



# BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

## NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee  
460 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, Tennessee 37219  
(615) 244-2355

W. C. Fields, Director  
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor  
Norman Jameson, Feature Editor

### BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041  
DALLAS Richard T. McCartney, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Tex. 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996  
MEMPHIS Roy Jennings, Chief, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38104, Telephone (901) 272-2461  
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) L. Bracey Campbell III, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2798  
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151  
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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### Wrapup

Affect of History  
Traced by Baptists

By James Lee Young

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--If some Southern Baptist historians are correct, their denomination has problems to iron out that are rooted in history.

Speakers indicated during a joint meeting of the Southern Baptist Historical Commission and Society that by looking at history, Baptists can better understand their own problems and more readily find solutions to them.

Setting the pace for the two-day conference was Albert McClellan, associate executive secretary and director of program planning for the Southern Baptist Executive Committee. McClellan told the group that Baptists are no longer a homogenous people, although their "basic dimension" is still doctrinal.

"The Baptist mind of today may be less sharply defined than in the past," McClellan said. "Accelerated communication and lack of sensitive debate in recent times may have brought increased mobility of conviction."

In his address, however, McClellan said there is "a fairly well defined core of theological understanding common to most Southern Baptists," and that is "that the Bible is the final authority in all matters of the Christian faith."

In a related address on sources of authority in Baptist thought, James Leo Garrett Jr., religion professor at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, said the early church saw authority as mediated by Jesus Christ or through the Holy Spirit.

Eventually, he said, the channels through which religious or doctrinal authority was said to be conveyed was through the biblical, ecclesial (creeds, confessions of faith, gifted or duly ordained ministers), and personal. Such "acknowledged" channels, he said, did not rule out the "viability or reality" of an unacknowledged channel, such as culture or society.

H. Leon McBeth, church history professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, traced fundamentalism from its roots and said "most Southern Baptists are Bible believing, conservative people, but most are not fundamentalists."

"The Southern Baptist Convention and its agencies have never, to this point, fallen under control of extreme doctrinaire, fundamentalist forces that were active in the 1920s," he said. But, he noted, Southern Baptist thought has been greatly shaped and influenced by fundamentalism.

In an address backgrounding the Baptist Faith and Message statement adopted by SBC messengers in 1963, Herschel H. Hobbs, the man who chaired the committee that wrote the revised statement said the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship (fundamental group founded in 1973) has "no moral right to that name."

The Baptist Faith and Message belongs to Southern Baptists, Hobbs said, "And if it ever comes up at the Southern Baptist Convention, I'm going to remind them of it."

Addressing another controversy among Baptists today, a New Orleans Seminary professor said the so-called charismatic movement has made a "relatively slight impact" on Southern Baptist life and is "declining."

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Claude L. Howe Jr., noted, "It's true that small groups of charismatics have emerged in many Southern Baptist congregations--often creating fear and frustration. But if only 100-200 churches of 36,000 or 10,000 members of 13 million (SBC church members)" are charismatics, "the results are not impressive."

Speaking to another, more internal, problem of local churches, Richard D. Patton, chairman of the Historical Commission, warned that Baptist churches are facing a growing problem of "unregenerate church members" by raising a generation of children who have been immersed but may not be Christians.

Patton warned that baptism of preschool age children is an increasing problem among Southern Baptist churches, one that "appears to put us precariously close to the practice of infant baptism."

In the final address, James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Washington, D.C., decried the church's failures in the area of human rights, saying it has a "far from unblemished record" in that regard. He said there must be a theological foundation of human rights and the church must see human rights as essential to its mission.

The Historical Commission adopted a \$270,000 budget for 1978-79, of which \$220,000 will come from Cooperative Program funds, subject to approval by SBC messengers in the annual meeting in June.

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Human Rights Said  
Essential to Mission

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--It would be a "gross distortion of history"--if based simply upon Christian theological foundations of human right--to infer that human rights were generally espoused by Christianity throughout its history, according to James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Washington, D. C.

"For centuries, even up to the present time, human rights have been repeatedly and flagrantly violated by both church and state throughout the world," Wood told participants in a joint meeting of the Southern Baptist Historical Commission and Society at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"This is not to ignore or denigrate the remarkable record of the history of Christianity," Wood continued, but it "has a far from unblemished record with regard to human rights... For centuries, intolerance and not tolerance, conformity...and assent...were the hallmarks of the history of Christianity."

Wood said urgent needs are for a theological foundation of human rights "which may be identified with the essence of Christian faith," and "a theological base on which the church's support of human rights can be seen as essential to its mission."

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Baptists Can't Abandon  
Cities, Say Evangelists

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--"The city is the place where Southern Baptists are losing their pride and their patience," says urban evangelist Dale Cross.

In a no-bones-about-it presentation, Cross and fellow urban evangelist Don Sharp got down to black and white as they addressed 200 pastors, students, and church, state, and denominational staffers at the second annual National Leadership Conference for Churches in Racially Changing Communities. The conference is sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's department of cooperative ministries with National Baptists.

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"It is a difficult experience for us to face a challenge for which we have no proven program and no assurance of success. The American city is proving to be just such a challenge for Southern Baptists," said Cross, director of Metropolitan Evangelism Strategy for the Home Mission Board. He and Sharp, pastor of Faith Tabernacle Baptist Church, Chicago, and associate director of missions for the Chicago Metropolitan Baptist Association, chided Southern Baptists for their "if we can't be successful, we won't be there" attitude and, therefore, their continuing withdrawal from the central city community.

