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Second VP Decries
Convention 'Liberals'

By Norman Jameson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Don Touchton, second vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention, stoked the smoldering coals of the biblical inerrancy debate with the mass mailing of a letter decrying "creeping liberalism in our convention organizations and institutions."

With a cover letter on Southern Baptist Convention stationery, Touchton mailed an eight-page "Cry of Concern" to about 8,500 pastors, state Baptist newspaper editors and supposedly to all trustees and executives of Southern Baptist agencies. In it, he defined liberalism as "the denial of the inerrancy of the Scripture."

Touchton mailed the letter just days before the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, at which time his term as second vice president would end. He makes no apologies for using the office to gain attention for the letter, and says most persons would have discarded it without reading if it had not been from a convention officer.

Touchton used a church services company in Texas to facilitate the mailing to Southern Baptist pastors in 20 southern states who had churches with 300 to 1,000 members. He said he undertook the effort at his own expense, which cost him nearly \$2,000.

The venture was not an attempt to lay groundwork for a presidential bid, according to Touchton, who said he was not going to be involved in the presidential politics of the convention. He did not say who he would support for president.

Though he is a member of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship, and his church contributes "nominally" to the group, Touchton said he has never attended one of its meetings.

The letter contained Touchton's observations of what he called "destructive patterns" in the convention. He said they are caused by liberalism which affects every organization, "particularly the seminaries and colleges."

He said moral decay is the natural result of liberalism. "Some of our Baptist colleges and seminaries allow drugs, sex, drinking, and dancing to be a daily fare of sin's smorgasbord on campus," he said.

Abner McCall, first vice president of the convention, and president of Baylor University, responded by saying, "I know of no Baptist college where drugs, sex, drinking and dancing are bad at all on campus."

"Our students are the sons and daughters of people from Baptist churches. They are no better or no worse than they were at home," said McCall, who did not receive a copy of the letter.

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Arthur Walker, director of the SBC Education Commission, supports the idea that Baptist colleges mirror Baptist churches and points out that every seminary student must be recommended by a local Baptist church before he or she can attend seminary.

Touchton also cited the writing of Joseph F. Green, retired Broadman book editor, as an example of "moral deficiencies (that) are a clear product of liberalism." He said that "Green teaches that mutual manual sexual stimulation between unmarried couples is acceptable."

Said Green, who is familiar with controversy over his book, "The Bible's Secret of Full Happiness," published in 1970, "Some kinds of premarital sexual expression are almost inevitable." While he does not condone "heavy petting" before marriage, he said the book tried to point out there is a difference between that kind of expression and sexual intercourse and to affirm the validity of a Christian sexual ethic in a secular culture.

The chapter on sex was one of 12 chapters in the book. In it, he said he "set out a Christian sexual ethic based on decision and commitment rather than dogmatic legalism that was characteristic of Southern Baptists 30 or 40 years ago." He said though it was contrary to his intention that his chapter be seen as approval for mutual sexual stimulation between unmarried couples, "I can't say a reader wouldn't reach that conclusion. But a reader who reached that conclusion missed the point of the book," he said.

In his explanation of liberalism, Touchton said most Southern Baptist liberals are employees of the convention, though he did not say most employees are liberals. He feels the difficulty in gaining hearing for his conservative views is because liberals control the apparatus of the convention.

He referred to Jimmy Allen's presidential speech in Houston where Allen said "there are some who would change our agenda from missions to orthodoxy" and said it was "an attempted distortion of our priorities in order to protect the liberal element in our midst."

"It is an attempt to get Southern Baptists to endorse a sanctuary in our convention for those who do not hold to the historic Baptist position regarding the inerrancy of Scripture," the letter said. "We must never allow orthodoxy to be set in opposition to missions. The priority for unity must be orthodoxy; the priority for ministry must be missions."

Allen said there was no attempt on his part to distort the priorities of the convention in his Houston speech. "The priorities all along have been missions and evangelism," he said.

He called Touchton's effort and that of the element formerly led by Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies, Dallas, "an artificial effort to create controversy around the authority of the Bible when the vast majority, the overwhelming majority, of Southern Baptists accept the authority of the Bible without question."

Harold C. Bennett, executive secretary-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee, who has been a denominational employee in two Baptist state conventions, the Baptist Sunday School Board, and the Home Mission Board since 1960, said, "In my experience, I just haven't known any liberals in the denominational structure."

Touchton said in a telephone interview, "The convention still has the greatest potential of any evangelical body on the face of the earth to accomplish the Bold Mission Thrust goals of giving every person a chance to hear the gospel."

"But that does not eliminate the fact we are going to have to address this issue (Inerrancy) in the next year or two in order to preserve even the appearance of unity among us," he said. "There are large numbers of pastors among us, from my sampling, who are on the verge of despair over this thing. They're very concerned over what's happening in our schools and over what they perceive to be happening in our seminaries."

He said the question of what to do about denominational employees will also have to be answered. "Are we going to require them to adhere to stated goals (Baptist Faith and Message statement) or aren't we?" he asked. "We'll lose some people if we require it, and we'll lose some if we don't require it."

Duke McCall, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, rose to defend seminaries and denominational employees. "It would have been better if Don Touchton had seminary experience or had visited a campus before posing as a judge of the seminaries on issues that from my rather extensive experience, I have never seen," McCall said.

"The typical Southern Baptist employee is exactly in the theological center of the Southern Baptist Convention, wherever that is," said McCall. "By its very nature, the average board member represents Southern Baptists and he elects employees who typify Southern Baptists. The Southern Baptist Convention elects people who employ the workers. Wherever the Southern Baptist Convention is, is where employees come out."

McCall said he would like to see which inerrant copy of the Scripture the inerrancy element reads from. "Pretending they have access to an inerrant copy when they are dependent like all of us on theological scholars to give us the instrument from which we read, is an unethical misleading of the public," he said.

Touchton's letter also quoted remarks of Dale Moody, professor of Christian theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, as an example of doctrinal deviation that liberalism produces.

The letter said: "Dale Moody... in a recent report by the Historic (sic) Commission in which he attempted to point out errors in historic Baptist theology, said that writers of the Baptist Faith and Message, '...failed to see that regeneration is as progressive as sanctification.' This was accompanied by remarks about Baptist polity being in error and suggested that Baptist polity would be more biblical when associationalism became Presbyterianism."

Moody took immediate offense to the quotations, and said Touchton did not mention the biblical references Moody listed to back up his statements. Moody also objected to a "distortion" of his intent when Touchton capitalized "Presbyterianism" in the letter, when Moody was in fact referring to the New Testament group of elders known as a presbytery to which there are numerous biblical references. Moody cited specifically Acts 14:23 which says, "And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed." (RSV)

Moody cited also Acts 11:30, James 5:14, I Timothy 5:17-22, among others. "There are far more references to elders than to deacons in the New Testament," Moody said. "Southern Baptists could strengthen their associational connections by going to more emphasis on elders."

Concerning progressive regeneration, Moody said: "When we are born again, we're not born full grown. We're born as babes in Christ and we should grow in grace until we're mature Christians." He quoted, among other verses of support, I Peter 2:1-2 which says, "So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander. Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation." He also

cited I Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:11 and 6:8.

"It would not hurt Don Touchton to do that, to obey those verses," Moody said.

Moody suggested a banner be placed over the podium at the convention that quotes Hebrews 6:1, "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity."

Others were mentioned in the letter but had already answered Touchton's charges through other public statements.

Touchton also talked about autonomy and said only the churches are autonomous. He said, "Not only are the boards, agencies, commissions and institutions not autonomous by design, they are also not autonomous by definition." He encouraged Southern Baptists to "stop being so timid" in directing their agencies.

He said extreme denominational loyalty is idolatry. "The denominational employee who labels a pastor disloyal because he did not choose to be educated by Southern Baptist Convention schools is treading on thin ice," said Touchton, a graduate of Houston Baptist University.

Touchton said he wrote the treatise out of frustration over his viewpoints never getting heard and over similar viewpoints of others being "shunted" aside at annual meetings. He said resolutions from the "conservative" element are killed in committee and attempts to bring them to the floor are shut off.

And, he said many conservatives are simply not informed about the inerrancy issue. "Most, if not all, of the state denominational papers are committed to reporting in such a way as to minimize, obscure or distort the issue," the letter said.

James Lee Young, editor of the Rocky Mountain Baptist, said, "In Colorado, we cover all the news. It's sad when a convention official will spend so much time and energy running down the denomination instead of uplifting it."

Young, who was furious over the letter, said "Mr. Touchton owes the whole denomination an apology. I think he's gone overboard and impugned all of us."

Touchton, who said he did not intend his letter to be antagonistic, reiterated his concern over the issue of inerrancy. "If we fail to discuss it," he said, "it's going to be the biggest blunder we've ever made."

-30-

Tom Brannon Named
Texas PR Director

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DALLAS (BP)--Thomas J. Brannon, director of public relations for the South Carolina Baptist Convention for 15 years, has been elected director of public relations for the Texas Baptist executive board, effective Sept. 1.

