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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a two-part series adapted from an article in the April 11, 1984, Baptist Standard, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.)

Robison-Green Ministry
Causes SBC Controversy

By Toby Druin

DALLAS (BP)--The ministry of longtime Southern Baptist evangelist James Robison and his new associate Milton Green is causing a firestorm of controversy in the denomination.

"I am concerned," says James T. Draper Jr., president of the SBC and pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas. "It is a problem all over the country. It has divided friends; it has affected churches."

Over the past two years, seminars sponsored by the James Robison Evangelistic Association and featuring the Bible teaching of Green, a one-time carpet cleaner from Cleveland, Tenn., have attracted thousands of participants, many Southern Baptist. Critics see in the seminars charismatic teachings, including emphases on healing and demonology and an anti-local church, anti-pastor bias.

Draper, who is Robison's pastor at the Euless church, said he is concerned about what he thinks is an extreme emphasis on the demonic and an abuse of the doctrine of healing.

One longtime Robison associate, Freddie Gage, severed a 25-year relationship over Robison's "Greenie" ties and "errant theology." Gage calls the movement a "cult," and said the breaking of fellowship is "due to Robison's emphasis on demons, curses, signs, wonders, healings and revelations," and his neglect of evangelism.

Robison's speaking engagements at several prominent Southern Baptist churches have been cancelled or postponed because of his new emphasis. Among them are First Baptist Church of Dallas, the nation's largest Protestant congregation, and First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., where former SBC President Bailey E. Smith is pastor.

Tom Melzoni, executive director of church ministries at First Church, Dallas, said he asked Pastor W.A. Criswell to postpone Robison's speaking engagement in 1983 "until there could be some clear definition of where James Robison stood theologically." Melzoni added he doubts "very seriously" if Robison will be rescheduled.

Smith said he cancelled because "I was afraid he would teach that sort of thing that I think is totally erroneous...." Smith added the Green influence has been divisive. "They preach unity but the seminars have caused more divisiveness than I have seen in my lifetime."

Robison now is a frequent speaker at Pentecostal services. Critics say he is at best no longer preaching "traditional Southern Baptist" doctrines and at worst simply no longer a Southern Baptist.

Robison was asked if he now is a charismatic and said: "I don't want to call myself anything. If I say I am now a charismatic, that's like saying I am not a Baptist and then Baptists don't want to listen to me. If I say I am not a charismatic, then the charismatics don't want to listen to me. What I am trying to be is a Christian."

He added: "I have never spoken in tongues, but I believe it is a legitimate gift and I always have, even more so today because I am seeing the genuineness of the gift...."

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Robison said his life was changed when Green prayed for him two years ago, setting him "free," he says, from "a claw in the brain" that had plagued him for years.

Green refused an interview with the Baptist Standard. Scott Fisher, the coordinator of the Green seminars, said Green wanted to avoid controversy. "We're not in this for controversy," Fisher said. "We are in it for the glory of Jesus."

Fisher, who said he has known Green 10 years, confirmed Green has been married three times. "Before he was saved in 1973 he had been divorced twice," Fisher said.

Other facts are gleaned from seminar tapes. He was a carpet cleaner in Cleveland, Tenn., and has a ninth grade education. He underwent heart surgery and contends he was told by a doctor he had no chances to survive and that the surgery was not completed.

The Dallas Morning News, in an article June 12, 1983, however, quotes Green's physician, Fred Ballard of Chattanooga, Tenn., that "everything was done as planned" during the surgery. He said: "I don't recall anything about him not being complete."

Robison's contact came during a meeting led by Jim Hylton, pastor of Lake Country Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. Hylton came into contact with Green in New Albany, Ind., in 1980 during a protracted meeting at Graceland Baptist Church. It was Hylton who two years ago brought Green to a conference being led by Jack Taylor, former vice president of the SBC.

The first Green seminar reportedly was conducted a couple of months later and the proliferation has continued.

Fisher said seminars, which cost \$40, feature Green lecturing almost non-stop for nearly three days. The central focus is Green, mainly quoting the Scripture and commenting on it. Green allows no questions, Fisher said, adding Robison and evangelist Dudley Hall usually join a seminar on the second day to answer questions.

One critic says Green allows no questions because he is intimidated by anyone who challenges him, especially anyone with a theological education.

Critics cite Green for seeing demons "in every bush," teaching that physical healing was secured for Christians on the cross--and an anti-local church, anti-pastor sentiment.

William E. Bell, professor of biblical studies at Dallas Baptist College and theologian-in-residence at Euless First Church, and John Newport, vice president for academic affairs at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, are critical of Green's teachings.

Bell says Green arrives at invalid doctrinal assumptions from "a faulty interpretation of Scripture" and a "faulty evaluation of presumed personal experience."

The practical dangers of Green's teachings, Bell says, are that they encourage adherents to shun modern medicine and turn to God alone for healing. "This is cultic," Bell says.

Bell says the believer who follows the Green admonitions about healings and are not healed tend to lose faith altogether. Believers also are encouraged "by example, not precept, to subject Scripture to absolutely outrageous interpretations to support presumed experience."

The DBC prof said pastors and other church leaders who are not charismatic are vilified as pharisaical, unbelieving, satanically blinded, arrogant, ignorant, etc., thus undermining their position as spiritual leaders and encouraging rebellion and schism in the churches.

Newport questions Green's use of the Scriptures, which he says is not appropriate; his antagonism toward traditional churches and denominations; Green's seeing just one great spiritual church with local churches and denominations being headed up by people just looking out for themselves, and an extreme dualism where the world is overwhelmed by the demonic.

Newport adds: "He thinks theologians, people like I am, or pastors or educated preachers are sort of the bane of God."

Lottie Giving Tops \$53 Million
But Still Off Pace To Meet Goal

By Bob Stanley

FMB-N

BILOXI, Miss. (BP)--Southern Baptists have given \$53,193,364 to the 1983 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, but the pace of receipts is not fast enough to meet the \$60 million goal.

Carl Johnson, Foreign Mission Board vice president for finance, said it looks now like the final total May 31 may run about \$1.9 million short. This would be a 7.52 percent increase over the 1982 offering, which Johnson noted exceeds the current national inflation rate.

Announcement of the offering total came at the board's April meeting, where board members voted to reduce their meetings from eight to six a year to help save expenses and use their time more effectively.

More than 8,000 Baptists committed themselves to pray for 24 new missionaries at an appointment service April 10 in the Gulf Coast Coliseum in Biloxi. These additions, plus the reappointment of Herman and Dottie Hayes, brought the year's missionary additions to 68.

Hayes, after six years' work as a staff member challenging Southern Baptists to respond to the need for career missionaries, is expected to work with Australian Baptists in starting new churches. The assignment is the first step following action taken in March setting up fraternal relationships with Australian Baptists. Hayes' assignment must be approved by the Australian Baptists before it becomes official.

The board also employed 65 young adults for training as journeymen. Those who receive medical clearance and successfully complete a five-week training program will be commissioned July 20 to work two years assisting career missionaries overseas. Another group of journeyman candidates will be approved in November. Opening of the new missionary learning center near Richmond has made it possible to train the journeymen in smaller groups.

Board members elected Harrell Cushing, pastor of First Baptist Church, Gadsden, Ala., as chairman after a runoff ballot with Mark Cortis, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.

Discussion at the meeting focused on the report of a special committee appointed to study ways to increase effectiveness of meetings of the 83-member board. Assured the reorganized schedule would not reduce time for consideration of important policy decisions, the board adopted the plan calling for six meetings a year but extending meeting time from two to three days on all meetings. Previously only the three major meetings each year have been three-day meetings.

Homer Beaver, vice president for administration, said the reduced number of meetings may save \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year.

As part of the plan, the board created a new chairman's advisory council composed of board officers and chairpersons of standing committees. But the board specified the council will function only as a forum for discussing ideas and will not in any way be considered as an executive committee.

The board also defined which items will be handled by the board and which will be considered staff decisions reportable to board committees.

Chairman Gene Triggs presented a 30-year service pin to President R. Keith Parks as board member Lucile Alexander pinned a corsage on his wife, Helen Jean Parks.

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Senate Broadens Extension
Of Clergy Housing Ruling

By Larry Chesser

BSC-N

Baptist Press
4/12/84

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Senate has voted to prevent the Internal Revenue Service from eliminating housing tax breaks for all clergy and military personnel before Jan. 1, 1986.

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By voice vote, the Senate agreed to an amendment offered by Sen. John W. Warner, R-Va., and Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., extending double housing tax breaks for ministers and military personnel through 1985. The Warner-Helms amendment came in response to a 1983 IRS revenue ruling which prohibited ministers from taking mortgage interest and real estate tax deductions to the extent these normally-deductible expenses were attributable to a tax-exempt housing allowance and concern that IRS was planning to impose a similar ruling on military housing.

The 1983 clergy housing ruling (Rev. Rul. 83-3) was scheduled for implementation at the end of June 1983, but IRS later issued a transitional ruling extending the effective date until Jan. 1, 1985, for ministers who occupied or had a contract to purchase their homes as of Jan. 3, 1983. Last month, the Senate Finance Committee agreed to extend the effective date for the same category of ministers for one year.