"We must disturbingly ponder," demanded Cross, "what's 'bold' about that! Surely the people who claim Bold Mission Thrust (SBC goal to present the Christian gospel to everyone in the world by the year 2000) in America must turn their faces once again to our Jerusalems, as Jesus did, and acknowledge that there is a cross for us as well in the city...The integrity of the total witness is undermined each time a city church sells out."

The two men, delivering a joint paper on evangelism in the cities, said blacks and whites must work together to develop and continue a successful strategy for the urban church. "Southern Baptists have no alternative. If we are going to minister in the city, it will be through black and white cooperation," they said. That can only be accomplished by developing a mutual understanding of their cultural differences.

Sharp emphasized the importance of the black church in any urban strategy, citing its history of survival in the city situation and its understanding of the city and its people.

"The black church and the black leader must be recognized for what they can provide to not only the black people but to the white people," he said. "If we can affect an integration of the resources of each (blacks and whites), we have hope for the city."

Cross and Sharp said "life style evangelism," a personal one-to-one encounter, holistic approach with concern for both physical and spiritual needs, is the greatest need in the city. Besides being the most effective means of reaching city dwellers, they said, it is quick, responsive, and inexpensive.

The duo called for the SBC to offer more practical support to the urban church, beginning by keeping local leadership informed about agencies and their functions and how they can help in terms of monetary and personnel resources.

Also warning that the denominational structure sometimes "holds on too tightly" to control of circumstances, the men urged agency leaders to "trust local people to design the plans they need. The greatest resources for meeting the needs of the people in the cities are the people in the city themselves."

"Too often we've taken a mix of pre-packaged panaceas, watered them with some high sounding words, stirred it up with a flurry of promotional activity and then tried to serve it as the answer to the cities' needs," they said. "For the most part, these approaches have been too easy, too quick and too costly for what we got out of them. The fact of the matter is, people in the city have not even opened their mouths to receive the stuff, much less swallow it!"

The two-day conference was designed to provide an intense look at urban trends, their effect on racial, ethnic and cultural community make-up, and how the church can meet the needs of people in such transition.

Samuel Roberts, assistant professor of sociology and the church, Union Theological Seminary, New York, projected that by the year 2000, 85 percent of the United States population would reside in metropolitan areas. In analyzing the rapid change this urbanization is and will be creating, Roberts felt the church would need to be more "politically sophisticated," to take an active role in affecting change that government holds the final answer to.

"Until we can get more folk into political leadership who understand how poverty people live, we'll need to turn to our churches for proper leadership for getting us out of this rut," he stated.

Other keynoters included James Glasse, president of Lancaster Theological Seminary, Pennsylvania; Rafael Melian, coordinator of language missions, Baptist Association of Greater New Orleans; and Ezra Earl Jones, associate secretary, General Council of Ministries, The United Methodist Church.

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'Baptist Faith and Message' Poses  
Authority Question, Historian Says

By Rex Hammock

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--The authority of the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message" confessional statement has become an increasing point of tension in Southern Baptist life, according to an article by Baptist historian, Walter B. Shurden.

Adopted on the heels of an SBC theological controversy, the statement, says Shurden, "has in some ways become a criterion of orthodoxy and a code-word for doctrinal purity." This, he notes, is contrary to Baptist tradition and was not the intention of the statement's authors.

Writing on "The Problem of Authority in the Southern Baptist Convention" in the spring issue of "Review and Expositor," the faculty journal of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Shurden traces the development of denominational controversies since 1962 and "authority questions" which have resulted. One such question involves "The Baptist Faith and Message."

Adopted after a bitter debate over biblical interpretation, the 1963 statement is a revision of an earlier "Baptist Faith and Message." Called by some the "1925 Confession," this earlier statement arose out of the evolution controversy of the '20's.

Shurden notes that the 1925 statement was not accepted widely among Southern Baptists. "Some resisted the document because it smacked of creedalism," he explains, "while some denominational leaders wanted it only to squelch controversy. A third group was dissatisfied with the statement because it was not specific enough."

No such resistance has met the 1963 statement, says Shurden, a church history professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Rather, he explains, the trend has been toward more doctrinal uniformity among Southern Baptists since the confession's passage.

Some SBC agencies and institutions have formally adopted "The Baptist Faith and Message" as a theological guideline. "Some Southern Baptists," Shurden notes, "have said that if you don't believe in the 1925 and 1963 confessions, then you are not a Baptist."

This, says Shurden, is contrary to the intention of the statement's authors. "In reading the introductory statement to the confession, one gets the distinct impression that the document is more concerned with defending conscience against uniformity than with defending scripture from heresy."

Shurden points out that former SBC president Herschel H. Hobbs, chairman of the committee which presented the 1963 confession, has repeatedly warned Southern Baptists against transforming the confession into a binding creed.

"The problem area for Southern Baptists," Shurden explains, "is how the confession is being used and what further abuses may occur. What is at stake is the nature and authority of confessions, the freedom of the individual conscience, and whether Southern Baptists shall face the future with a theology based upon the Bible or upon a man-made creed."

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