



BAPTIST PRESS

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AMB-N

Leavell Says Missions Demand SBC Loyalty

By Michael Tutterow

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Denominational politics threaten to unravel Southern Baptists' programs of mission support and pre-empt the denomination's efforts to reach the world with the gospel, the president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary warned.

Denominational infighting has resulted in a move away from missions and evangelism and brought the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program, the denomination's unified budget, under attack, said Landrum P. Leavell, president of the New Orleans seminary.

"The Southern Baptist Convention may stand at the point of no return and the decisions we make from this moment on will determine whether or not this denomination remains viable or if it will be fragmented and become useless in the Kingdom of God in the future," he said.

Leavell, in an address to participants attending Home Missions Week at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center, leveled charges against factions in the denomination vying for power and said political games have no place in the church.

"This denomination was born in the fires of evangelism, it has been nurtured in a love for the scriptures and we grew in strength through missions response to lost multitudes," noted Leavell. "When we become introverted and begin thinking more of maintenance than we do of missions, we're moving in the wrong direction.

"We'll either reaffirm our commitment to evangelism and missions--reaching people--or we can consign our successors to mediocrity and obscurity," he said. "We shall either harness the vast resources of our denomination in a new thrust to claiming this world for Jesus Christ, or surely we shall be divested of our glorious opportunity and our sacred responsibility."

The denomination reflects a trend in American society, he added, saying the United States stands at a crossroads. "We'll either look to the rock from whence we were hewn and return to the strong massive foundation of Christian morality founded by our forebears," cautioned Leavell, "or we'll wallow and disappear in a quicksand of permissiveness and relativity, in easy credits and deficits, in low morals and high crime rates and double-digit inflation and recession until ultimately we'll be consigned to the graveyard of fallen nations."

Leavell noted several mainline denominations have declined as they strayed from a conservative biblical base, but since Southern Baptists have been and remain Bible-believing people--as long as differences in doctrine do not compromise the diety of Christ or include "a denial or refutation of the word of God,"--there is room "for latitude in our doctrinal belief."

But some in the denomination insist on uniformity of belief, which violates individuals' rights to be directed by God, said Leavell. "We must be unashamably doctrinal without becoming argumentative," he said. "We need to keep in mind that there is the slightest possibility that we may be wrong" (about what we believe).

Demanding unity of belief might be an insistence "that others believe something isn't right," he suggested.

Under the guise of doctrinal purity, some have withdrawn from the SBC but continue to harangue the denomination's structure and program, leaving the convention battleorn and divided, said Leavell.

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He offered little sympathy for those who stand outside and throw stones at the denomination and charged that cooperative efforts have been the success of the 14 million member denomination.

As a young seminary student Leavell made a commitment to work through the Southern Baptist Convention and tie his life "to something that was not going to die when I did." He said the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' unified budget, enabled him to go to college and seminary and still offers Southern Baptists the best educational and missions support.

Yet political struggles within the SBC threaten to unravel the Cooperative Program and undo the "genius of Southern Baptists," he charged. Political factions within the SBC only serve to divide Southern Baptists' loyalties to missions and evangelism, he said, adding "I have no patience with those who are constantly criticising our program of missions support, who have always spent their days maligning and trying to cast dispersions.

"And I have no respect for pastors who have been educated in our institutions who do not lead their churches to support the denomination. I hold nothing but contempt for those wolves in sheeps' clothing who accept the pastorates of God-fearing, Christ-honoring, mission-supporting Baptists and sow suspicion and distrust and antagonism toward the Convention.

"And some of these, under the guise of alleged liberalism (in the SBC), lead those churches out of the denomination," he stated. "The culprit, in many cases, is a superego, not an independent streak, which refuses cooperation."

Leavell cautioned against relaxing standards of education among Southern Baptist leaders. "I'm afraid that we've raised a large segment of a generation who're willing to compromise their personal integrity in order to be called 'doctor'," he lamented. "I'm not against education, but I have absolutely no respect for a man who wants it so badly that instead of paying the price to get it, he'll buy a bogus degree," he declared.

Those who earn degrees from schools unaffiliated with the denomination may deal a severe blow to the financial stability of the Cooperative Program, Leavell added. He expressed fears Southern Baptists had raised a generation "who may well fragment or destroy the Cooperative Program. But," he warned, "if you fragment or destroy the Cooperative Program, you've fragmented and destroyed the genius of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Leavell noted the annual meeting of the SBC was originally designed to hear reports from the denomination's agencies and institutions on how they had used Cooperative Program funds. "Kill the Cooperative Program and you won't even have a meeting at which you can politic for president," maintained Leavell.

