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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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RB

Biblical Authority Question
Causes Blurring Of Purpose

By Mike Creswell

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)---Overemphasis on biblical authority is a heresy among Southern Baptists which is creating confusion and causing the denomination to stray from its purpose of missions, Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks said.

Parks, addressing 2,000 participants at the Sunday morning worship service during the Foreign Missions Conference at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center, said:

"Anytime anyone among us would pick any of our beliefs (such as) the authority of the Bible as sole rule for faith and practice and emphasize that to the point it is the only criterion that is chosen and nothing else matters--that is the only thing that makes you Christian or makes you Baptist-- that's heresy." Omitting such a belief about the Bible also is heresy, he added.

Parks defined heresy as choosing one part of the truth to the neglect of the whole body of truth and related that definition specifically to Biblical authority to illustrate this point.

It was the second time in recent weeks the missions leader has issued a strongly worded call for the denomination to unite its energies toward missions causes instead of arguing over doctrinal purity.

Parks said the current debate within the Southern Baptist Convention over Biblical authority is threatening the denomination's Bold Mission Thrust--a plan to share the gospel message with every person in the world by the year 2000.

"Just as this Bold Mission Thrust was catching us up as Southern Baptists there began to move among us distractions about doctrinal integrity. We're beginning to try to focus on other truths to the neglect of our basic purpose and we will lose the blessing of God if we continue to do so," Parks declared firmly.

"There is confusion among us because some would have us believe that our identity, our characterizing principles, our unifying force is not, in fact, missions, but something else," he said.

Parks attributed some of the confusion to ignorance. He said he believes Southern Baptist churches are not teaching these principles to enough of the new members. Many do not understand much about what it is to be a Christian or a Southern Baptist.

Southern Baptists are not God's chosen people, he said, but "as long as we have been faithful in carrying out our purpose God has blessed. Anytime throughout the Bible and, I believe, throughout Christian history, a person or a group of people failed to do the primary thing for which God had called them they lost their usefulness in the kingdom of God."

Parks likened Southern Baptists today to the Jews of earlier times who were blessed by God but failed to grasp that they were blessed in order to carry God's message to the world. That half truth, he said, prevented them from being the people God would have made them. "They never did understand the rest of the message."

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The answer to the convention's problems, Parks said, "does not lie in trying to out-argue each other about what we believe about the Bible or anything else. The answer to our problem lies in each of us."

He urged Southern Baptists to allow "the living, risen Christ to so dominate us that he will carry out in us what he came to do."

The greatest problem and the greatest reason the truth of the gospel is in jeopardy today is not because of our doctrinal differences or our denominational wrangling but that Christians refuse such domination by Christ, he said.

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Lebanese Damage Limited,
Baptists Prepare Relief

By Betty Smith

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JERUSALEM (BP)--Sensing that Israeli military forces have halted seven years of civil war and Palestine Liberation Organization domination in southern Lebanon, Lebanese residents of the Tyre and Sidon areas now move about freely and have begun rebuilding their lives.

Jarrell Peach, Southern Baptist foreign mission board representative in Jerusalem, made those observations after a three-day visit to southern Lebanon the first week of August. He is the first member of the Israel mission allowed to enter the Israeli-controlled area of Lebanon.

Peach said he was surprised to find damage not nearly as extensive as news reports had led him to believe. Severe damage was limited geographically, some of it dating back to fighting between Arab factions in Lebanon before Israel's June 4 invasion, he added.

What he saw were people, including many in the heavily damaged Palestinian refugee camps, quickly cleaning up and rebuilding their homes and public buildings. "There are signs that life is going on normally," he said.

In some areas central government services neglected for the past seven years--such as road care, electricity, telephone and water service--are slowly being restored, he reported.

Peach, chairman of the Israel mission's committee for Lebanese relief and social ministries, said several Lebanese Baptists in the area told him they had no particular needs since food has remained in good supply and damage to their homes has been minimal. None of their church buildings has been damaged.

Baptist laymen and pastors told him "we have money and manpower; just let us be free," Peach reported.

When he pressed for ways his mission and other organizations could help, church leaders and civil authorities promised to draw up lists of families of all religious backgrounds whose homes had been damaged. They also will provide the names of persons needing continuing medical assistance and rehabilitation after returning from hospitals in Israel.

"Since massive relief efforts are being made by several international organizations Baptist involvement will be on a more personalized and long-term basis," Peach explained.

