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Southern Baptist Unity
Cracking, Historian Says

By Craig Hardee

WAKE FOREST, N.C.(BP)--The Southern Baptist unity is "not breaking up," but is "cracking" and "reshaping," a church historian says.

Walter Shurden, professor of church history and dean of the school of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, gave his analysis of the current upheavals in the nation's largest Protestant denomination in the Carver-Barnes Lectures recently at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The "cracking" and "reshaping," he said, are caused by internal and external stresses and the emergence of a new way of doing things.

The synthesis, or unity, of Southern Baptists, Shurden said, was woven from diverse beginnings into a fabric of cooperation around the theme of missions over the past three centuries.

But now, he continued, since the 1940s the denomination has undergone cultural and theological stresses which not only threaten its historical moorings but also its effectiveness as a Christian witness.

Shurden characterized the elements contributing to the development of the Southern Baptist Convention as a "goulash" of ecclesiastical order, revivalistic momentum, southern culture and narrow sectarianism.

Contributing to the mixture in the 18th century were the Baptists of Charleston who emphasized theological consensus, ministerial education and stability, he said.

Baptists in North Carolina brought an "adventurous spirit, love for liberty, and revivalistic momentum" to the body, while those from Georgia contributed a cultural identity, the "southernness" of the denomination.

The fourth element in the mixture was the so-called Tennessee tradition identified as an attitude that Southern Baptists were "the only ones God had."

Never a denomination with a monolithic hierarchy, Southern Baptists were fairly solidified during the early part of the 20th century. Following World War II, however, Shurden says "phenomenal stress has been on the Southern Baptist synthesis."

"Migration and a continuing emphasis on evangelism" have created a new geographical distribution of Southern Baptists, who now span the United States. This geographical expansion, he says, has "produced a growing cultural pluralism," with, for example, 30 percent of the Southern Baptist churches in California composed of ethnical minorities.

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Another stress point, Shurden says, is denominational loyalty. While Southern Baptists stayed "a country mile" away from the ecumenical movement of the early part of this century, some Southern Baptists who would have been the sharpest critics of that kind of ecumenism are right in the middle of a new fundamentalist ecumenism."

Encouraged by the boom of the electronic church and para-church groups "this new non-denominationalism has made unbelievable inroads into Southern Baptist life," he added.

This new-found allegiance, Shurden believes, leads to a stress point centered around finances. He pointed to the large sums "being siphoned off from the Cooperative Program (the denomination's pooled fund for missions, benevolences and education) and channelled to non-denominational causes."

The synthesis of Southern Baptists has been challenged by four controversies during the 20th century, according to Shurden. All four have centered on the Bible, but "the social matrix of the current controversy (over inerrancy of the Bible) is more inflammatory" than any of the others.

"The Southern Baptist inerrantists are a part of both the new religious and political right wing." Shurden says many agree with church historian Martin Marty that "the world is not moving toward toleration but away from it."

Shurden pointed out that Southern Baptists were relatively free from major controversy from the beginning of the convention in 1845 to the early 1920s.

The first controversy dealt with biblical interpretation and scientific evolution, and Southern Baptists' first confession of faith was one of the results, something that many had stubbornly resisted from the beginning.

Two other debates, the Elliott controversy in 1963 and the Broadman Bible Commentary controversy in 1972, resulted in the firing of a seminary professor and the rewriting of the commentary on Genesis.

The current controversy, Shurden believes, will produce a polarization among Baptists, accusations against Baptist college and seminary teachers, intensification of the debate, and possible jeopardizing of the convention's Bold Mission Thrust.

Shurden sees the current issue as political rather than doctrinal. "They (the inerrantists) are going after the machinery of the convention and the minds of the people," he alleged.

