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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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84-150

Speakers Affirm Women
At Southern Conference

By Bob Allen

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)—During a two-day conference at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., experts in Biblical study, church history, psychology and sociology chided religious teaching which advocates the subjugation of women in church and in society and affirmed the full personhood of women before God in areas of Christian service.

The conference, "Changing Roles of Women in Church and Society", drew 650 participants to the seminary campus. The conference, sponsored by the seminary's Woman's Committee, also featured the presentation of the first Distinguished Christian Woman Award to former First Lady Rosalynn Carter.

Carter expressed concern about the continuing debate in Southern Baptist life over the role of women. "With the time-proven ability of women to share equally all loads and responsibilities with men, it seems we should move beyond resolutions and endless talking, and simply encourage all Americans, male and female, to develop their talents to the fullest, to become leaders based on merit, not on sex," she said.

She also urged women to seek ways to open their churches to ministry by all Christians, regardless of gender.

"As Christian women actively involved in our church," she said, "we are responsible for helping the church overcome any forms of discrimination that keeps all people from becoming the very best we can."

Other conference leaders spoke in equally direct terms about the attitude of churches toward women.

Frank Stagg, retired faculty member at Southern seminary, said, "The church has never been comfortable with Jesus" in its teaching on women. While Jesus "openly and decisively affirmed the full personhood of women," Stagg contended, many Christians have turned instead to Pauline texts which are often "misunderstood", "poorly translated" or "interpreted to fit a bias".

Southern Baptists need a "solid hermeneutic"—or method of biblical interpretation—Stagg indicated. Such a method differentiates between "texts which are of universal value and those which are situational and provisional."

Catherine Allen, associate executive director of Woman's Missionary Union, SBC, believes women have been "hidden in history," because most history has been written by males from a male point of view.

A rediscovery of the contributions of women to church and secular history will bring about "a new day" in historical study, she said.

Southern Baptist women have had one good outlet for passing on their contributions through the work of the WMU, she said, pointing out there are more women in WMU than in all feminist organizations combined.

Bill Leonard, associate professor of church history at Southern, attributed the recent interest in ordination of women to "the powerful dynamic of personal religion" which "leads to an openness of Christian calling."

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Leonard said it was inevitable the Baptist insistence on openness to God's call would result in greater numbers of women coming forward as candidates for ministry.

"It's the fault of GA leaders and Sunday school teachers that women are here at Southern seminary," Leonard said. If some Baptists do not want women to respond to such callings, they should teach girls to sing "Wherever He Leads I'll Go, Unless."

Sara Frances Anders, professor of sociology at Louisiana College, pointed out religious denominations lag behind even the meager gains afforded women in other fields. She added women are beginning to gradually to make some progress.

"There are leaders in the church who are angry about the healing process," Anders said, "but we are here and talking. One of these days our denomination is going to let us talk--really talk--and listen to us."

Andrew Lester, professor of psychology and religion at the seminary, said all interpretation of scripture is subjective, and women "bring a unique selfhood" for understanding truth in the gospel that men cannot grasp.

"Male oriented theology," typified in an SBC resolution passed at Kansas City opposing the ordination of women, when an attempt is made to impose it on others, undermines the soul competency of the believer and the sole authority of Jesus Christ, Lester said. Lester argued the resolution "adds to the subjugation of women" by furthering "a cultural mindset which allows women to be exploited and victimized."

The conference also featured 26 speakers in small group sessions focusing on spiritual growth, dual career families, changing stereotypes of women and the various stages of life.

The conference also featured the presentation of the Kentucky Baptist Woman of the Year Award to Anne Markham, a Mayfield, Ky., educator who has established theological libraries on mission fields.

The conference was the first sponsored by the Woman's Committee. The committee, established at the seminary in the 1950s, has an active membership of 1,900. The Woman's Committee grants scholarships each year to qualified students needing financial assistance and has completed a number of on-campus projects.

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OKC First Messengers
Seated At Annual Meeting

By Bob E. Mathews

Baptist Press
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OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)—By a four to one margin, messengers from First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, were seated at the annual meeting of Capital Association, despite a letter protesting their seating because the church has ordained women deacons.

Last year, messengers at the association's annual meeting voted, by a 2-1 margin, against seating messengers from the church, where former SBC Second Vice-President Gene Garrison is pastor, even though the church did not send messengers.