Israeli Baptists will take care of needs in the southern region while the Lebanese Baptist Convention will continue to meet needs in the north and in areas not under Israeli military control.

Peach envisioned the Israel mission will pattern its aid after Haifa pastor Ibrahim Sim'an's relief and social ministry to Lebanese who crossed into Israel that has been operating since 1976.

Sim'an's program to help the Lebanese victims of the civil war has included transportation from the border to hospitals throughout Galilee; extensive hospital visitation; food, shelter and clothing as well as medicines and orthopedic devices, and reuniting families separated by the civil war.

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This ministry has been intensified and expanded as a result of Operation Peace for Galilee, the name given Israel's military invasion of Lebanon. Shortly after it began the Foreign Mission Board granted the Israel mission \$15,000 in emergency relief funds with the possibility of additional funds as needs are determined. Other relief has been provided by special offerings in churches and centers throughout Israel.

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Discharged Pastor's Suit
Against Church Mistrial

By Jack Walls

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Baptist Press
8/10/82

ELKINS, W.Va. (BP)--A lawsuit against Elkins Southern Baptist Church by its former pastor has been declared a mistrial after the jury was unable to reach a verdict.

The unusual case of a discharged pastor bringing suit against a church alleging illegal dismissal lasted two weeks and was the longest case in recent history of the Randolph County Circuit Court, according to a court official.

The terminated pastor, James Gillespie, sued the church and three individuals as representatives of the church, a deacon, a trustee and the clerk, asking for reinstatement as pastor, 13 months back pay amounting to \$19,500, compensation for labor on a church building built during his tenure as pastor for an undetermined amount, \$35,000 for damage to his reputation and punitive damages as the court might determine.

Gillespie alleged the church dismissed him in an illegally called business meeting moderated by an illegal moderator and the church conspired against him, causing damage to his reputation by its action.

The church contended Gillespie, through his activities, was hindering the ministry of the church and their action to dismiss him was in accordance with the church constitution, Robert's Rules of Order and Southern Baptist polity and practice.

Judge Jack Nuzum ruled the only question before the court was the legality of the termination of the pastor and that the church's constitution would be interpreted according to civil law and not according to church polity and practice. He also ruled the constitution and bylaws to be an explicit contract between pastor and church when there is no other written agreement.

Testimony showed a motion to dismiss Gillespie was presented at a church business meeting March 15, 1981, and that the meeting was presided over by the chairman of the deacons since the business under consideration dealt with the pastor. Gillespie said there were 10 votes to dismiss him and 30 to retain him. The attorney for church presented testimony that Gillespie "disrupted" the meeting which prevented the dismissal from being completed.

The deacons called a second meeting March 22 and since both the pastor and the chairman of the deacons were involved in the conflict a non-church member, who has served as parliamentarian for the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptist, was asked to moderate. The vote at that meeting was 31-25 to dismiss Gillespie.

After approximately six hours of deliberation the jury advised Nuzum it was hopelessly deadlocked. The judge asked the contesting parties if they would allow the decision of a simple majority of the jury to prevail in order to resolve the impasse. Gillespie and his counsel agreed but those representing the church advised they could not make that decision without action by the church.

Nuzum took the response as negative and declared the mistrial. He indicated, unless the contesting parties were able to resolve the situation, the case will remain on the docket and another trial could be scheduled in late October or early November of this year.

The principals met briefly after court adjourned and both sides indicate they will explore an out-of-court settlement.

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Gillespie became pastor of Elkins church about two years ago and at one time attendance was around 150. Prior to the dismissal moves, one group left the church to attempt to form another Southern Baptist Church and after the dismissal a second group left to form an independent church with Gillespie as pastor.

The independent church has since disbanded and the two Southern Baptist groups combined are averaging less than 50 according to West Virginia convention sources. Gillespie is reportedly working at an Elkins foodstore.

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Missionary Opens Home
For Brazilian Cadets

By Erich Bridges

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8/10/82

CAMPINAS, Brazil (BP)--Stroll the gleaming halls and shady walks of the preparation school for army cadets in Campinas and you'll find 800 of Brazil's best hopes for the future.

You'll also find a most unmilitary figure, dressed in baggy pants and a windbreaker, toting a battered Bible and usually surrounded by a knot of laughing and singing cadets. That's Dan Burt, Southern Baptist missionary.

