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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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January 19, 1984

84-10

Draper Tells White House  
Baptists Oppose Vatican Ties

By Stan Haste

WASHINGTON (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President James T. Draper Jr. told a top Reagan administration official Jan. 18 Southern Baptists are virtually united in their opposition to President Reagan's appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican.

Draper, along with Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta, and a handful of evangelical leaders, told presidential assistant for national security affairs Robert C. McFarlane millions of evangelicals oppose the Jan. 10 move restoring full diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

Draper told Baptist Press after the White House meeting he told McFarlane, "You've touched an issue that Southern Baptists would almost be united on."

The Euless, Texas, pastor also repeated his view the Vatican action "has endangered the support of millions of evangelical Christians" for President Reagan.

Draper said while McFarlane sought to explain Reagan's action restoring relations after 116 years by saying it would give the U.S. a better "pipeline" to the Vatican, he "gave no real reasons."

McFarlane appeared "cowed" by the objections registered during the meeting, Draper said. "There was just no rationale to support this appointment."

Following McFarlane's presentation, Draper said, Stanley told the national security advisor bluntly his explanation was unsatisfactory, that the Vatican move was a major White House blunder and that the group of churchmen remained opposed to it.

Draper said his reading of public reaction to the appointment is that "they (the White House) have gotten a ton" of telegrams and calls opposing the action.

But a White House official told Baptist Press "there were just not enough calls" to keep count.

Before registering their protest with McFarlane, the group of churchmen met with White House chief of staff James A. Baker III and presidential counselor Edwin Meese III on the controversy between the state of Nebraska and the independent Faith Baptist Church, Louisville, Neb., over the latter's unaccredited church school.

Baker and Meese told the group the reason the White House has not become more involved in the ongoing dispute has to do with the president's view education is essentially a state, not a federal, issue. At the same time they expressed concern about the matter.

Draper said the group urged Baker and Meese to ask the president "just to express sympathy (and) concern" for the parents who were jailed for refusing to tell a Nebraska judge what they know about the school's operation. He added: "If we don't show concern for violations of religious liberty everywhere, then religious liberty is threatened everywhere."

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For the past four years, Faith Baptist Church has refused to comply with a state law requiring teachers in religious schools receive state accreditation. The church's pastor, Everett Sileven, has insisted that submitting to accreditation would place the authority of the state over that of God. Sileven, who has been jailed repeatedly, has become an heroic figure in fundamentalist circles for his defiance.

Draper said one member of the group meeting with Baker and Meese, famed church-state attorney William B. Ball, acknowledged Sileven and the parents had not been defended well and the judge who sentenced them for contempt of court had been placed in a no-win situation.

Ball also said he is defending another unaccredited Christian school in a separate Nebraska proceeding and hopes that case will become a better legal test of Nebraska's accreditation requirements.

The issue of state accreditation of religious schools recently gained further attention when a federal district court judge in Maine declared unconstitutional that state's requirement that teachers be approved by the state. Similar legal tests are springing up in other parts of the country as well.

Besides Draper, Stanley and Ball, others participating in the White House meeting included independent Baptist preacher and author Tim LaHaye, television evangelist Jimmy Swaggart, and National Association of Evangelicals general counsel Forrest Montgomery.

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Lloyd Elder Said Ready  
To Assume Board Presidency

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press  
1/19/84

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Lloyd Elder describes himself as "on ready" as he prepares Feb. 1 to assume the presidency of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Elder, 50, was elected in February 1983 to succeed Grady C. Cothen at his retirement Jan. 31, 1984. Elder is completing 10 months of orientation which has included interviews with persons throughout the board and at every level of the denomination.

"This orientation period has allowed major learning opportunities for developing relationships, participating in the operations of the board, and increasing my sensitivity to Baptist people and other Sunday School Board audiences," Elder said.

"My intention as president of the board is to keep its focus on the local church and to magnify the excellence of this organization through servant-team leadership," he noted.

