "but we must pay tribute to schools which are producing more pastors and church workers than any denomination in history.

"Our denomination," declared Weber, "often overlooks the commitment of Christian educators. We must stand and salute that kind of integrity and must undergird the men and women who commit themselves to Christian education . . . It's not equitable and not Christian not to do so."

But Weber injected a plea to educators to discover why many students enter the freshman class with a commitment to Christian service which has been drained by the time they are seniors.

"What are they hearing that leads them to be unconcerned about the local church? . . . Are they getting innuendos or seeing failure of leadership which causes them to lose that cherished sense of hope?" he asked.

Exploring a different level of Southern Baptist education, H. B. Ramsour, president of Mexican Baptist Bible Institute, San Antonio, Tex., said the denomination often overlooks the adult, in his mid-30s, with little or no previous education, who "has been called to preach."

"Neither our evangelistic or educational programs have zeroed in on that person," said Ramsour.

Challenging rigid ideas of what comprises "academic excellence," Ramsour said, "Academic excellence can be expressed at many levels," citing Baptist Bible institutes and other non-degree programs with over 1,000 students.

"Seminaries can and should project non-degree theological education without apology. Not only college graduates should have the opportunity for theological study.

"The Holy Spirit," declared Ramsour, "can make preachers out of 'unpromising' men. A 35-year-old can learn just as fast as a 15-year-old, especially if the 15-year-old doesn't care and the 35-year-old is motivated and seeking truth."

Weber expressed enthusiasm over efforts by colleges and seminaries in adult education and over reports over how the Education Commission and the ASBCS have linked hands with SBC agencies, such as the Foreign Mission Board, to aid the cause of world missions.

Daniel Grant, president of Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, Ark., and a member of the Education Commission, declared that Baptist schools, to survive, "must provide a different educational commodity than state colleges and universities."

Besides educational quality and commitment to Christian faith, he said, we must provide services to the denomination recognized as important by our constituents."

Grant and Oscar Romo, the SBC Home Mission Board's language missions director, who spoke to the Education Commission, outlined unfolding areas of joint efforts by SBC educators and the Foreign and Home Mission Boards.

An Analysis:

**R search Exposes Fals
Rumors About Astronauts**

By John W. Baker

WASHINGTON (BP)--No, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, the well known atheist, is not circulating a petition to NASA to stop the astronauts from praying or reading the Bible in outer space.

No, Mrs. O'Hair is not petitioning the Federal Communication's Commission (FCC) to stop religious radio and TV broadcasting.

Somebody is crying "wolf!" Many unfactual circulars are being distributed across the country calling for letters which supposedly are needed to "stop Madalyn Murray O'Hair." The circulars assert: (1) That Mrs. O'Hair is renewing her earlier campaign to have the astronauts publicly censured for reading from the book of Genesis on December 24, 1968, and/or (2) That Mrs. O'Hair somehow is about to have both prayers and the mention of God banned from radio and TV.

Mrs. O'Hair is not reopening her challenge to the reading of the Bible over the radio by astronauts on space flights. Mrs. O'Hair is not involved, either directly or indirectly, in a petition (RM 2493) now before the FCC. This petition requests the FCC not to grant additional new educational non-commercial FM or TV channels to be used exclusively for religious broadcasting.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Mrs. O'Hair herself sustain the statements in the previous paragraphs.

S. Neil Hosenball, general counsel for NASA, pointed out that Mrs. O'Hair's two suits against NASA and the astronauts had been dismissed by the lower federal courts, and that the United States Supreme Court twice had refused to hear an appeal on the issue--the last time in 1971. "The action of the Supreme Court, denying a further hearing, has settled the matter for all practical purposes," Hosenball said.

In a recent interview, Mrs. O'Hair also gave assurances that neither she nor any of her staff are involved in or know anything about a renewal of her 1969 petition drive against the astronauts (which preceded her suit in the federal courts).

"I am innocent. Any such movement is strictly a figment of somebody's imagination," she declared. "Perhaps someone found one of the old 1969 petitions lying around and thought something new was underway. But absolutely nothing is happening."

According to NASA, the official position of that agency is that astronauts, like any other citizens, are free to exercise their constitutional rights--including the right to religious freedom--wherever they are. "It is NASA's policy neither to direct nor to limit the astronauts' religious activities at any time," Hosenball stated.

Mrs. O'Hair also denies that she is in any way involved, either directly or indirectly, in the petition to the FCC. After she had received unfavorable mail on the matter, she telephoned the California men who had submitted RM-2493 and learned that they are religious people, not atheists, and that in the petition they claim no connection with her or any other group. Mrs. O'Hair is in basic agreement with the thrust of the petition but denied that she was involved in any way in seeking its implementation.

Acting on or distributing these unfactual circulars is just one of many instances in which a number of religious people have responded without determining the facts. Such uninformed response dilutes their present and future influence with Congress and the administrative agencies.

The name of Madalyn Murray O'Hair triggers a conditioned response in many religious people. If Mrs. O'Hair supports a project, these people feel honor bound to oppose it. If an activity takes place which they oppose on principle, they almost automatically assume that Mrs. O'Hair is the moving force on the other side. Mrs. O'Hair is given credit for or condemned for more activities than it would be physically or emotionally possible for a person to be involved in.

But whether one agrees or disagrees with Mrs. O'Hair--or anyone else for that matter--is not the issue. The issue is the correctness or incorrectness of assertions in a given situation.

Unreliable information and unfounded assertions, when used as a basis for action, can only produce ridicule and defeat.

Why don't church people stop shooting canons at sparrows, leave Mrs. O'Hair alone, and give themselves to more important issues in advancing the cause of Jesus Christ?

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Dr. John Baker is director of research services for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Washington, D. C.

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89-Year-Old Baptist
Ordained To Ministry

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SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (BP)--An 89-year-old father was ordained here on Father's Day.

The new minister is Wilfred Watson, founder and lay-leader of Costa Rica's Siquirres Baptist Church. Southern Baptist Missionary Jackie B. Cooper arranged the service.

Along with Watson, Charles Cyrus, who is "only" 68, was ordained as pastor of the Guacimo Baptist Church.

Both English-speaking churches are on the Atlantic side of Costa Rica.

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Miami Beach Restaurateur
Likes Southern Baptist 'Sunshine'

Baptist Press
6/30/75

MIAMI BEACH (BP)--A Miami Beach restaurateur is happy that Southern Baptists held their annual convention here in early June.

He backed up his feelings with a letter and a \$50 check in appreciation for the 16,212 elected messengers who descended on Miami Beach, June 9-12.

"Never, and I say never, has Miami Beach been so graced by the presence of people who emanate such sunshine and contentedness and just plain, happy, pleasant countenances," wrote Charles S. Kaufman of the Flame Steak House in a letter to John Williams, director of financial planning and assistant to the treasurer of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, Nashville.

"Especially, in such troubled times as we are now experiencing, does your... (denomination) shine forth," he said.

"Let me thank you and your group for the 'sunshine' they brought to Miami. I am enclosing a small check to be given to one of your favorite charities."

Williams said his favorite charity is the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program unified budget, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in Miami Beach.

It'll be \$50 richer because of Charles Kaufman.

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