



## **BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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### **'Concerned' Pastors Discuss Future; Deny Forming Faction**

By Dan Martin

**GATLINBURG, Tenn. (BP)**--An informal group of 15 to 20 "concerned" pastors met here to discuss the issues and future of the Southern Baptist Convention, but deny they are forming a political faction within the denomination.

The meeting was held in reaction to a group which has set as its goal capturing control of the Southern Baptist Convention, its agencies and institutions.

"We are taking them at their word," said Cecil Sherman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., who organized the meeting. "I regret this has come to pass, but I feel we have no choice (but to fight back)."

The catalyst which set off the meeting was a published report which quoted Texas Judge Paul Pressler outlining a plan to capture control of the convention through appointment of trustees to the agencies, boards and institutions.

Sherman, who also is president of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, said no formalized organization was planned, but that participants "have returned to our states to try to gather some friends to go to the convention," referring to the 1981 Southern Baptist Convention, to be held in June in Los Angeles.

Sherman added: "Somebody is going to have to stay after this for several years, continuing as long as our convention is in this broken condition."

Sherman declined to identify other participants, saying all would "tell the truth" if asked about their own participation, but had agreed not to reveal the identities of the other participants.

However, Baptist Press has learned the participants included at least one former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Carl Bates, pastor of First Baptist Church of Charlotte, N.C. Also, all of the participants were pastors; no denominational worker attended.

"I would not presume to tell you whether we have any clout," Sherman said. "We are just people who think the stated objectives of Judge Pressler and Dr. (Paige) Patterson mean harm to the convention... We reluctantly assembled to work to change the leadership of the convention. We did not turn this corner, we were jerked around it by events in Houston and St. Louis (the 1979 and 1980 meetings of the SBC)."

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Welton Gaddy, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas, said: "The only clout we have is in influencing people around us. This (the Gatlinburg meeting) is a diverse group, with concerns for the convention which transcend our diversity. That is indication of some clout."

Although the controversy within the 13.4 million-member denomination swirls around the "inerrancy and infallibility" of the Bible, Sherman and his brother Bill, pastor of Woodmont Baptist Church in Nashville, claim the real issue is "not theology or the Bible," but an "overt power grab." Bill Sherman adds: "Never in the SBC have we had a group who has come out with the stated purpose—the transparent purpose—of taking command. Our system is built on mutual trust and cooperation, so we have been vulnerable to this."

Another participant, Kenneth Chafin, pastor of South Main Baptist Church in Houston, adds: "They have taken a theological word (inerrancy) and have used it to confuse the issue. The issue is really power."

Several of the participants claim the "inerrancy" faction really is composed of non-cooperating Baptists, rather than cooperating Southern Baptists.

"The difference between a non-cooperating Baptist and a Southern Baptist is how much they give to support the work of missions we are about," said Bill Sherman.

He maintained a majority of the inerrancy supporters give minimally to the Cooperative Program. "We have a group among us who want complete control of the convention, yet are giving \$1 a week. They want to tell us how to run it, how to spend the money, what to believe. But they are not paying for it."

Adds Cecil Sherman: "The real Southern Baptists have been outflanked by the clever, political work of a minority. I think that I and my kind are the real Southern Baptists, friends and supporters of missions. Missions is what called this convention together and what will hold us together rather than doctrinal issues."

"If they (the inerrantists) believe the Bible so much, why don't they put their money where their mouth is? The real contributors to Southern Baptist life ought to determine the policies."

Another participant, Vernon Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church, Alexandria, Va., said the inerrancy debate puts the SBC "in danger of being side-tracked from the basic support of missions and evangelism and the strengthening of our institutions. The people who have been supportive of the institutions and missions should be heard from."

All of those interviewed by Baptist Press see the possibility of a split, although none want one to occur. "We are not interested in a split," said Lavonn Brown, pastor of First Baptist Church of Norman, Okla. "We are simply interested in knowing what we can do to move the convention to a more moderate direction than some of the extremism that has come of late."

Brown, a former trustee of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, added: "Our question is does anyone, regardless of theological position, have the right to seek to control the SBC?"

Chafin, chairman of trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, noted his reluctance to form a "counter machine" to the Pressler-Patterson coalition.

"I hate to see it, because then it becomes a power struggle, where you don't have trust levels, good communications. It is just an effort to see which group can haul the most warm bodies in to vote," Chafin said.

"I am not really interested in creating a 'political' party, but I also am not going to roll over and let a group of Frank Norrisite fundamentalists steal the institutions of my denomination," he added.

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Crowe To Head  
Holman Division

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--E. Odell Crowe, 30-year employee of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, has been named the first director of the Holman division, the board's Bible publishing arm.

Crowe, 55, has been manager of the operations department in the board's book store division for seven years, where he was responsible for advertising and for merchandising recommendations to Baptist book stores. He assumes the new position immediately.