The language agreed to by the Senate was a compromise urged by Finance Committee Chairman Robert Dole, R-Kan., after Warner and Helms originally had offered an amendment which permanently would have exempted clergy and military housing from application to Section 265 of the Internal Revenue Code which bars double tax benefits.

Dole, floor manager of the pending tax bill, suggested the simple extension of housing benefits for both groups and promised his committee along with the Armed Services Committee would hold hearings on the issue by Oct. 1.

A Warner aide told Baptist Press the Virginia Senator will pursue a permanent ban through the hearings announced by Dole.

Warner said his intention is "to protect the compensation now received by two of the most dedicated and worthy professional groups in our society; namely, military personnel and clergy."

Warner said implementation of a ruling denying housing breaks to either group could "have serious financial consequences." He added, "The total gain to the U.S. Treasury, though not calculated yet by the IRS or Treasury Department, is estimated by them to be relatively small."

Because the House-passed tax package does not contain language dealing with the clergy-military housing issue, the matter will have to be resolved by a House-Senate conference committee along with other differences in the two tax bills.

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God Calling Southern Baptists
To Missions Destiny, Says Parks

FMB-N

Baptist Press
4/12/84

BILOXI, Miss. (BP)--"God is blowing trumpets, turning on spotlights, clashing cymbals and ringing bells declaring: 'Southern Baptists, your destiny--your potential for making a remarkable contribution in my world today--is missions. Don't be sidetracked.'"

This was the message President R. Keith Parks delivered April 11 as the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board met on Mississippi's Gulf Coast.

"I believe we are at a time when we can become a catalyst--a coordinator for mobilizing mission efforts of much of the Baptist world," Parks said.

Referring to contacts already underway to involve overseas Baptists in strategic planning for world evangelization, Parks said he didn't know what form the organization will take, but said, "We must plan toward evolving into an organization which will assume a significant role in the internationalization of missions.

"This must happen first among Baptist groups with which we work," he continued. But he said he foresees the day "wh n we can take a more active role in influencing Christians beyond Baptists."

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Parks said he is convinced Southern Baptists will continue to send out missionaries. Missions will continue to be the magnetic core pulling Southern Baptists together to meet the needs of the world, he emphasized.

But he stressed missions operates in a world of change and called for accelerated modification of methods "which will enable us to shape these changes to enhance our mission effort."

"Our philosophy," he said, "should be 'Let's fix it before it breaks.'" He warned, however, against "accidental, unplanned change in Southern Baptists' basic nature. For unintentional, or unrecognized change in the basic nature of any organization is insidious and deadly. Such could destroy the basic purpose of our board and of our convention."

Parks said Southern Baptists' spiritual ancestors were already committed to the authority of the Bible, personal salvation by faith, priesthood of the believer, authority of the local church, baptism of believers by immersion and the Lord's Supper as the two ordinances, and separation of church and state.

"They emphasized and intensified the importance of cooperation," he said. "But the distinguishing mark was creating a denomination called Southern Baptist with missions as the cohesive force of that cooperation. Such is the clear statement in the constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Other Baptists, he noted, have essentially the same doctrine but are not held together by the dominant commitment to missions.

"If we ever lost the other Baptist distinctives, we would cease to be Baptist," Parks said. "If we lose our historic perspective and unintentionally or unknowingly allow a substitute for missions to be defined as our distinguishing characteristic, we will have changed the basic nature of our Southern Baptist Convention. This will distort our past, change our present and jeopardize our future."

"It is my personal conviction," Parks added, "that just as God has blessed Southern Baptists in the area of missions, the one possibility we have to be used of God to make a unique contribution to the Christian world is in the realm of missions."

Baptist leaders around the world are sensing God's leadership toward a consultation on worldwide evangelization, he said. Several plan to continue dialogue at a European Baptist meeting in Berlin this summer, and an international meeting may be convened at Ridgecrest, N.C., next year. "The Lord is imbedding this idea in many hearts," he said. "It seems to be a spiritual idea whose time has come."

For the first time, he said, the necessary ingredients of spiritual maturity, world vision, commitment, personnel, financial resources, transportation and communication are such that there is "a genuine possibility that we as Baptists can function internationally in jointly reaching a whole world."

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Southeastern's Annual Gifts
Increase 24 Percent

Baptist Press
4/12/84

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Annual gifts to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., totaled \$877,055, up from \$708,254 in 1982, a 24 percent increase.

The total represents 1,367 gifts from alumni, friends, foundations and corporations.

The report also showed that for the five-year period, 1979-1983, gifts amounted to \$3,482,744.

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