Countering criticism the Cooperative Program has become a test of missions commitment in SBC life, Leavell charged a church's gifts to the Cooperative Program act as a "litmus test" and signify "where someone stands on world missions." But graduates of non-Baptist seminaries and schools who become pastors of SBC churches have no sense of loyalty to the Cooperative Program, he charged.

"If we continue to water down our identity with a large number of graduates serving churches in our denomination who are not graduates of our seminaries then it isn't going to be very long until Southern Baptists will have lost their distinctiveness entirely," he said.

"If we get enough pastors who are graduates of non-SBC seminaries and feel no sense of obligation or gratitude to the Cooperative Program for their education it won't be long until the whole thing will come crashing down."

He called on those who "throw stones" at the denomination to work within the convention's system to "constructively bring about change and continue to build on the strong denominational foundation that we've inherited."

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Baptist Press

North Carolina Association
Passes Tobacco Resolution

SMITHFIELD, N.C. (BP)—Tobacco farmers have received the "love and support" of the Johnston Baptist Association in North Carolina, just weeks after a resolution at the national annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention urged them to switch to other cash crops.

The resolution, which was mailed to the Biblical Recorder (the state Southern Baptist newspaper), noted the production and sale of tobacco "remains the economic lifeline for many of our people and the majority of our churches" in the association and that it is "essential we have money from tobacco at the present time to carry on our church programs including the Cooperative Program which is the lifeline for mission support."

The resolution also said the SBC resolution had been adopted, "without realizing the economic impact to the Southern states and many Southern Baptist churches."

The farmers were commended for their "present and continued support of Southern Baptist work through the local church and the Southern Baptist Convention."

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Iranian Christian Joins
Dallas Church Anonymously

By Terry Barone

Baptist Press
8/1/84

DALLAS (BP)—Wilshire Baptist Church, Dallas, has voted unanimously to accept into fellowship an anonymous Christian in Iran.

"I need to pray. I need to cry," the Iranian wrote Wilshire pastor Bruce McIver. "Here at home I can pray and cry, but in secret."

McIver has received four letters in four years from an Iranian man in his 40s. Generally the letters have concerned the Iranian's progressive search for Christ and his longing to be part of a Christian fellowship.

In the most recent letter of June 1984, the man wrote McIver, "I want to ask you to write down my name as a member of your church. On Sundays, when you preach and speak to your audience, remember me as one of the most faithful members."

McIver said this was the first letter in which the man talked about a commitment to Christ. The other letters raised many questions about his Islamic faith and mentioned the "beautiful church building and warm spirit of Wilshire" he had heard about from friends.

McIver said he does not know the man. In an earlier letter the man wrote, "This is a letter...from someone you have not seen and you have not known. From someone who has not the same religion as you and has not been born in the same faith as you have."

The Iranian described himself as highly educated, with several advanced degrees. He said, "I have traveled to different parts of the world and have observed different nations, different customs and traditions.

"I am fully empty of hope. I am dying, not my body, but my soul, my belief and my creed. I think that all my life I have been in darkness and now I am discovering a light that warms me to comfort and gets rid from my congenial faith...I want to confess, to warn all people across the world that I have been foolish! I have been shamefully stupid in believing in Islam."

McIver said the man's most recent letter represents a turning point in his life.

The man wrote, "During this long hard time (of course for me) many things have happened in Iran which I sure am not able to write. Many dramatic, regretful changes have occurred in our ancient culture...I just want to write about a great change in myself. It is a real change, not in my face or body, but in my thought and belief."

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He went on, "I need to write. I need to speak. Here in my country, I can not speak. I can not write. I can not meet. I can not breathe. Then what can I do except sitting and writing to my most respectful place (church) in my most respectful country (America). Be patient and read my letter carefully and when on Sundays you are on your prayers with the audience, call your people and speak to them instead of me."

He also talked about his "inherited belief" in Islam.

When he went home after the Islamic revolution, he noticed "so many crimes, inhumanities and religious ignominies. I felt it necessary to doubt and study my religion. After a hard and accurate research I awakened from the deep stupor of ignorance. I recognized that I have not been on the right way. Now I want to announce that I am not a Moslem anymore. I have made many of my friends and relatives to review about their faiths."