While the official state Baptist papers are solidly against the movement, two unofficial Baptist papers are promoting the controversy. He also believes the Baptist Faith and Message statement written in 1925 and revised in 1963 also is being used. He said the prediction of Baptist historian W.W. Barnes of a trend toward creedalism is accurate. "Creedalism is not creeping among us, it is galloping," Shurden said.

Even though Baptists historically have shunned creedalism, Shurden said, that is not his primary concern. "The unique thing, and the most dangerous thing," he said, "is that we now have for the first time in the Southern Baptist Convention a highly organized, apparently well-funded, partisan political party going not only for the minds of the Southern Baptist people but for the machinery of the Southern Baptist Convention."

"In no controversy in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention," he said, "has the system been misused in this way. Those who say that 'this is just the same old thing' are unaware of our heritage."

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(Hardee is newswriter for Southeastern Seminary.)

Southern Baptists Minister
In Aftermath of Inferno

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
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LAS VEGAS, Nev. (BP)--Flames and smoke which ransacked the MGM Grand Hotel Nov. 21 left at least 83 persons dead and more than 500 others injured. But from the time the blaze was first discovered, Southern Baptists were on hand to minister and help.

Probably the first Baptist to step forward was bell captain Steve Cardon, a layman and member of The Church on the Strip. Observers said Cardon repeatedly ignored risks to himself so he could tell hotel guests about the blaze and lead them to safety.

While Cardon was doing his job, other Baptists arrived at the hotel to do theirs. "At least two, possibly three or more" Southern Baptist firemen fought the blaze and helped rescue stranded hotel guests, Las Vegas ministers reported.

One of those ministers, Michael Hogue, associate pastor of The Church on the Strip, showed up in the early moments of the disaster. He helped victims get on buses bound for two Red Cross rescue centers. Later, he went to the centers to comfort the injured and the grieving. Then he worked at the morgue, aiding stricken people who came to identify the bodies of friends and relatives.

Stanley Unruh, pastor of Sunrise Southern Baptist Church, heard about the blaze too late to minister on the scene, but he did what many Southern Baptists did. He found other ways to help.

Unruh comforted members of his congregation who worked at the hotel and had friends and co-workers who were killed or severely injured in the fire. He and members of the church donated blood for victims who needed transfusions and gave shoes and clothing to survivors who lost theirs in the flames.

Unruh also "adopted" hotel guests who were left in the city under severe circumstances. He helped care for Ann Smith, a consultant for the Baptist Sunday School Board, and her husband, Charles. Mrs. Smith broke her leg during the fire and Unruh helped watch over her while providing her husband with food, clothing, housing and transportation during her stay in the hospital.

Fortunately, no Southern Baptists other than Mrs. Smith sustained serious injuries, and none were killed.

With their members safe and the Red Cross handling most of the physical needs, many pastors of the city's 16 Southern Baptist churches were free to tend to spiritual matters. Like Hogue, they uplifted the injured and comforted the grieving. Like Unruh, they counseled with people who lost friends and encouraged injured visitors and their families.

Pastors claimed one of the most encouraging messages came from an out-of-town Southern Baptist. Evangelist Billy Graham, in Las Vegas for a series of meetings, preached on the reasons tragedies occur.

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"He preached that sermon the night after the fire, and I think he helped us as much as anyone could," said Jim McElroy, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church.

"Most everybody has gotten pretty sensitive," added Hogue. "The whole town is going through a stage of corporate grief. Suddenly, life is so precious.

"That feeling may remain," he said. "And the period of ministering to people's needs will not soon be over."

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Hawaiian Baptists Debate,
Table Integrity Resolution

Baptist Press
11/25/80

MOLOKAI, Hawaii (BP)--Hawaiian Baptists, meeting on the island of Molokai, debated and tabled a resolution on doctrinal integrity.

"The messengers said they feel the Baptist Faith and Message statement, though not a requirement, is an adequate expression of their belief," said Edmond Walker, executive secretary-treasurer of the Hawaii Baptist Convention.