Elder said he was not totally surprised at the size of the Sunday School Board--1,800 employees, 16 programs of work and a 1983-84 budget of \$149.2 million. However, he added, "I am amazed at the complex and extensive resources the board has to do its work."

For example, he said, "Each program, such as Sunday school, has resources for its own role. But it extends those resources as it relates to other programs such as church training, church administration and church music."

Another part of Elder's orientation was a detailed study of the 93-year history of the board. He came away grateful for the hope strengthened by an increased awareness "the Sunday School Board and the convention have had other days of struggle and gone on to experience growth, harmony and fellowship."

A knowledge of the board's heritage helps him "keep the large, founding vision in mind and becomes a point of reference in making today's decision," Elder said.

"It has helped me to keep aware of the central purpose of the board and its relationship to the convention and the people. I have come to know in a sense the vision and heartbeat of people like J.M. Frost" (Virginia pastor who led the effort to establish the board and became its first corresponding secretary).

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Many conversations with Cothen also have been a key part of Elder's introduction to the board. He described Cothen as a "visionary leader at the center of Southern Baptist life with a deep commitment to the Bible and the lordship of Christ. He has become a cherished friend."

Among Cothen's contributions, Elder cited Cothen's initiation of the Bible Book Series for youth and adults, his emphasis on Bible teaching for the masses and his initiation of BTN (Baptist Telecommunications Network) which will begin broadcasts by satellite to churches in June.

"I think Southern Baptists will continue to be enriched by the impact of Grady Cothen's ministry," said Elder.

In the midst of his preparation to become the board's seventh president, Elder also began writing a book on denominational renewal which is due to be released by Broadman in June of this year.

Combining the management principles of organizational renewal and the biblical principles of spiritual renewal, Elder said he hopes to challenge the denomination as an organization to make positive changes at every level toward more effective service to Christ.

"I am not talking about renewal in the sense of moving from bad to good but moving from today into tomorrow and dealing with the changes in a vital and authentic way," he emphasized.

Within the Nashville community, Elder said he has seen the primary influence of the board through its employees as members of local Baptist churches. He has preached in numerous Nashville churches, including First Baptist Church where he and his wife Sue are members.

"I have found employees serving as deacons, choir members, ushers and committee members. My own Sunday school teacher is Will Beal (consultant in the church administration department) and my Sunday school department director is Bob Boyd (supervisor of the ethnic liaison unit)," said Elder.

Also, he noted, "The Sunday School Board, one of the major employers in the Nashville area, has earned a valued place in the business and community life of the city."

After spending most of their lives in Texas, Lloyd, Sue, his wife of 30 years, and son Philip a high school senior, have made the move to Tennessee with a minimum of problems.

"It is difficult to uproot, but people have been gracious, outgoing and friendly. We're settling in," he said, expressing a special measure of gratitude for Sue's support and encouragement during a year of new beginnings.

As he approaches his presidential installation, Elder's outlook is characterized by "an ever-increasing appreciation for Southern Baptist people and churches."

Also, "I have a new knowledge and appreciation for the people who do the work here at the Baptist Sunday School Board," he noted.

"The initial decision by faith has been quietly validated by the Lord during these months. I'm not anxious. I'm ready. The time has come and I'm glad. I want us to get on with the work."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by BSSB Bureau of Baptist Press

Agency Heads Oppose  
Vatican Appointment

By David Wilkinson

Baptist Press  
1/19/84

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The chief executives of the Southern Baptist Convention's national institutions have registered unanimous opposition to President Reagan's recent decision to appoint a United States ambassador to the Vatican.

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The 20 agency executives, at a Jan. 18 meeting of the SBC Inter-Agency Council, voiced the opposition "on the basis of our time-honored Baptist commitment to religious liberty and its great corollary, separation of church and state."

The motion, introduced by Christian Life Commission Executive Director Foy Valentine, expressed disapproval of "the appointment of any ambassador to the Vatican or any other religious body."

