



-- FEATURES
produced by Baptist Press

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July 21, 1980

80-118

Perspective of Past Provides
McClellan Wisdom for Future

By Craig Bird

ST. LOUIS (BP)--In 1948 Albert McClellan covered the Southern Baptist Convention as editor of the Oklahoma Baptist newspaper. The meeting in St. Louis was bitter as Frank Norris rented an auditorium in the same building as the SBC.

Norris, who led a charge against Southern Baptist "modernists" and eventually led a split with the convention, "filled that auditorium just prior to our meeting and preached against the convention and castigated it," McClellan recalled at the most recent meeting of the SBC in St. Louis.

As the associate executive secretary of the SBC Executive Committee thought back over his 50 years of observing Southern Baptist life, the final session of the 1980 SBC meeting was unfolding in St. Louis. It was the last session for McClellan as secretary of program planning. He retires Dec. 31 after 31 years on the Executive Committee staff.

He was tired, having worked 10 to 12 hour days with the resolutions committee--a committee that was heavily influenced by another reaction to "modernists"--or "liberals" as they are termed now. Around the convention had swirled muted predictions of splits, strongly worded resolutions aimed at stripping convention employees of voting privileges at future conventions and at requiring signed statements of faith.

But Albert McClellan wasn't ready to assign the SBC a weakened role in years to come.

"I see a bright future for our churches," he insisted. "Oh, we're going to change, we've always changed. I know there will be a regrouping, a reassessment after these confrontations."

"These things (clashes such as the present inerrancy battle) come and go, rise and fall, they provide a shaping and a reshaping. Right now, as a convention, we are going through an ebbing of spirit--but we will come out of it even stronger. We are shaped for the future out of even the most negative events," he explained. "And what happened here is becoming a healing process. It will help us find new directions of service. It will drive us to examine where we stand and why we stand there."

McClellan, recognized for years as one of the deepest thinkers in the convention, did not reach his conclusions lightly. Nor does he feel the bright future he foresees is inevitable.

There are elements that could wreck the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination (13.4 million members). And there are different "consciousnesses" dominating the Southern Baptist churches of the 1980s than those of the 1950s.

"The spirit of independence that was on the outside when Frank Norris was attacking the convention is now on the inside," McClellan said. "If we again have someone come into our midst and write books and make accusations and get people to following him--then we could be in trouble as a convention."

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"But if outsiders will leave Southern Baptists alone, we will learn and grow from this experience."

McClellan sees a major shift since the 1950s from an attitude of affirmation to one of defamation, "toward one another and toward each other," he said. "This business of accusing your brothers can come close to witch-hunting and derives from our Puritan background."

He says the convention outlook has shifted from rural to urban since 1949 when he joined the Executive Committee as public relations officer. Churches are less willing to cooperate with the national convention, state conventions are becoming continually stronger and the push toward "so-called super churches" is becoming widespread.

"In the 1950s there was a tremendous loyalty to Sunday School as a program of enlistment," McClellan explains. "Our people could travel 3,000 miles and go to church and find the same quarterly, the same six-point record system, the same registry on the walls and the same posters in the halls. This developed an awareness of 'I am a Southern Baptist' that was more than a label, it was a commitment. That made us denomination conscious."

"We were missions conscious because of the Advance Program launched in 1947 (comparable to Bold Mission Thrust now) that had a goal of 2,500 missionaries. And we had a revival conscious, which I distinguish from evangelistic conscious, because every church had regular revivals, most several a year and many of them lasted for two weeks."

McClellan feels these "conscious's" are still "a part of us" but are less dominant now as a whole new set of conscious's emerge:

Congregations are more building conscious, "The plant becomes the thing and the pastor tends to grade himself on the size of his gym and the number of buses the church operates";

Larger churches especially are obsessed with media--they have to be on television or have a radio show and the media becomes not so much an evangelistic arm as a way of enhancing the audience and a status symbol, and;

We respond more to our culture. "Some of the things we do in our churches are nothing more than an accommodation to the times instead of being biblically, mission or historically based. They are desperate to be like whatever is working somewhere else in our denomination or community."

"I'm not saying these things are bad, I'm just saying they are there and they affect the way the Southern Baptist Convention functions," he said.

What could wreck the SBC?

"What I fear the most is the 'other side' organizing to oppose the announced move by the conservatives to take over the convention," McClellan declared. "A convention can survive one organized group but it can't tolerate two competing factions without splitting."

He pointed to the historical example of the Northern Baptist Convention. In 1950 it split after a power struggle between the Roger Williams Fellowship and the Conservative Fellowship, becoming the American Baptist Convention and the Conservative Baptist Convention.

"You can check their records and see how badly it hurt them--they have never recovered," McClellan said. Fortunately, he sees three forces that help offset any tendency for the organization of conflicting caucuses: the strong state conventions, the six regional seminaries and a more democratic organization of the convention than the Northern Baptists used.

"We'll be okay," he declared again, getting ready to bite into the cold hot dog that would be his evening meal as it neared 8 p.m. "I have great confidence in Southern Baptists. Our future is bright."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers.

Victoria Tolbert Set Free;
Given Security in Liberia

Baptist Press
7/21/80

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Victoria A. Tolbert, wife of the late William R. Tolbert, former president of Liberia, has been set free after being held by authorities since her husband's assassination April 12.

Mrs. Tolbert, president of Woman's Missionary Union for the Liberia Baptist Convention, was released July 12, according to John E. Mills, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's director for west Africa, who just returned from Liberia. She was given a house, a car, a driver, and two security officers and was told she was free to go anywhere, according to a government radio report.

Southern Baptist missionaries have visited her and said she looks well, Mills reported. Several family members are still being questioned by a government tribunal and one of Tolbert's sons, A.B. Tolbert, is still in custody.

Mills met with the permanent secretary to Liberia's head of state who told him that missionary activity is still appreciated and that the country still needs Southern Baptist help, especially in education. Mills said an 11 p.m. curfew is still in effect but churches are meeting normally.

Baptist women from all over the world met in connection with the 14th Baptist World Congress in Toronto, Canada, the week previous to Mrs. Tolbert's release and made her release a matter of prayer. A resolution asking for Mrs. Tolbert's release was passed by the Woman's Department of Baptist World Alliance.

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Baylor Underscores Bible,
1963 Baptist Statement

By Toby Druin

Baptist Press
7/21/80

WACO, Texas (BP)--Baylor University trustees have unanimously approved a 10-point report of their Academic Affairs Committee, which shelves the controversial

"People of the Covenant" as a primary textbook for Old Testament courses and underscores commitment to a 1963 statement of Baptist Faith and Message for current and future faculty members of the department of religion.

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The Bible, the statement said, will be the textbook for survey courses required of all Baylor students. The department of religion will teach it as the word of God and each teacher will "make clear his own personal belief and position" in line with affirmation of his commitment to the 1963 statement.

In a question and answer session after presentation of the report, Baylor President Abner V. McCall says he expects no changes of teachers in the department of religion and said the report was "largely a declaration of what we're already doing."

"No major changes are mandated, just putting emphasis on the Bible and letting it speak for itself," McCall said.

"People of the Covenant" was never a basic textbook, the president said. "All of the professors use several and it was just one of them."

The new plan will list three reference books of which "People of the Covenant" may be one, McCall said. "Whatever the mainstream of Baptist belief is the students are going to hear about it," he said.

All of the current professors in the department of religion have voluntarily signed the 1963 statement of Baptist Faith and Message, McCall said. It is not a requirement, he added, although a faculty member's position on the statement is "ascertained" before he is hired.

The report also calls for a Bible conference each year at Baylor to provide fellowship, lectures, inspiration and discussion for Baptist leadership.

The trustees approved the report in a closed session in Pat Neff Hall, the university administration building, on July 18, denying access to news media "to enable the trustees to freely discuss the report," said W. Dewey Presley of Dallas, chairman of the trustees.

Discussion was "open and candid" during the meeting, which lasted more than an hour, said James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas. Draper's charges last fall that "People of the Covenant," written in 1963 by H. Jack Flanders and two other men, was "liberal" prompted the year-long study.

Flanders became chairman of the department of religion June 1, succeeding Ray Summers who retired.

Flanders' chairmanship of the department was never discussed, said Draper and Milton E. Cunningham of Houston, chairman of the academic affairs committee, who read the statement at a press conference.

Draper said he had positive feelings about the report and its approval and said, "If we mean what we say, it will give us a means for assuring the future" of teaching at the Baylor department of religion.

Draper said there were no "winners and losers" in the meeting and that the report was "something that lets us all work within established guidelines."

If it had been left up to him to draft the report, there would have been changes, Draper said, but differences among Baptists have been taken into account.

Flanders said after the Academic Affairs Committee report he had not attended the meeting of the committee as it drafted its final report, had not seen it, and could not comment on it.

"I will simply do my best in the future as the chairman of the department of religion," he said. "I am committed to my assignment here."

The statement noted that the annual meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas last fall in Lubbock asked the trustees and administration of Texas Baptist institutions to "fulfill their responsibilities and direct the affairs of our institutions in line with historic Baptist beliefs."

Cunningham said the action of the committee and trustees fulfills that convention directive.

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Heat Wave Stops
Saturday Camping

Baptist Press
7/21/80

DAVIS, Okla. (BP)--The incessant heat wave choking the Southwest has prompted a water shortage at the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma's assembly ground and forced cancellation of Saturday camping activities for the remainder of the season.

A sinking water table and a spring whose production has dropped to its lowest level in 75 years has forced the shortening of the camp weeks at Falls Creek assembly grounds in the Arbuckle Mountains. The assembly handles over 30,000 campers in nine summer weeks.

Grounds manager Harry Dodd brought in a well-drilling contractor to search for more water. The assembly also recently tied into the Davis city water system.

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