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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Bible Translator Clarifies Remarks

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Noted Bible translator Robert G. Bratcher said he was speaking only for himself when he made remarks on biblical inerrancy during a seminar of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission in Dallas.

Bratcher, one of the main translators of "Good News for Modern Man," apologized for the tone of his remarks, and emphasized he was not speaking for the American Bible Society, by whom he is employed, or for the Christian Life Commission, which invited him to speak at the annual workshop.

"I was speaking as an individual and neither said nor implied that my view represented the position of either the American Bible Society or the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission," said Bratcher, a resident of Chapel Hill, N.C.

At the meeting, Bratcher criticized belief in biblical inerrancy, saying that to give the Bible those qualities is to idolatry it.

Concerning his remarks Bratcher said: "I used language that was intemperate and that seemed to cast aspersions on those who do not agree with my position. I deeply regret the language I used and I apologize to those who were offended by it."

The former Southern Baptist missionary to Brazil went on to affirm his belief in the Bible. "To study the Scriptures, to proclaim their message, and to put them into practice is not only a duty but is one of the greatest privileges that any believer has," Bratcher said. "It is because of this that I have given my time and effort to making the message of the Bible more widely known and better understood."

More than 55 million copies of the "Good News for Modern Man" translation of the New Testament have now been published by the American Bible Society.

"My purpose," Bratcher said, "was not to disparage the Bible nor to create controversy. I believe the Bible to be both true and indispensable."

Responding to these developments, Foy Valentine, executive director of the Christian Life Commission, said, "Because of his special knowledge of the Bible and unique experience with the American Bible Society, I asked Dr. Bratcher to speak with regard to the Bible and the prophetic tradition with its powerful emphasis on 'Thus saith the Lord.' The choice of his specific topic and the decision to include the remarks in question were his, however, and not mine," Valentine said.

"I had no prior knowledge of what he intended to say. I thought the moment I heard his two or three sentences about inerrancy that this inevitably would focus attention on the current

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controversy instead of on the main thrust of his sermon which was a call for Christians always to live and work in the light of the First Commandment, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.'

"While the 422 registrants at the meeting paid registration fees that covered the expenses of the 14 speakers," Valentine said, "still, the meeting was under our sponsorship; and we are deeply concerned that Southern Baptists understand that it was planned to help God's people, as we are admonished in James 1:22, to be 'doers of the word, and not hearers only.'"

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Smith Celebrates Passover
With Jewish Representative

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DALLAS (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President Bailey E. Smith and his family celebrated the Passover seder in traditional Jewish fashion at the home of the Southwest representative of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

"It was a very inspirational and very joyous time," Smith said after observing the traditional Jewish holiday, which this year coincided with the Christian celebration of Easter.

The Smith family participated in the festival with the family of Mark Briskman, who also was involved in other meetings the SBC president has had with representatives of the Jewish layman's organization.

"The seder is the recounting of the journey of the Children of Israel out of Egypt," Smith explained, noting he had participated in the observance, reading two passages of scripture from the Old Testament book of Exodus.

"We really wanted to be part of it," Smith said, adding the Jewish celebration was modified in one respect because of his participation. "They usually have wine in the celebration, but I had told them I could not partake of alcoholic beverages, so they had grape juice. They were so very thoughtful of us."

After two widely publicized remarks by Smith concerning Jews, the Del City, Okla., pastor met with ADL representatives in New York City to work out better relationships between Southern Baptists and Jews.

Smith told Baptist Press after the celebration that he "certainly will stand to oppose any group which is anti-Semitic. There is no place for anti-Semitism in the world."

He also noted he is planning to visit Israel with ADL leaders Nov. 30 to Dec. 6, 1981.

Taking part with Smith was his wife, Sandy, and their sons, Scott, 15, Steve, 12, and Josh, 6.

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Sociology, Not Theology
Divides Black/White Baptists

By James Lee Young

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Sociology—not theology—has kept black and white Baptists apart over the centuries in America, a black staff member of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, says.

While progress has been made gradually in black-white relationships among Southern Baptists, Edward L. Wheeler, associate director of the HMB's black church relations department in Atlanta, says "...the ugly head of racism still appears all too frequently in Southern Baptist life."

Wheeler spoke at the joint annual session of the Southern Baptist Historical Commission and Society whose theme was "Black Southern Baptist Heritage."

"...We must continue to refute those who would deny the biblical truth that of one blood God created all humanity and rebuke those who would determine human value according to skin color and physical characteristics," Wheeler said.

Blacks and whites have been "intimately involved with each other for centuries"—especially in the South—but the "dehumanizing institutions of slavery and segregation denied blacks the right to interact with whites as equals," Wheeler said, noting that both have "roots in the same soil."

While Baptists began work in the South in the late 17th century, he said, "It wasn't until the 18th century that their efforts were rewarded." Blacks had a limited exposure to Christianity, he noted, "but some slaves did respond to the gospel—most often becoming members of predominantly white congregations. As a result, more blacks became Christians and many became Baptists." Black Baptist congregations developed in the North during the first decades of the 1800s, and several black churches developed in the South.

