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**Baptist Leaders Respond
To Call For 'Guidelines'**

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Leaders from all spectrums of the Southern Baptist Convention have responded with skepticism to a suggestion that the Southern Baptist Convention establish "guidelines of bedrock Southern Baptist belief."

The suggestion was made by SBC President James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, in a news conference in mid-November. He suggested a committee be appointed to draw up some "irreducible minimums" of things Baptists believe.

He cited four things he said are "bedrock belief." They include the full divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, substitutionary atonement by Christ for the sins of mankind, justification of God's grace through faith and belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ.

Secular news reports of Draper's suggestion caused confusion among Southern Baptists because they used the term "creed." Draper told Baptist Press he did not use the term creed, and added "creed is a red-flag word for Southern Baptists."

He explained the term creed comes from a Latin word--credo--which means "I believe. What I am saying is that we do believe something.

"No matter what they say, Baptists have got a creed--everyone's got a creed. We do believe in something. We have a statement of faith and a confession of faith. They are creedal in a sense...."

Draper said he made his suggestion in an effort to be reconciling. "We have been arguing, but here are some things--bedrock things--we can agree on. I had no intention of suggesting we use this to beat people on the head with.

"I in no way implied I wanted to bind anybody, or require anyone to do anything. I am not starting a witchhunt. I suggested this as an affirming thing and do not want to force anything on anybody. But I do believe we need to affirm some of our cardinal truths."

Draper noted the principles he enunciated were things denominational employees should have to ascribe to for continued employment. "Those who are recipients of Cooperative Program funds ought to have to express some commitment to something."

Draper added six Southern Baptist seminaries "require professors to sign statements" of faith. "If that is not creedal, I don't know what is. A creed is something you have to sign and adhere to. Maybe what I am suggesting is not as far out in left field as it may seem...."

Conrad Johnston, pastor of Salem (Va.) Baptist Church, who was present at the news conference, said he believes Draper "was trying to get someplace to stand. He pointed out four or five things and said these are things we can agree on.

"It is not a perfect suggestion, but we need to get together on the things we can agree on. There is risk, but it is better than standing there killing ourselves or dividing our impact. He is trying to come up with something. It may not work but he is trying."

Generally, Draper's suggestion has met with confusion and skepticism from Southern Baptist leaders. Some are uncertain what he is calling for, while others are skeptical of the notion.

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John M. Lewis, pastor of First Baptist Church of Raleigh, N.C., and a member of the SBC Executive Committee, called it "a horrible idea in the light of Baptist history and Baptist theology. It's going to be one of the most divisive things that has happened to us."

Lewis added: "What's wrong with the Baptist Faith and Message statement (a 17 point and preamble statement of faith adopted by the SBC in 1963)? I think that says a lot more than he said in his four points. The most important part (of the BFM) is in the preamble which indicates it is a guide for understanding and should not be imposed on anyone."

Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, is "lukewarm" to the idea.

"While I respect the president (Draper) tremendously, I don't really see the need for going any further than the Baptist Faith and Message statement. I do not think the problems (in the denomination) relate to the inadequacy of our confessions. I think the problems relate to the unwillingness of our institutions and agencies, in some cases, to see to it that all they do corresponds to the statement of faith adopted by the convention," he said.

The problem, he concluded, "will not be solved by writing more creeds or confessions," and will not be solved until some agency leaders "have a willingness to cooperate and not play language games," and to have "absolute integrity" in conforming to what the SBC perpetuates.

Robert M. Tenery, pastor of Burkemont Baptist Church of Morganton, N.C., and editor of "Baptists United News," a conservative publication, said he does not think Draper's suggestion "covers enough territory," and is far too general.

"A lot of neo-orthodox people could sign the four points he espoused. I don't think Baptists would accept anything that doesn't speak to such basic things as the church, the scriptures, the nature of God and man and things like that. I think Baptists are generally pretty happy with the Baptist Faith and Message statement," he added.

He added some churches "have clarified that statement at the point of the scriptures and the second coming of Jesus Christ. I would like to see some more clarifying, particularly concerning the scriptures, but if the statement (in BFM) is read honestly, it says the scriptures are inerrant."

Tenery, also a trustee of the Baptist Sunday School Board, said the question "is a matter of integrity," and noted professors at all six seminaries are required to sign articles of faith. "The question is will they honestly stand by what they have signed...do they have the integrity to stand by that?"