Brannon, 42, will direct the 12-member public relations staff of the 2.2 million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas. He succeeds Richard T. McCartney who was named editor of the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger and director of public relations for the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

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Under Brannon's coordination are news/information, graphic arts, audio-visual and technical services for the Texas convention's executive board agencies. Brannon will be chief of the Dallas bureau of Baptist Press, news service of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Brannon will be a member of the 11-member administrative staff of the Baptist General Convention of Texas executive board.

More than 4,000 churches and missions are affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, which owns and operates 23 colleges and universities, hospitals, children's homes and homes for the aging. Its 1980 Cooperative Program budget is \$34.6 million.

A native of Greer, S.C., Brannon is a graduate of North Greenville College, and has attended Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

A former director of public relations for South Carolina state trade schools, he is a frequent speaker and workshop leader on all facets of religious public relations/communications work and is a regular contributor to many denominational publications.

In May, Brannon was elected president of the Religious Public Relations Council, the interfaith professional organization of religious communicators from the United States, Canada and several other countries.

-30-

(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Dallas bureau of Baptist Press.

Baptists Walsh, Kimball
Attend Iran Conference

By Norman Jameson

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6/4/80

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptists John Walsh and Charles Kimball were among 10 Americans attending an "American Intervention" conference in Tehran, Iran.

Walsh, a Baptist chaplain at Princeton University, and Kimball, a doctoral student in world religions at Harvard University, were expressly invited by Iranian President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr to participate, according to Walsh's wife, Karen.

The two were part of a seven-man fact-finding group that went to Iran in December 1979, with Jimmy Allen, now president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission. In December, they talked with the Ayatollah Khomeini on Christmas Day, spent five hours with students holding 53 American hostages, and visited with other Iranian officials.

Upon their return, Walsh called for an international tribunal to investigate charges of Iranian students against their deposed dictator. He said then, "Such a tribunal would probably expose areas of U.S. involvement in the misuse of power during the shah's regime." Allen and Kimball were less adamant, though Kimball wrote extensively about his trip.

He wrote in the Harvard divinity school review: "I came home convinced that the American people must come to understand more fully the anguish through which Iran has come if we are to achieve a framework for future cooperation. The process may be slow. Patience and empathetic understanding are required."

Walsh and Kimball spent the intervening months speaking with both American and Iranian University students, opening what Mrs. Walsh called, a good dialogue. Consequently, when considering a list of participants in the conference held to air grievances against the United States, Bani-Sadr asked that Kimball and Walsh be included.

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The Iranian government is paying the expenses of the two, according to Mrs. Walsh.

The Americans, including former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark and Nobel Prize-winning biologist George Wald, defied a Justice Department ban on travel to Iran to participate in the conference. In breaking the April 17 ban on nearly all travel to Iran, Walsh, Kimball and the others could face prosecution and up to 10 years in prison and fines of as much as \$50,000.

The Justice Department, which has ultimate jurisdiction, has made no decision on whether to prosecute. A spokesman for the department said no penalties are likely to be sought or fines assessed until the group returns.

Secretary of State Edmund Muskie has said that the effect of the group's visit to Iran, whether it does open dialogue or instead aggravates the situation, could be a factor in his decision whether or not to seek prosecution.

State Department spokesman Hodding Carter called the four-day conference "a propaganda circus."

Walsh is a Southern Baptist home missionary, employed by the Home Mission Board in Atlanta, Ga., but assigned through the Baptist Convention of New York to student work at Princeton. William G. Tanner, executive director of the Home Mission Board, emphasized that Walsh's action was taken as a private citizen and the Home Mission Board has no involvement.

Kimball, 30, is a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., where he was an "A" student. At Harvard, he majors in the study of Islam. He spent a year in Cairo, Egypt on full scholarship studying Islam in Arabic.

Before leaving for Iran, Walsh and Kimball told close friends and associates they believed if the Iranians felt their case received a fair hearing at the crimes tribunal they may be willing to release some of the hostages into their custody.

They said they realized that Bani-Sadr and Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, who want an end to the crisis, have risked their political futures on this conference. Their efforts to end the crisis have met resistance from both the militants holding the hostages and their allies among the Islamic fundamentalist clergy.

The American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia said the Americans accepted the invitation to attend the conference "in the hope that they may help to diffuse tensions between the two countries."

"The delegation believes that its participation may begin a needed dialogue," the group said. "The delegation has been assured that the conference will entertain discussions of every relevant issue including the great concern for the American hostages."

Kimball and Walsh were scheduled to return to the U.S. June 7. Walsh, at least, was expected to attend the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis, Mo., June 10-12.

Others in the delegation were: Los Angeles lawyer Leonard Weinglass; Paul Washington, black rector of the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia; Lennox Hind, professor of law at Rutgers University; John Derrase, free lance journalist from New York; Kay Camp, president of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; and Mary Anderson, member of the Middle East panel of the American Friends Service Committee.