

**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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May 23, 1983

83-79

New Orleans Conference  
Calls for Christian Action

By Robbie Watson

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Frank Stagg termed current "right-wing" religious movements in America, "secularism with a Christian veneer" and Glen Stassen called on Christians to take initiative in peace making during a conference sponsored by the Christian Life Committee at St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, La.

Stagg and Stassen were two of the 11 speakers at the conference called "Chesed: People of Faith in a World of Hurt", May 13-15. The conference attracted over 100 registered participants including New Orleans social workers and religious leaders from various denominations. Approximately 250 persons heard Stassen's Sunday morning sermon.

Stagg, retired professor of New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., and a member of the New Orleans church, said the conference had the twofold purpose of identifying who Christians are as people of faith and of identifying the agenda for Christian response in a world of hurt.

Speaking on Biblical imperatives for the Christian citizen, Stagg called on Christians to understand there were claims civil order has on them, but that God has the ultimate claim. He charged the American military-religious-political-economic system breeds poverty in the pursuit of wealth and called on Christians to be better stewards within that system. In defense of capitalism and democracy, Stagg said, "Some political systems are better than others, but the human being is capable of expressing its depravity within any system."

Stassen, professor of Christian ethics at Southern Seminary, related the concept of sin as captivity in relation to America's captivity to an escalating arms race. He called on Christians to get involved no matter what position they may take. We need to answer the question, "Are we under the lordship of Jesus Christ or principalities and powers," Stassen said.

Stagg said the writer of Revelation warned about the dangers of a military, political, religious and economic complex much like President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of the dangers of war in an industrial-military complex 23 years ago. Stagg charged that historically a great deal of responsibility for installing and maintaining an unfair system goes to religion."

"Civil religion sees as its highest calling, service to the state and this country is more threat ned by that than anything since the time of its founding," Stagg said.

"The prophet in the Old Testament was the voice of the voiceless," said Stagg. "The false prophet was the court chaplain trying to bring the people into submission." Stagg then accused Jerry Falwell of being a court chaplain. "In fact, to me he doesn't represent a Moral Maj rity but immoral malignancy."

Charging the Bible calls on Christians to pray for their enemies, Stassen said we're never going to make peace if we don't affirm the enemy's valid interest. Stassen recalled the pullout of Soviet troops in Austria at the end of World War II when the United States promised that Austria would remain a neutral state. "It isn't always that simple but we still need to take the active, surprising initiative to make peace," Stassen said.

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Arguing the defense department wants to spend \$30 billion over the next five years on the MX missile, Stassen urged the audience to write letters to stop the plan and encourage a bilateral nuclear freeze saying the money could best be spent for human needs.

Panel members Evelyn Stagg, wife of Frank Stagg and co-author of the book, *Woman in the World of Jesus*, and Bill Elder, pastor of St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church, voiced agreement with Stassen that Christians should write letters to political leaders. "When a congressman gets a letter from a housewife he sees the grassroots movement," Elder said. Mrs. Stagg, who had previously led a workshop on Women and the Human Rights Movement, insisted women are a significant political force in America today.

Sidney Barthelemy, councilman for the city of New Orleans, led a workshop on what citizens in government can do to fight hunger, poverty and homelessness in New Orleans. He said he was concerned that he gets few letters from citizens.

Rick Axtell, pastor of Parkway Baptist Church in Natchez, Miss., led the conferences on hunger. Currie Burris, southern regional director for Amnesty International, gave a lecture on human rights. Steve Cheramie, former tribal chairman and current member of the United Houma Nations, Inc., participated in a panel on peace making. Bill Rogers, chairman of the division of Religious Education at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, presented a lecture on human rights and was moderator for the conference.

J. Schinderman, founding director of Crescent House, center for abused women and their children, led a workshop on human rights in the abusive family situation. T.J. Smith, director of the Baptist Joint Committee of Greater New Orleans, serving under the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (he is liaison between Southern Baptists and the National Baptist Convention), led a workshop on human rights and the black experience.

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Fisher Describes  
'Crisis In Canaan'

By Mark R. Van Sciver

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BUIES CREEK, N.C. (BP)--The transmission of religious values is in jeopardy warns Ben C. Fisher, former head of the Education Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Speaking at Campbell University on "Crisis In Canaan," Fisher, who called himself a strong supporter of public education, said religion (as an integral part of human experience and knowledge) is in danger of being lost in a quest for perfect separation of church and state.

He expressed concern over the recent National Committee on Excellence In Education report which, in part, concluded the American system of education is suffering from mediocrity of purpose and direction, and fear the committee's solution will be more money, better organization and revised subject matter, rather than addressing the central problem--the development of character, responsible citizenship, and self-discipline among young people.

The early settlers symbolized America as a new Canaan, literally flowing with milk and honey in the form of natural resources, Fisher said. He pointed out influences of religion, especially the Bible and its authority, were treated as divine guidelines of everyday life; the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ was accepted without question.

Fisher acknowledged things weren't perfect then--slavery, and corrupt leadership in church and civic office were prevalent--but "These men and women, driven by deep religious convictions, built a nation such as the world had not seen, excelling in every field of human endeavor: agriculture, industry, science, technology, art, literature, and, above all, education." He maintained America lost that sense of purpose and its values, religious and cultural, eroded. When 19th Century Intelligentsia began preaching "To be free, man must discard the yoke of religion," the concept spread quietly but rapidly, and "for a time it appeared God and religion were no longer necessary for the perpetual prosperity of the new Canaan."

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While Baptists will certainly find a place in history because of their consistent cry for religious liberty, Fisher said, he questioned whether Baptists today have not confused essential religious liberty with the separation of church and state.

"Our somewhat negative and defensive preoccupation with the separation of church and state--a legitimate issue--has blinded us to the fact that when God is excluded completely from public policy, the very liberty which we so ardently seek has been abridged," he said.

Until the 20th Century, Fisher said, the First Amendment was interpreted to mean all religions were to be included, treated equally, and guaranteed full protection under the law. Now, the First Amendment is interpreted as being exclusive, not inclusive.

Under the extreme interpretations, public buildings cannot be used for religious purposes, and yet, any person or group representing a secular view has right of access, he said.

Another issue of concern is the problem of prayer in public schools. Fisher claimed we have become too preoccupied with the prayer issue and have not faced up to the new secular spirit which dominates our age.

"The real and critical issue is that the public school and public university student is receiving only a secular view of man and his destiny," he said. "Even more critical is the value neutrality which is successfully diluting both religious and cultural values."

To those who say these values are the responsibility of the church and home, Fisher asked--What real chance does religious instruction have for surviving the massive materialism of general education?

Christians face special problems today, he admitted.

Many are deeply troubled by the nature of creation, Fisher feels. The fact that every view or hypothesis of creation, except that of a Creator, can be discussed in the public schools has placed an excessive strain on the home and churches to balance out the picture.

The church's own irrational and dogmatic views in times past have done much to drive a wedge between science and religion. Nevertheless, he said, even a person who thinks the world is flat is closer to the truth if he believes that the world is God's handiwork than the most brilliant scientist, philosopher, or secular theologian who only interprets the vast mysteries of the universe as a cosmic accident.

Fisher said another area of concern is the Christian family, under attack each day from the outside influences of the secular world, which on one hand blames the family for its inability to discipline its children and on the other hand makes it legally possible for a thirteen-year-old girl to have an abortion without the knowledge of her parents.

But Christians can't blame the crisis entirely on public education and secular values, Fisher pointed out. The Christian's dilemma has been sharpened by internal controversy, which at times has diverted Christians from common problems and forced them to present an "un-united front" against the secular world.

For instance, on the subject of the inspiration of the scripture, Fisher said Southern Baptists need to come to terms with the negotiable and the non-negotiable: "What is non-negotiable is that the Bible is God's inspired Word. What is negotiable is that there are several theories of inspiration. "The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible was a matter for vigorous debate for such theological giants as Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, Knox, Zwingli, but at least Luther and Calvin made it clear the disagreement over the manner of inspiration was no ground for schism."

Fisher is convinced the route of success for reversing the trends of the past decades is in the furtherance of Christian higher education and its support by members of its denomination. He listed three major points of renewed commitment on the part of Southern Baptists to strengthen the SBC's educational program:

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1. Reform those aspects of public policy which are adversely affecting private higher education, religion, and religious values; 2. A serious reform of public education which will include the objective aspects of religion, as they relate to the complete knowledge and wisdom of the ages; and 3. Support for those students who wish to attend religious schools.

In closing Fisher said perhaps the most important reaffirmation that a Christian can make is we are dependent on God, but God is not dependent on us.

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(Mark R. Van Sciver is director of public information at Campbell University.)

Elliff's Return to States;  
Will Resign as Missionaries

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Two years ago, Tom Elliff left booming Eastwood Baptist Church in Tulsa, Okla., to become a missionary evangelist in the war-torn African nation of Zimbabwe. Soon he will leave that ministry and return to the United States.

Elliff says he still considers foreign missions very important, but strongly feels his calling and gifts have redirected him toward ministry in the U.S., said Davis Saunders, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's director for Eastern and Southern Africa. Elliff is involved in evangelism and Bible distribution in the area of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

Elliff and his wife, Jeannie, and their four children will return to the United States this summer to seek medical treatment for their 14-year-old daughter, Beth. Their resignation becomes effective Sept. 1.

In a Zimbabwe automobile accident last fall Beth suffered multiple fractures of the pelvis and burns which may require up to five years of plastic surgery, said Saunders.

Mrs. Elliff and the couple's three younger children were also in the accident but suffered only minor injuries. Beth's legs and thighs were burned when the car engine fell on her after she was thrown from the vehicle. Elliff was attending a church development conference in White River, South Africa, at the time of the accident.

Elliff is the brother-in-law of former SBC President Bailey Smith.

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CORRECTION: In BP mailed on May 19, 1983, please make the following correction. In graf 3 of "Missionary Says Christian Record Mixes Success, Failure" on page 1, please change the word Southwestern to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Thanks, (BP)

Senate Panel Delays Action  
On School Prayer Amendment

Baptist Press  
5/23/83

WASHINGTON (BP)--Initial efforts by key members of the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution to pass a compromise constitutional amendment on school prayer fell through when the White House strongly insisted the panel stick with the tougher language of President Reagan's version.

After the drafting session was postponed, subcommittee chairman Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah, said the panel probably would have rejected the White House proposal in favor of an amendment allowing silent prayer and reflection and calling for "equal access" to school property by students for religious meetings.

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Hatch planned to meet with White House officials before a second attempt to complete subcommittee action on the amendment May 26, but warned if the administration were merely asking for additional time to put pressure on the panel, "I don't think they'll get anywhere."

In contrast to the language Hatch expected the committee to adopt, the Reagan proposal would allow state-written, state-mandated oral prayer in public schools.

While saying he could live with the White House amendment, South Carolina Republican Sen. Strom Thurmond, a member of the subcommittee and chairman of the full Judiciary Committee, questioned whether that proposal could be passed.

Even more doubtful, Hatch declared, "I think it will be difficult to pass the Justice Department (Reagan) version of it."

"There's a lot of concern about set prayer that varies from school district to school district that would be sectarian in nature," Hatch added. "I have difficulties with that myself."

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Missionary Margie Duncan Dies;  
Sons Made A Name In The States

Baptist Press  
5/23/83

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Margie Rains Duncan, Southern Baptist missionary to Kenya, died of cancer May 21 in Knoxville, Tenn. She was 56.

Duncan and her husband, Marshall, had been missionaries to Kenya for almost 18 years, but in recent years had become better known in the States for the accomplishments of their sons, Alan and Kenny.

Alan's soccer-style place kicking with the University of Tennessee Volunteers football team earned him three team scoring titles, seven kicking records and a berth in the pros. After being cut from the pros before his first season, he joined the staff of the First Baptist Church, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., as youth director.

Kenny, still a student at University of Tennessee, Knoxville, has used his magician's wand to entertain people in Kenya and in Tennessee while sharing his Christian testimony. Both sons have expressed an interest in following their parents as missionaries to Africa.

Since 1970 Duncan had worked with her husband in evangelism in the Limuru, Kenya, area. Earlier the couple worked with an English-language church in Mombasa and with the Baptist community center in Nairobi. In Mombasa, Duncan also taught at the Baptist high school.

In recent months the Duncans had been on medical furlough in Knoxville, where he was pastor of Ridgedale Baptist Church before their appointment.

Duncan was born in Anderson, Tenn., but also lived in several east Tennessee communities while growing up. She attended Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. Before her appointment she was a bookkeeper for firms in Greeneville, Tenn., and Fort Worth.

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