He said he believes Draper "is trying to dodge the issue of inerrancy and that issue cannot be dodged. We are not going to solve anything by saying we aren't going to talk about the scriptures. That is like a mathematician saying he is not going to talk about numbers or a doctor saying he is not going to talk about medicine...."

Cecil Sherman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., and a leader in the so-called "moderate faction" of the denomination for three years, said he does not believe Draper's suggestion "will come to anything. The fundamentalists want more (in the guidelines) and others think it ought not happen at all. That's not much concensus," he said.

Kenneth Chafin, pastor of South Main Baptist Church of Houston, and a co-leader with Sherman in the "moderate faction," termed the suggestion "a subtle attack on the integrity of the institutions and agencies" of the denomination. "It is part of the continuing effort to undermine the confidence of Southern Baptists in their institutions and leaders."

The suggestion, he added, "comes at a time when the climate of the denomination is not good. We have a group of people attacking the seminaries and other agencies of the denomination. The suggestion is bound to cause a lot of people to think: 'Inquisition.'"

Chafin, also a trustee at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, added he believes Draper "is stirring a pot that doesn't need to be stirred. It seems he is not putting oil on the waters but pouring gasoline on the fire."

Creeds, Creedalism Draw
Denominational Discussion

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Creeds and creedalism have become an increasing topic of denominational discussion in the wake of a proposal to name a committee to suggest "guidelines of bedrock Southern Baptist belief."

The proposal, made during a mid-November news conference by SBC President James T. Draper Jr., suggests a committee be appointed to draw up some "irreducible minimums" for Baptist belief. Creedalism was injected when news reports tagged Draper's proposal as a call for a Southern Baptist creed.

Draper has denied he used the term, saying he wished to make affirmation of some "cardinal truths" Southern Baptists hold in common.

The SBC president told Baptist Press "historically there is not very much difference between a confession and a creed," but added "creed is a red-flag word" for most members of the 13.9 million member Baptist denomination.

In an effort to sort out the distinctions, Baptist Press contacted a number of Baptist leaders.

"I think the real difference is in how the word is used," said Leon McBeth, professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. "The words confession--'I confess'--and creed--'I believe', are similar. If it is used to inform, to tell the world what we believe, it is a confession. If it is used as a restriction, then it is a creed, no matter what you call it."

Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, says he believes there is a "historical distinction" between creed and confession. "In terms of strict definition (of the terms) there is no difference, but historically a creed has represented an ironclad definition of a doctrine to which all initiates had to subscribe in order to be a part of that particular order.

"Generally creeds were ecclesiastical law while confessions were consensus statements," he added.

Charles Deweese, director of editorial services of the Southern Baptist Historical Commission in Nashville, defined a creed as "an authoritative list of doctrines intended to control the minds of believers. As the ultimate authority, a creed is rigid, inflexible, final and complete. It does not allow for individual interpretation."

Lynn E. May, executive director-treasurer of the Historical Commission, noted: "Baptists in general and Southern Baptists in particular are not and have not been a creedal people. The confessions or statements of faith (such as the 1925 and 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statements adopted by the SBC) are not creeds or authoritative statements."

May added the preambles to the two statements "clearly state they represent a consensus of opinion...that they are not authoritative creeds or final statements." The introductions, he noted, specify they "are not to hamper freedom of thought...are only guides to interpretation, having no authority over the conscience...and emphasize the historic Baptist position that the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Bible."

McBeth, who said he has talked with Draper about the proposal, noted he has "considerable confidence" in the president, but has questions about the future of such a suggestion.

"Although Jimmy (Draper) says he does not want to use any statement in a creedal sense, I think the proposal would lend itself to being used in a brutal, medieval sense of a creed...some future president could use it as a witchhunt.

"I believe the environment in the denomination is too poisoned to try to come up with some confessional statement at the present time," he added.

While Draper has said he does not intend the "guidelines" to be a club to beat people to death with, he did say he believes denominational employees "ought to be able to say we do affirm these basic things."

He told Baptist Press if denominational employees could not accept the "cardinal truths" he suggested, they would eliminate themselves. "If someone could not accept them, he is not a true Southern Baptist and ought to have the integrity to leave."

Patterson agreed there is "a lot more justification" in requiring adherence to a set of statements by denominational agencies and institutions "than on the individual." He cited Cooperative Program support of those agencies and said "it comes back to my having to support that which is inconscionable to me." He said he believes Southern Baptists "have a right to expect (doctrinal) conformity" from denominational employees.

May warned that establishing "a set of doctrinal statements to which individuals, churches, organizations or institutions must subscribe to be accepted as 'Southern Baptist' would make such a statement a creed. Such a development would be totally out of keeping with the historic position of Southern Baptists."