One place, despite limits on black expression of religious expression, the possibility black-white interaction and contact was evident was in the development of the first organized mission efforts by black Baptists in the early 1800s, Wheeler noted.

But the primary concern, according to Wheeler's research, that led to the "dissolution of the Triennial Convention (of Baptists) was the issue of slavery."

A public denouncing of slavery in 1840 caused stir in the South. The refusal to appoint slaveholders as missionaries led to the call for a convention of Baptists in the South. The Southern Baptist Convention was organized May 1845 in Augusta, Ga.

The Civil War's end drastically altered the black-white relationships of Baptists, although it did not end them. By apparent mutual agreement, black Baptists began to draw apart and formed their first state convention in North Carolina in 1866 and developed other such conventions into the 1870s. The Baptist Foreign Mission Convention was formed in 1880.

Wheeler cited the SBC's Home Mission Society (now Board) for leading the way in breaking down barriers between blacks and whites, by beginning—first—to educate black ministers back in the late 1800s, and finally, nearly a century later were among the first Southern Baptists nationally to denounce racism.

In the 1960s, Wheeler continued, the Civil Rights movement "shifted into high gear as the white church stood immobilized by fear of change and the shackles of tradition. Yet even

though the general Southern Baptist response was inadequate in the eyes of many blacks, some meaningful changes were made."

The Home Mission Board hired its first black person, Roland Smith, in 1942 as an assistant secretary to be a liaison between black and white Baptists. Since that time, blacks have gradually come to fill other staff positions at the HMB, are attending SBC schools and serving in leadership positions across the denomination, Wheeler said.

Wheeler stressed the need for literature to address black needs and said that the black religious experience must be recognized and respected.

He called on the six Southern Baptist seminaries to "incorporate courses that reflect the contributions black Baptists have made to the rich Baptist heritage—not only for the sake of black students but for the sake of white students..."

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(EDITOR'S NOTE)

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The Southern Baptist Sunday School Board celebrates its 90th anniversary this year. Although it has a \$107.6 million budget and a goal to involve 8.5 million Southern Baptists in Sunday School by 1985, its early days were not nearly so secure. James L. Sullivan, board president from 1953 to 1975, tells about one early incident that threatened the board:

T. P. Bell Rescues
New Publishing Board

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Theodore Percy Bell headed the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board for only three years (1893-1896), but his decisive actions and ability to fight fire with fire perhaps saved the fledgling institution from an early death.

James M. Frost was pastor of the Leigh Street Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., when he wrote the resolution that launched the board into existence 90 years ago in 1891. Bell had been a member of that congregation and Frost had observed the man's brilliance, moral courage and energy.

It is understandable then why Frost would turn to Bell and beg for his help in a critical time in the life of the Sunday School Board.

Efforts by those opposed to a denominational publishing house continued after the board's creation. One group even purchased exclusive advertising rights in all the state Baptist papers. By this means they hoped to keep Baptists from learning about publications of the board, and thus, the new institution would fold, due to lack of financial support.

The board's very existence was in jeopardy. Someone had to be found who would counter with wise but drastic steps. Frost was a gentle man, persistent, but not a fighter. Now a fighter was needed if the board was to continue.

The First Baptist Church of Nashville was without a pastor at the time. When they extended a call to Frost, he saw it as an act of God and accepted. Frost then vigorously urged the trustees of the Sunday School Board to select T. P. Bell to succeed him.

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Bell assumed the post May 1, 1893. Someone said of Bell that he "could write with carbolic acid on asbestos paper." Thus he wrote, organized, propagandized and promoted. He attacked the attackers. He fought fire with fire. He broke the back of the organized opposition and put the young institution back on its feet.

Such an approach, while necessary, was sure to draw fire in return. The fire was concentrated on Bell as he knew it would be. In fact, that is what he wanted and worked for.

Then at the crucial moment when the battle was won, Bell resigned. He bought a controlling interest in the Christian Index, Baptist paper of Georgia, and moved to Atlanta in 1896. In doing so he took the build-up of opposition and criticism with him.

Bell's departure meant that Frost could step back into the role of leadership at the Sunday School Board without the scars of battle. He spent the rest of his life in that office, and the deep feelings of opposition were never to rise again.

Without the vigorous, organized and, at times, unscrupulous opposition of its enemies, the board could steadily advance. And it has. It is well that Southern Baptists remember the man who perhaps saved the board from destruction at a crucial moment in its earliest days.

An old Quaker story graphically illustrates the role of T. P. Bell in the board's history.

A Quaker farmer had a hooking and kicking milk cow. As he tried to milk her, she kicked the Quaker and kicked over the milk. Being forbidden by his religion to be harsh and abusive, even to animals, he was nevertheless exasperated.

"I cannot curse thee," he said. "I cannot smite thee. But I can sell thee to a Baptist who will beat thy brains out."

It was in that vein that J. M. Frost committed the board into the hands of T. P. Bell, just for a while.

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