Crowe has worked closely with editors of state Baptist newspapers for seven years to place advertising in their publications, which have a combined circulation of two million.

Holman, the first Bible publishing company in America, was purchased 18 months ago by the Sunday School Board. Holman markets a wide selection of Bibles for all family members. Crowe has sold Holman Bibles at the retail level for 30 years.

Crowe, a native of Kentucky, is a graduate of Vanderbilt University and Peabody College in Nashville.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Sunday School Board bureau of Baptist Press.

Foreign Mission Board Executive  
Rogers Smith Dies in Richmond

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Rogers M. Smith, 68, special assistant to the president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, died early Oct. 3 in a Richmond hospital. He had been hospitalized since August for treatment of multiple myeloma, a type of bone cancer.

Smith took the responsibility of special assistant with emphasis on correlating intercessory prayer in March as part of President R. Keith Parks' reorganization and desire to encourage and focus prayer for world missions.

Besides encouraging Foreign Mission Board staffers in intercessory prayer and serving as a liaison to prayer groups across the Southern Baptist Convention, Smith also administered Margaret Fund scholarships for missionary children, worked with the board's more than 250 emeritus missionaries and with state Baptist foundations and served as unofficial pastor for staff members with sickness or death in their families.

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For 21 years he was administrative associate to Emeritus Executive Director Baker J. Cauthen. Before that he worked as the board's associate secretary for promotion and as a field representative.

He had visited Southern Baptist mission fields around the world, earning the fond title of "Balloon Man" as he passed out balloons with "God is love; Jesus saves" printed on them to children in the United States and abroad.

Before joining the board staff in 1954, he worked with students in Tennessee for four years as student secretary and teacher in the School of Religion at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and for 10 years as secretary of the student department of the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

A native of Waco, Texas, Smith received the bachelor of arts degree from Baylor University there and the master of religious education and the master and doctor of theology degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

A member of the Kiwanis Club of Richmond since 1959, Smith worked with the travelog program and was chairman and vice chairman of several committees. At First Baptist Church, Richmond, Smith had taught Sunday School and served on several committees, including pastor care and community services.

He is survived by his wife, the former Evelyn Melton, originally of Fort Worth, and two children, Sara Sue Athans of Birmingham, Ala., and Rogers M. Smith of Houston, Texas; three grandchildren; and a sister, Mrs. Ike Ashburn of Austin, Texas.

Funeral services were held Oct. 5 at First Baptist Church, Richmond. Interment was to be at 11 a.m. Tuesday, Oct. 7, in Fort Worth, with James E. Coggin, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church, officiating.

The family asks that memorial donations be made to a trust fund for the education of missionary children or to the American Cancer Society.

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

Niagara Crowds Contrast  
Baptist Church Challenge

By David Wilkinson

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GRAND ISLAND, N.Y. (BP)—When Baptist pastor Terry Robertson stands before his congregation on a typical autumn Sunday morning, he looks into the faces of two to three dozen people.

Meanwhile, less than five miles away, awesome Niagara Falls displays its thundering power before a delighted audience that ranges from 70,000 to more than 100,000 people.

The stark contrast in interest illustrates the magnitude of the challenge facing 25-year-old Robertson and the small, struggling congregation of First Baptist Church, Grand Island, N.Y.

First Baptist is the only Baptist church and one of only 10 churches on Grand Island, a township of more than 17,000 people. Average Sunday morning attendance on the island for all churches combined is only 2,900 people.

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But Robertson views those statistics as a challenge rather than a formidable obstacle, and the soft-spoken, easy-going Alabamian and his wife, Elizabeth, are deeply committed to the task of sharing the gospel with the unchurched population of Grand Island.

Robertson also has surveyed part of the nearby Lewiston community and hopes to establish the first Baptist witness in that township of 16,000.

His immediate priority, however, is to lead the Grand Island congregation to establish a presence in the area which can later serve as a base for launching specific ministry and witness efforts.

"It's really important to knock on doors so people can see that Baptists are doing something," says the spectacled, sandy-haired pastor. "Most people I visit seem to be pleased that Baptists are here. They may not be in church next Sunday, but at least they know we're here."

A closely related priority, he adds, is to establish meaningful relationships with people in the community. "We must do more than simply invite people to attend church," he explains. "They need to know that we really care about them."

Robertson says his experience on Grand Island has also convinced him of the need for greater awareness among Baptist lay persons of the mission needs in "pioneer areas."

"I think Baptist laymen have a general idea of what missions is all about, but they need more specific, personalized, focused information if they are going to become actively involved," he explains. "I would urge laymen to visit mission areas such as Grand Island. They might even make it a part of a vacation trip with their family.

"If they could just get a glimpse of the tremendous need and the numerous ways Baptist laymen could help, I think it would give new meaning and vitality to Bold Mission Thrust."