After a quarter century in Brazil the 57-year-old Texan's "Portugese drawl" still confuses some locals but his grin and friendliness attract cadets looking for a buddy.

Burt is pastor of an evangelical group on campus. He and his wife, Mary, also run a Baptist camp and train Sunday School leaders for the State Baptist Convention of Sao Paulo. But they seize every opportunity to spread the gospel personally.

The first time Burt visited the military campus to teach a Bible study nobody showed up, but in the six years since he's led more than 100 young men to faith in Christ. About a fourth of that number have joined Baptist churches.

For cadets with a weekend pass and a hankering for home-cooked meals, Mary Burt opens the missionary couple's home in Campinas. On Saturday evenings young people from nearby Cambui Baptist Church come for a Bible club and social hour with the cadets. Sundays the cadets attend Campinas churches, eat lunch with the Burts and accompany Burt on witnessing excursions to slum areas.

For some, especially those with little or no family life, the Burt household becomes a second home. While some help Mary wash dishes, others gather around Burt at the dining room table after a meal, trading thoughts on life, love and girlfriends.

Said one cadet after a weekend stay: "When I find the wife God is preparing for me, and start my home, I want one just like this."

Former members of the evangelical group who've moved on to the National Military Academy in Rezende "come home" too, often hitchhiking the 400 miles to Campinas. "If we're not here they come on in," Burt said. "The key's in the window and we've come home before to find four or five boys waiting."

The cadets also extend Christian witness to their own families and local communities throughout Brazil. One cadet's father wrote the Burts after a visit from his son: "We want to know more about this religion and this new life." The father and two other sons became Christians.

Adaulto, a tall, clear-eyed former president of the evangelical group, planned suicide before finding Christ through the cadet fellowship. "Pastor Daniel is like a father to me," he explained. "When I came to know Jesus he was the first to encourage me."

Adaulto awaits his commissioning as a second lieutenant when he will assume command of 400 men. He dreams of serving in pioneer regions of Brazil and starting mission churches. "I want to serve my country but my main aim will be to give my testimony," he said.

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Dreams like that make Dan Burt smile. "When you put a Bible not only in the hand but in the hearts of these boys, Brazil's new leaders, you've got an exciting future," he believes.

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Adapted from the Commission, the Southern Baptist foreign missions journal.
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Mobility, Creativity Mark
Baptist Church In Hong Kong

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HONG KONG (BP)--When Bill Hailey goes to work at International Baptist Church each day he has a choice of 18 different places.

But Hailey, Southern Baptist missionary and pastor of the church to internationals in Hong Kong, doesn't mind being spread out. In fact he and his church members want to keep it that way.

It's that sense of mobility that makes International Baptist so attractive to foreigners living in this jam-packed city. And the realities of Hong Kong life make it almost impossible for the church to function from a single building.

Consider these statistics: Hong Kong's exorbitant prices for land range from \$4,000 to \$6,000 per square foot. Then there's the oppressive traffic congestion sometimes taking two hours to go six miles. And even if members could buy the land and drive to the building, there would be no parking space available.

These realities have put IBC on the top floor and roof of a 22-story office building, in the music room of a Lutheran school, at members homes, in a Lutheran church and in two high-rise apartment complexes. The church fellowship is as varied as its meeting places. At any given time English, Cantonese, Japanese, Filipino dialects and others can be heard. Members call IBC a "Church Where It Is."

International Baptist began as an English-language service of a Chinese church in Hong Kong where the late Charles P. Cowherd, a Southern Baptist missionary, was pastor.

For years International Church had its own building. The membership increased and the church began planning to expand. The building was sold but before the group could relocate, Hong Kong's property market soared and the church was unable to purchase another site. The Seventh-Day Adventist Hospital became available for Sunday use and the church began to adapt itself to the new limitations.

When Hailey's predecessor, missionary Bob Davis, was pastor the church outgrew the hospital chapel and a second worship service was begun. In early 1981 Davis and others began to study membership maps and expatriate populations. As a result members living in the Repulse Bay area began separate services at the Lutheran Hong Kong International School.

Search for space is under way in four other areas all of which now have weekly Bible studies or prayer meetings.

Since his arrival in November 1981, Hailey has continued to see needs. Loneliness, frustration and homesickness are overwhelming emotions which plague these people in a foreign country. He feels International Baptist Church is limited only by its imagination and the openness of its people to be used by the Lord--building or no building.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond Bureau of Baptist Press