He said it is dangerous to establish "a set of statements to be used as tests of orthodoxy," and noted such action could lead to a Southern Baptist "inquisition."

Bill Leonard, associate professor of church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., pointed out the progression Southern Baptists have followed. "Once we claimed 'No creed but the Bible', then we wrote a confession of faith not binding on conscience, and now seem to want binding creeds."

Dotson Nelson, pastor-emeritus of Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., and a member of the SBC Executive Committee, said he voted against the Baptist Faith and Message statement when it was adopted in 1963, "not because I disagreed with anything that is in it, but because I knew that the preamble which stated it was not a creed would soon be forgotten...."

"Openness is one of the strong facts of Baptist life. I believe when you sign something, you close your mind as far as that is concerned. I am very conservative, but I believe if we are to interpret the Bible as the Holy Spirit leads us, then there will necessarily be some divergence in what we think is our guidance."

Nelson added he fears the BFM "has become our creed," and noted efforts to make the statement more specific in certain areas. "If it came to a vote, I suspect I would favor making it less specific than more," he said.

The retired pastor said the only "good church covenant" he knows of is one adopted "years ago" by Second Baptist Church of Richmond, Va, "composed entirely of Scripture."

Nelson added: "We pay a heavy price for our freedom. It is not as efficient as it might be, but I will take freedom even at the loss of efficiency."

Baylor Faculty, Students
Urge Nuclear Disarmament

WACO, Texas (BP)--Fifty-eight members of the graduate religion "community" at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, have publicly urged fellow Christians, "not to be accomplices to the final holocaust through our silence."

The group, including 43 of 61 resident students in the Baylor graduate religion program, 14 faculty members and a retired faculty member, placed a paid advertisement in the December issue of an independent, national newspaper, SBC Today.

Headlined, "An end to our silence," the statement said the signers "believe the use of nuclear weapons lacks moral justification and stands contrary to the will of God," and asked others to "join us in the divine calling to be makers of peace through prayer and service."

The administration at Baylor, the largest university affiliated with Southern Baptists, "has not been extremely favorable toward our efforts," according to Curtis Freeman, one of the statement's authors and pastor of Belfalls (Texas) Baptist Church.

However, John S. Belew, vice president and provost at Baylor, said: "The right of individuals to express their positions on issues which affect the welfare of mankind are respected at Baylor. All sensitive people are deeply concerned about the potential for a nuclear holocaust.

"It would be improper, though, for any group to state or infer they represent a position of Baylor University. A number of solutions for the avoidance of nuclear disaster have been proposed and it is the hope of all mankind that the most effective one will be embraced."

Freeman said they hope the ad, which included a disclaimer "this statement in no way represents any official position of Baylor University on this subject," will bring the issue of disarmament up for discussion among Southern Baptists.

Students, "spent hours" with professors, "explaining our concern, going over the statement, asking and answering questions," Freeman said after it was decided to include as large a portion of the graduate religion community as possible.

Thirteen of 17 full time faculty members in the graduate school ultimately signed, along with the director of Baylor's Institute of Church-State Studies, James Wood.

Others included Glen Hilburn, department chairman; James Landes, former executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas; Daniel B. McGee, H.J. Flanders Jr., C.W. Christian, John B. Davidson, Russell Lester, John Wood, Naymond H. Keathley, William L. Pitts, J.W. Ousley, Bob E. Patterson, Bruce C. Cresson and Glen O. Hilburn. E.L. Dwyer, retired faculty member, also signed the statement.

Those who did not sign were: James Breckenridge, Edward Dalglish, Robert Sloan and W J Wimpy, campus chaplain.

The statement also said: "The nuclear arms race threatens to terminate creation, while simultaneously diverting money and resources which could otherwise be used to meet the basic needs of the earth's poorest people...the spiraling nuclear build-up accompanied by the failure to develop a meaningful, authentic nuclear arms control and disarmament negotiation strategy demands that the Church withdraw its moral support from the continuing direction of the nuclear arms race."

It said the statement had been written to "affirm the spirit of recent statements on nuclear arms control and disarmament, as exemplified by the Southern Baptist Convention's peace resolutions, the Roman Catholic Bishops' letter and the Presbyterian Church's Call to Halt Nuclear Arms."

Freeman said, in addition to Southern Baptists, signers of the statement included members of Missionary Baptist, Presbyterian, Mennonite, Disciples of Christ, Church of Christ, Lutheran and Nazarene churches.