This year, 20 messengers--the maximum--were seated after a 392-90 vote. Hugo Lindquist, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, challenged the seating, but messengers adopted a positive substitute offered by Bailey Smith, pastor of Del City First Southern Baptist Church and former president of the SBC, allowing First Church members to be seated.

Discussion of Lindquist's protest and the vote extended a 10-minute-period of business to more than 30 minutes.

During the discussion, Garrison said: "I do not believe the issue before us tonight is autonomy, but I do believe the issue is spirit, fellowship and openness to a common task."

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Garrison said it is obvious the majority of churches in the association do not favor the ordination of women. "The conservative nature of our association is well established, but tonight we are establishing the spirit of the association. I do not ask you to believe that we are necessarily right, but I must say in some defense, if we are wrong, B.H. Carroll was wrong, for he had deaconesses in First Church, Waco. Also A.T. Robertson in three places...says certain passages (in the New Testament) are clearly about women deacons."

Lindquist contended, "What we do tonight will decide what we believe as Baptists and how far we will go. We've got to call a halt to the chipping away of what we believe in as Baptists." He told messengers if God had intended women to serve in ordained roles, women would have been included in the disciples and the first deacons chosen.

"The Southern Baptist Convention looked to Capital Association as the conservative association in America. Did you know that?" Lindquist cautioned.

Charles D. Graves, pastor of Nichols Hills Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, was first to oppose Lindquist's motion: "We've already spoken on this issue and I'm not convinced it's the primary issue.... If we seat First Church, we'll be seating messengers who've been seated before and I disagreed with some things they've done, but I think we should accept them.

"These people have changed about nothing else except this one issue and it is not worthy to be compared to redemption through Jesus or the authority or inerrancy of God's word," he added.

Jim Smith, pastor of West Riverside Baptist Church, who seconded Lindquist's motion, said: "I don't think this is a matter of fellowship, or of spirit or of who loves Jesus more than another. It's a matter of faith and order."

Speaking on his substitute motion, Smith said, "I think what this association wants to do is let the world know that most of us believe these roles are masculine and we want to express them. But there's also the matter of being Christian and having the spirit of Christ."

His motion noted the association was expressing its continuing belief in the role of men as deacons and pastors but in the spirit of harmony and Christ, the messengers of First Church should be seated.

Ernie Perkins, Capital Association executive director, later expressed his joy at the annual meeting's events. "I'm proud of the association because for years I have preached we can disagree but still have harmony and love and that's what happened," he said.

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Board Rejects Silencing
Of Seminary President

By Jim Jones

Baptist Press
10/18/84

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, have tabled a motion which would have instructed seminary President Russell Dilday Jr. to stay out of denominational politics.

Tabling of the motion was seen by seminary leaders as a vote of confidence for Dilday, even those who adamantly opposed Dilday's involvement in denominational controversy praised his leadership at the seminary and said they would continue to back him on other seminary matters.

An unnamed trustee said about seven of the 30 trustees favored the motion.

The motion came in the second of two rare executive sessions in which the controversy of Dilday's prominent role in what has been called a Baptist holy war, was sharply debated between the fundamentalists and so-called moderates among the trustees. The debate apparently occurred in a closed door session which took up most of the Oct. 16 afternoon trustee meeting.

The trustees reportedly agreed not to discuss the closed meeting with reporters.

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In the session, Dilday repeated charges which he has made in speeches and in writing; namely that fundamentalist forces are attempting to dominate the denomination and are a threat to the Baptist seminaries and colleges.

After Dilday's comments, a trustee who asked not to be named told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, James T. Draper Jr., new seminary trustee who is immediate past president of the SBC, told fellow trustees he was deeply hurt by Dilday's accusations. Draper was seen as the candidate of the fundamentalist faction when he won the presidency. He said he tried to be fair to all during his two years as president.

Draper said in an interview he is concerned about Dilday's role. "I think he's (Dilday) gotten into an area of controversy and polarization that we don't need. I'm not critical of his courage or right to speak out," said Draper, pastor of First Baptist, Euless, Texas, "I just regret the inclusion of his voice to be a polarizing factor...."

Dilday would not give any details about the exchanges which took place during the two executive sessions which came during the regular open meetings of the trustees, but he acknowledged there were differences stated in both closed meetings: "We had a very open and clear expression of concern."

Dilday, along with other Southern Baptist seminary and agency heads, have been attacking what they claim is an attempt by fundamentalists to take over the Southern Baptist Convention.