Messengers also heard, on first reading, a constitutional amendment which would require the credentials committee to "take a more careful look" before seating messengers from new churches seeking to affiliate with the convention.

The amendment will be voted on at the 1981 annual meeting.

The meeting was held on Molokai, which also is the site of the leper colony, Kalaupapa.

In other business, messengers adopted a budget of \$872,196, of which slightly under \$300,000 will come from the 60 congregations affiliated with the convention. Hawaii Baptists will share 25 percent of undesignated funds with the worldwide Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program, the same percentage as last year.

Bob Duffer, pastor of Kihei Baptist Church on the island of Maui, was elected president, the first time the president has not resided on the island of Oahu.

The 1981 meeting will be in Nuuanu Baptist Church in Honolulu, Nov. 11-13.

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Tax Exclusion Chances Up;
Parks Urges Final Drive

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--Prospects for passage of a measure to restore the \$20,000 exclusion on income earned by religious and other charitable workers in lesser developed countries improved here when the Senate Finance Committee attached it as an amendment to another bill expected to pass this session.

Before legislators left Washington for a brief Thanksgiving holiday, the Senate panel, chaired by Sen. Russell B. Long, D-La., added the income tax exclusion language to H.R. 4968, a bill dealing with real estate investment trusts.

Sources close to the finance committee told Baptist Press the bill is likely to pass the Senate after the body returns from the Thanksgiving break on Dec. 1. It would then go to the House of Representatives for action, but only days before final congressional adjournment.

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In an effort to shore up support in the House, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks called on fellow Southern Baptists to encourage members of Congress to support H.R. 4968 and the income tax exclusion when it reaches the House floor.

Parks, who has been highly visible in the final push for congressional action on what nearly all observers agree is a non-controversial issue, wired an open letter to Southern Baptists through the 34 editors of state Baptist newspapers across the country. His appeal, declaring that "significant action has begun stirring" on the income tax exclusion within Congress, asked Southern Baptists to wire or call their own House members asking them to support H.R. 4968.

"It is too late for letters to be effective. Only phone calls and telegrams will get the job done," he warned.

For the past several months most legislative attention to the matter has centered in the Senate, where Sen. John H. Chafee, R-R.I., and numerous co-sponsors have pushed a bill to renew the exclusion.

According to finance committee members, the exclusion was inadvertently dropped two years ago when Congress passed the Foreign Earned Income Act of 1978, a measure designed to tax the income of Americans living abroad. Under previous tax law, however, charitable workers overseas who earned less than \$20,000 annually were exempted from paying U.S. income taxes.

Among the reasons for the older law was the view that Americans serving such organizations overseas provide services which reap good will toward the United States and the fact that nearly all American citizens living abroad also pay taxes to host governments.

Unless Congress acts to restore the income tax exclusion, charitable organizations stand to lose an estimated \$25 million annually.

The Foreign Mission Board alone would lose \$1 million per year to the Internal Revenue Service. Payment for tax year 1979 would be due Dec. 15 and for tax year 1980 June 15, 1981, meaning approximately \$2 million would have to be paid during the FMB's current fiscal year.

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Illinois Staff Plans
'Unique Celebration'

Baptist Press
11/25/80

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (BP)--Breaking a custom of several years, employees of the Illinois Baptist State Association will forego their usual staff Christmas dinner for an evening of fellowship, centered on world hunger.

"Instead of using Cooperative Program monies for a dinner, we felt it more fitting to use the occasion for a unique and contemporary celebration," explained Executive Director Ernest E. Mosley. "We may experience the true celebration of Christmas in this manner more than we have become accustomed to."

"The World Comes to Christmas Dinner" is the theme for the event. It will feature minimum servings of rice to illustrate how so many people exist on so little.

"It's an effort to get at the real meaning of the Incarnation, which is giving and serving, rather than getting and keeping," explained planning chairman Mike Copen, associate evangelism director.

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NEWS SERVICE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION