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Pressler Defines Role
In West Virginia Speech

By Jack Walls

CHARLESTON, W. Va. (BP)--Paul Pressler, a Houston appeals court judge, spelled out what he believes his role to be in the Southern Baptist Convention during a speech and question and answer session in Cross Lanes Baptist Church.

"My role is to say to people that we do have a problem," he told pastors, laypersons and state staff members. "Second, it is to say that there is a solution to this problem and third, to motivate the people into activity."

Pressler said: "I do not think that at the present time Southern Baptists have gone the way the Methodist seminaries have gone, the Presbyterian seminaries have gone and those denominations have gone. But I do feel that at certain places we are creating a situation where the floodgates are being opened for various doctrinal deviations and that our children and our grandchildren will reap the havoc of the ambiguity which we have allowed to be created at the present time if we don't do something about it."

He told his audience of having watched the decline of New England churches because of liberal theology, and his concern during the (Ralph) Elliott controversy in the SBC in the early 1960s.

Even though Elliott was fired from a teaching post at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Pressler said he was disappointed Southern Baptist leadership did not take decisive action on the theological issues, but dismissed the professor, not for his views on Genesis but for other reasons.

Pressler, who said he has been "amazed and disturbed" at personal attacks against him during his efforts to point out liberalism in the denomination, encouraged participants to deal with the issues rather than the personalities involved.

Here are some of the questions and answers:

Q. Do you support the Cooperative Program?

A. "The answer is 'yes'."

Q. Is one of your goals to split the SBC?

A. "Certainly not. I am not going anyplace, but I am going to continue to talk just as I am talking today to stimulate various people to take action and participate in the system in order to effectuate the result that the Southern Baptist Convention continue to be a vibrant force for God."

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Q. Do you see your understanding of the Bible the only or only correct understanding?

A. "We are not talking about an interpretation of the Scripture. We are talking about what the Scripture is."

Q. Do you feel that the Baptist press represents Southern Baptists?

A. "I certainly hope not." Pressler cited several uncomplimentary articles from various state papers.

Q. Do you make a distinction between the various Baptist state editors and Baptist Press, which comes out of Nashville?

A. "You are very correct. I did not make a distinction in my answer and I apologize. I was lopping all state papers and Baptist Press together."

Q. Do you feel that the editors of the Southern Baptist Advocate and the Southern Baptist Journal practice journalistic integrity?

A. "They are two separate publications entirely directed by different people. I do not have confidence in the Southern Baptist Journal. I have failed to see anything in the Southern Baptist Advocate which I think lacks journalistic integrity."

Q. You mentioned earlier that one of your goals in a meeting was to stimulate action. What strategy do you recommend to correct the things you are concerned with?

A. Pressler answered by describing misconceptions about his role at the Houston convention, and, in essence, said: 1. Tell people how the system works. 2. Get a full contingent of messengers at the SBC to vote their convictions.

Q. Then your strategy does not include encouraging local churches to tamper with or use Cooperative Program manipulation to change the course of events?

A. "No. I think everybody must follow his own convictions on that matter. I give to the general program of my church...I never advocate that anybody withhold funds from the Cooperative Program."

Walls is editor of the West Virginia Southern Baptist, journal of the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists. Editorially, Walls expressed appreciation to the church for bringing Pressler to West Virginia, and complimented the Texan for being "a committed Christian and Southern Baptist," who demonstrated "great spirit." He also encouraged West Virginia churches to invite persons of opposing viewpoints, to help people "form honest opinions."

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Reagan Lifts Restrictions
On Building Temperatures

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WASHINGTON (BP)--President Reagan has removed restrictions on temperatures in public buildings, including churches.

In a presidential proclamation which took effect immediately, the president declared:

"Although restrictions on building temperatures may result in reduced consumption of fuel, I have concluded that the regulatory scheme designed to accomplish that objective imposed an excessive regulatory burden and that voluntary restraint and market incentives will achieve substantially the same benefit without the regulatory cost."

Reagan's action canceled previous moves by former president Jimmy Carter requiring temperature controls to save fuel. Originally imposed in July 1979, the restrictions would have remained in effect until Oct. 16.

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Cancellation of the restrictions was seen here as another example of Reagan's determination to sweep out what he views as unnecessary federal regulations.

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Missionary Staffing Contingent
Upon Nigerian Hospital Changes

By Susan Cahen

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Problems at Baptist hospitals in Eku and Ogbomosho, Nigeria, must be solved if Southern Baptist missionaries are going to continue work there, according to a hospital evaluation team report.

Medical missionary forces assigned to the two hospitals could be combined or ultimately withdrawn if operating changes are not made at the hospitals, the report said. The team cited problems in funding, administration and supplying equipment, drugs and personnel.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's committee on west Africa recently approved the report, which came from a survey last fall of three west African hospitals. John E. Mills, the board's area director for west Africa, will submit the team's recommendation to Nigerian Baptist Convention leaders in early March. The Nigerian convention now operates the hospitals which were started by Southern Baptist missionaries. Southern Baptists now have eight doctors and eight nurses on the two staffs.

Political leaders in five Nigerian states have promised a free medical program to their constituents, including the state where the 58-year-old Ogbomosho hospital is located, says Mills. This is what prompted the proposed changes, he explained.

The Ogbomosho hospital started following the free medicine policy last year and the state where Eku is located has proposed a similar program, Mills says. The program means that the Ogbomosho hospital can no longer charge fees, even to those able to pay, because everyone is entitled to free medical attention.

Southern Baptists have not given financial subsidies to the Ogbomosho hospital since 1975 when the government started paying national workers' salaries. The Southern Baptist Convention requires that stance to comply strictly with its mandate of separation of church and state, Mills says.

"The Foreign Mission Board is strongly recommending that the Nigerian Baptist Convention seek a change in status at both hospitals from charitable to private, non-profit institutions," says Mills. With that status, the government would allow the hospital to charge fees and Southern Baptists could help the institutions financially.

The board also has recommended that missionary staffing be contingent on tolerable working conditions, such as adequate supplies of water, electricity, equipment, drugs, personnel and maintenance.

Since the hospital began participation in the government's free medicine program, drug supplies have sometimes been limited; water and electrical services have been erratic; and money for equipment and maintenance, so far, nonexistent.

The acute personnel shortage which affects most Southern Baptist mission hospitals, coupled with the other problems, creates a difficult working situation for people on the field and makes recruiting new staff extremely difficult, says Mills. And, "We cannot afford to lose any of our limited medical missionary forces."

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To help deal with the problems facing these hospitals, the Foreign Mission Board also is recommending that the Nigerian convention appoint separate boards to set policies and govern each hospital.

Boards of visitors should be appointed, the board suggests, to secure support in the local community. They should impress upon the local governments the need for the hospitals to obtain water and electricity on a priority basis. And, they should urge those governments to give immediate attention to securing funds for the hospitals' other needs, the board says.

Mills expects a tough job when he presents the board's recommendation to Nigerian Baptist leaders because "There is a unique problem for us as Southern Baptists in that we cannot accept help from a government and still put Southern Baptist resources into institutions.

"This is totally incomprehensible to the Nigerian people. We are about the only mission group that holds so closely to the tenet of separation of church and state. But, historical wisdom and experience have shown that this is a good idea and is one I subscribe to."

"On the other hand," Mills adds, "the Nigerian sees nothing wrong with some of his tax dollars coming back to the local hospital to provide the best standard of medical care available to everyone—just as we operate in our public schools."

The hospital evaluation team report also recommends a stepped-up recruitment effort in the United States to augment medical missionary forces around the world who are struggling to keep work going.

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Worship on State Campuses
Reaches U.S. Supreme Court

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WASHINGTON (BP)—A classic constitutional clash of free exercise versus government establishment of religion will be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of a group of University of Missouri-Kansas City students who want to worship on campus.

Nearly four years ago, after being denied permission to hold regularly scheduled, Saturday night meetings on campus, 12 students took the university to court, alleging their right to exercise freely their religion had been denied. Named as defendants were Gary E. Widmar, then dean of students, and the governing board of the state university system.

But a federal district judge, issuing a ruling in Dec., 1979, disagreed with the students, thus upholding a set of university regulations forbidding on-campus religious services.

Nine months later, however, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the lower court, setting the stage for university officials to appeal to the nation's high court.

The justices' decision to hear the case marks the first such legal test to arrive at the Supreme Court for full oral argument and decision.

University officials contend that to permit students use of campus buildings for religious services would entangle the state with religion. They note that the students, who belong to a group called Cornerstone, feature such activities in their services as prayer, singing, Bible reading, testimonies and an invitation for inquirers.

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The students, on the other hand, contend that the university's refusal to permit the services on campus discriminates against one class of students in violation of their right to free exercise.

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Americans United Case
Accepted by High Court

By Stan Haste

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WASHINGTON (BP)—The U.S. Supreme Court will decide if officials of a well-known religious liberty organization have a constitutional right to sue the federal government for transferring public property to religious organizations.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a frequent litigant in church-state cases for 35 years, filed suit against the government for itself and four of its staff members when the Department of Health, Education and Welfare donated a 70-acre tract of land and a number of buildings formerly used as a military hospital to an Assemblies of God college in Pennsylvania. Transfer of the land and buildings was made under provisions of the Federal Property Act, a law regulating the disposal of surplus government property.

But the college, noting that the law had never before come under legal attack, countered that Americans United had no legal standing to bring the suit. Citing a string of Supreme Court decisions over the last dozen years, attorneys for the college contended that individual citizens must show actual or potential monetary damage to sue in such cases.

A federal district court dismissed the complaint more than two years ago, but the Third Circuit Court of Appeals reversed, holding for Americans United.

In legal papers filed with the Supreme Court, attorneys for Valley Forge Christian College, recipient of the \$1.3 million government property, argued that "special interest groups" such as Americans United ought to be differentiated from "the citizenry at large."

For its part, Americans United argued that "governmental largesse to church institutions" under the Federal Property Act since its passage 31 years ago has amounted to more than \$25 million. Transfer of excess government property "has the impermissible effect of advancing religion," the argument continued.

To deny its officials standing to sue, warned the watchdog group, "would effectively foreclose judicial inquiry into serious breaches of the prohibitions of the First Amendment, thus emasculating the Bill of Rights."

Although arguments in briefs for both sides concentrated on the technical question of whether Americans United and its officials have standing to sue, the high court could choose to decide both the standing issue and rule on the merits of the case. That is considered unlikely, however, meaning that even if Americans United wins this time, the case would have to go back to lower courts for new arguments.

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