During the annual Southern Baptist Convention in Kansas City, Mo, last June, Dilday, in a convention sermon, attacked the fundamentalists, calling them proud brokers of power. Later Roy L. Honeycutt, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., stirred emotions when he called for holy war against the fundamentalist political faction in the SBC.

The last six years fundamentalist leaders have successfully sought to elect their own candidates to the SBC presidency. The latest, Charles F. Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta, was installed as president during the Kansas City meeting.

Dilday said one purpose of the Tuesday trustee meeting was to express concern the seminary is one of the "targets" of fundamentalist leaders after they cited a trend toward liberalism in certain SBC-connected colleges and seminaries.

He said most trustees agree, "The seminary is right in the middle of this and the fundamentalist movement is indeed aimed at the educational institutions including the seminaries. And that's where our concern is."

Some seminary leaders fear a fundamentalist dominated Convention might exact reprisals against professors viewed as too liberal and/or cut school funding to a school viewed as having strayed too far from the conservative Baptist viewpoint.

Ralph Pulley, a Dallas layman on the seminary board, made the motion to instruct Dilday to stay out of denominational politics, a trustee said. Pulley is one of three seminary trustees who are members of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, where W.A. Criswell is pastor. Criswell is seen by many as being the behind the scenes central figure of the fundamentalist movement. One of Criswell's associates at First Baptist, Paige Patterson, who is also president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies, spearheaded the fundamentalist movement in the SBC.

Another trustee, John McKay, a Ft. Worth music evangelist, says he is a fundamentalist but not aligned with any group. He has a great admiration for Dilday but doesn't like his role in the Baptist controversy. "I don't feel like a person receiving a salary like Dilday's from the denomination should chose sides," he said.

Afterwards, even those who opposed Dilday's involvement in the controversy praised his leadership at the seminary and said they would continue to back him in seminary matters. McKay said, "We agreed to disagree. I love Dr. Dilday and I think he has done a marvelous job. I hate to see him drag the seminary into this fight. I don't think the seminary will get anything out of this except a bloody nose."

Draper said he agreed Dilday had some responsibility to speak as a seminary leader but he would like Dilday's statements to be less divisive. "I'd like him to speak out and invite all the people to come to the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas next year instead of saying 'these are the bad guys and let's get rid of them.'"

The trustees also announced a five-year program to raise \$25 million has gone over the top and adopted a new Upward-90 program goal of raising another \$50 million for the seminary by 1990.

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(Jones is religion editor of the Fort Worth (Texas) Star-Telegram.)

Central Association Defeats
Resolution On Women

By Mark Wingfield

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (BP)--A resolution opposing the ordination of women was defeated 44-39 at the annual meeting of New Mexico's largest Southern Baptist association Oct. 16.

The resolution, submitted to the Central Association's resolution committee by Boyd Morerod, was similar to a resolution passed by messengers to the 1984 Southern Baptist Convention in Kansas City, Mo. Morerod is pastor of First Baptist Church in Los Chavez.

The resolution was brought to the floor without specific recommendation after resolution committee members could not agree on the resolution.

The resolution stated since Paul "excludes women from pastoral leadership to preserve a submission God required because the man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall," then women should be encouraged to serve in all aspects of church life and work "other than pastoral function and leadership roles entailing ordination."

Debate of the resolution was impassioned. First to speak against the passage was Marsha Moore, a member of Albuquerque's Heights Baptist Church and a chaplain at St. Joseph's Hospital. Moore explained she had been a chaplain for six years and was hindered in her work by not being ordained. She was to be ordained by Height's Church Oct. 21.

Height's pastor Carmen Conner told messengers his church already has two ordained women deacons and would ordain more regardless of the vote on the resolution. He said he did not believe the church's practice was contrary to Scripture or out of God's will for that church.

Thomas Foulk, pastor of Albuquerque's Westgate Church spoke for the resolution. He said he agreed with Dallas pastor W.A. Criswell that "when a woman can prove she is the husband of one wife, we'll ordain her."

W.C. "Prof" Ribble made a motion the resolution be tabled and referred to the association's executive committee for further study. "This is a lot of scripture for a layman to digest in such a short time," he said. The motion was defeated.

The local church autonomy was cited by David Red as a reason not to pass the resolution. Red, minister of music at Albuquerque's Del Norte Church, said ordination is a matter Baptists have traditionally left to local churches to decide. If the resolution passed, Red said, it could become a test of fellowship in the association.

Central Association includes 54 churches from Albuquerque and surrounding areas. There were 146 messengers registered for the meeting.

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