In closing he asked, "Help me to awaken numerous people who are disillusioned from their inherited religious hopes and are seeking a new Heaven. I know many people here who are wishing to smell fresh inspiration issued from within your world to invigorate them, as the seekers of love, forgiveness and affability."

He ended by saying that since most letters posted in the United States from Iran are censored, the address on the envelope was not his real address.

McIver said he shared the letter with the congregation because "someone in another part of the world would like to be a part of a church that would pray for him."

"Obviously, there is no vehicle to receive him into membership of our church this way, but there is the watchcare program whereby someone can be considered part of the fellowship without officially being a member. This was not a mechanical process that was performed. This was done to call the attention of the congregation to a person who wanted to be part of us. This was done in response to his request since I can't write to him."

McIver added he was not concerned that what he did was something "different or organizationally proper. My only concern was that our church include him in fellowship and prayer."

McIver said he would remind his congregation of its Iranian brother from time to time.

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ACTS Awarded Fifth
Low-Power TV Station

By Greg Warner

Baptist Press
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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—The American Christian Television System (ACTS) has been awarded a fifth construction permit for a low-power television station—this one in Champaign, Ill.,—through the Federal Communications Commission's random selection procedure, or lottery.

The FCC is using the computer-assisted lottery to help wade through 12,000 competing applications for low-power service, a new type of TV broadcasting that reaches a smaller viewing area, usually 10-15 miles in radius. When two or more applicants have filed for the same channel in the same location, and all meet other FCC requirements, the lottery chooses the winner.

To date ACTS has been granted all but three of its applications. The network still has 147 applications awaiting FCC action, 91 of which will be assigned to lotteries between now and the end of the year.

The Champaign station will be licensed for channel 36. A local board representing Southern Baptist churches in the area will be formed to build and administrate the station, which will carry both ACTS' programs and local programming.

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Other channels awarded to ACTS through the lottery are in Anchorage, Alaska; Brownwood, Texas; Flagstaff, Ariz., and Honolulu. Two other low-power stations in Tyler, Texas, and Paragould, Ark., were acquired for ACTS through other means.

The stations in Anchorage and Tyler are the first ACTS stations to go on the air. ACTS also is carried on 84 cable TV systems, which reach more than a million homes.

Low-power applications in Albany and Macon, Ga., as well as a second application in Anchorage, were dismissed through the lottery.

The American Christian Television System is an 18-hour-per-day network of family and Christian entertainment programs sent by satellite to cable TV systems and television stations nationwide. The network is operated by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

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August LIFE Features
Beirut Missionaries

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Baptist Press
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RICHMOND Va. (BP)—Three Southern Baptist missionaries and a missionary "kid" are among Americans in Beirut featured in a seven-page spread in the August 1984 issue of LIFE magazine.

The article, "Hanging On in Beirut: The Last Americans," focuses on missionaries Nancie Wingo, from Fort Worth, Texas, a teacher at Beirut Baptist School in west Beirut; David and Maxine King, from Livingston, N.J., and Winkler, Texas, who live on the east side; and the Kings' 18-year-old daughter, Jeanne. King teaches at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary and his wife is a church and home worker.

The magazine photographs show Wingo on her apartment balcony, still damaged from a direct artillery shell hit last September, and talking with an Arab neighbor on the street.

The Kings are shown giving thanks around their table. Maxine King is pictured checking provisions in the family's bomb shelter. Jeanne King was photographed crossing Beirut's Green Line after school and later riding her Arabian stallion into the Lebanese hills.

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Baptist Home Severs
Tie With X-Rated Theater

Missouri Press
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Baptist Press
8/1/84

ST. LOUIS (BP)—A seven-month controversy over Missouri Baptist Children's Home's partial ownership of a theater which showed X-rated movies apparently has ended.

The St. Louis Fine Arts Theatre was one of nine properties bequeathed in 1979 to the children's home and nine other charitable organizations. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported on the link between the charitable, mostly religious, organizations in January.

During the mounting publicity Bob Kenison, administrator of the children's home, explained effort had been underway since 1979 to sell the property but the only offer was withdrawn before it could be accepted.

A representative of St. Johns Bank and Trust Co., the trustee for the properties had potential buyers as early as April but a string of legal considerations, including an out-of-state lease and subsequent sub-lease on the property slowed negotiations.

The children's home's one-tenth share of the sale was approximately \$31,000.

Kenison said the incident showed what "an unfortunate thing can happen when people do not keep up to date on their estate planning," noting the benefactor apparently never realized X-rated movies were being shown at the theater.

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