The Inter-Agency Council consists of the chief executive officers of the convention's Executive Committee, Foreign and Home Mission Boards, Sunday School Board, six seminaries and 10 other national organizations.

The President's decision to restore full diplomatic relations with the Vatican after 116 years immediately drew a barrage of criticism from Baptist leaders after its announcement Jan. 10.

James M. Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, pledged to lead Baptist opposition in Congress and in court if necessary. SBC President James T. Draper Jr., followed with an appeal for Southern Baptists to protest with letters and with calls to the White House switchboard.

Dunn said the Inter-Agency Council's motion "reflects the solid unanimity of Baptist leadership on this issue." The action, he added, is "particularly noteworthy since these leaders are especially close to the grassroots of Southern Baptist life."

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Revival Signs Promising  
Says Vance Havner

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press  
1/19/84

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Vance Havner, who's been preaching on spiritual awakening for much of his 70 years in the ministry, says he's seeing "strange things" in some churches.

"Grown men are walking the aisle with tears in their eyes to give their hearts to God," Havner said at the Texas Baptist Evangelism Conference in Fort Worth last week.

Havner, who at 82 still maintains a vigorous preaching schedule at evangelism conferences, seminaries and churches, won't venture any predictions concerning widespread revival. He said there are promising, though "spotty", signs and "some churches are having sustained revival."

Havner, who wants to be known as "just a preacher," laced his message with his special brand of witty indictments.

"Before revival can come," he said, "the church must first repent, and that's not popular."

"The main job of the devil is to get people to join the church without being saved.... It's too easy to become a Baptist. You walk the aisle and they give you a box of envelopes."

Havner said in an interview in calling for church members to repent he tries not to beat someone over the head who's nervous about their salvation.

"We don't all have the same type of salvation experience," he added.

Havner called on Christians to be salt for Christ.

"He wants to put you in the salt shaker and rub you into the decaying carcass of civilization. If we don't have a reformation pretty soon, this country is going to be the biggest buzzard roost you ever saw."

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Concerning the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians, Havner said, "There's a lot of spiritual smog in the churches. Nothing will blow that out except the same wind that blew at Pentecost."

He said fear of extremism has stifled the Holy Spirit among Baptists. "Some are so afraid to get out on a limb they never get up the tree."

When spiritual awakening comes, Havner said, "It won't necessarily follow our pattern. The great Welch revival of the early 1900's was spontaneous. There were some great preachers, but they didn't preach. They just came to see what was going on."

Havner says more prophets are needed, not the kind who predict the end of the world, but "the kind who speak to the nation for the church and for God."

Havner is optimistic in that he sees better response today from young people than ever before. "A couple of generations ago, they were pretty wild," he said.

Although he's been preaching for 70 years, he said, "I still get up a new sermon every once in awhile, just for my own good."

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Persecutors Given  
Break Even Proposition

By Orville Scott

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Relief comes in unexpected ways sometimes, according to Gene Fluker who has endured much persecution as pastor of Lake City Baptist Church in Colorado.

Fluker ministers in an area of Lake City where there had been 32 saloons and related establishments.

Last week Evangelism Director Carlos McLeod saw Fluker at the 1984 conference in Fort Worth and asked for an update.

Fluker said foes had continued the persecution. But he reiterated, "God has told me that he wants me in Lake City and he wants a church there."

During the year, said Fluker, opponents had filed "disturbing the peace" charges against the Baptists for holding an outdoor service, shot arrows through the church windows and assaulted Fluker on the street.

Then a strange thing happened. A 270-pound man was angered by the persecution. He was not a member of the church and "was probably an agnostic," said Fluker, but he made the round of the saloons and announced: "The first man who bothers the preacher or breaks windows, I'm going to break all his arms and all his legs."

The persecution stopped, said Fluker, and "First Baptist Church is still alive and doing well in Lake City."

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