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Mixture Of Religion And Politics Threatens Church, Ethicists Say

By Michael Duduit

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--A "secular authoritarian ideology" has infected many churches and contributed to their manipulation by politicians, according to a trio of Southern Baptist ethicists.

Glen Stassen, Henlee Barnette and Paul Simmons, all professors of Christian ethics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., believe politics is using religion in this campaign year, and the results could be damaging to the mission of the church.

This authoritarian ideology, explains Stassen, argues "there's one view, my view, and everyone else ought to agree with my view, or else you don't belong. It's an authoritarian view of the nation, that there should be one view instead of several views, and that takes away from freedom."

He illustrated by citing a popular evangelical author who, while being interviewed on television recently, would characterize each position that differed from his own as "the un-Christian position."

"It's intolerance. It's the opposite of religious liberty," Stassen declares.

Not all the exploitation is one-way, however, Simmons contends. He sees a new group of religious figures on the scene who are using the political process to promote religious goals. On issues such as tuition tax credits, a right-to-life amendment (anti-abortion) and a prayer-in-schools amendment, "both traditional Roman Catholicism and Fundamentalism seek political leverage to accomplish religious goals."

If either of these groups has its way, its "doctrinal and moral concerns would be promoted through law," Simmons argues.

One reason for the growing power of this authoritarian ideology is access to mass media and money to finance their appeals, according to Barnette.

"They reach many, many people now. These people are organized--clearly the far right has a network. Instantly they reach millions of people. The goal is to make this the model for our kind of democracy. These people have never learned to deal with pluralism."

The ethicists cite several reasons for this authoritarian ideology's attraction to religious leaders.

Stassen recounts an interview with Charles Colson, former White House official under Richard Nixon, who called religious leaders "the easiest group to manipulate. They'd invite them into the White House, and the religious leaders were so flattered by attention from the president that they'd end up...making favorable noises toward the administration. They were naive about how they were being used; they would come wide-eyed and excited about attention from Caesar."

Simmons differs somewhat, arguing that, unlike the religious leaders of the late 1960's and early 1970's who were vulnerable to being used by political forces, today's Religious Right is itself seeking to exploit the political scene for its own religious agenda.

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Another attraction of authoritarianism, Barnette believes, is its reduction of difficult issues to simplistic solutions.

"People really don't care to face the complex issues of reality. They prefer escape mechanisms, style not substance," says Barnette. When such a secular authoritarian ideology becomes a dominating force in religion, church-state separation is in serious danger, the Baptist ethicists argue.

"The authoritarian view unites the whole society, and church and state become part of one organism," explains Stassen. "If you look at Jerry Falwell, his rallies are 'I Love America' rallies; his college is not Calvary College, but Liberty College; the colors are red, white and blue. The central symbols in his rallies are not Christian symbols, but nationalistic symbols. That's dangerous. If his kind of people get appointed as Supreme Court justices, separation of church and state is in trouble."

Simmons believes this authoritarian viewpoint has resulted in a "crusade mentality" and an "incestuous wedding of Far Right politics and Fundamentalist religion."

Such an inter-relationship between church and state also poses a threat to the mission of the church, Stassen argues. When the state is in a position to hand out favors to the church, the church may be tempted to support "politicians who give favors rather than politicians who stand for biblical justice. It can seduce churches and their members. It can change a church's own perception of what it's supposed to be doing; it can distort the gospel."

Stassen also believes the future of evangelism may be affected by the church's excursion into politics. A reaction against the current authoritarian trend could become a reaction against Christianity if the two are linked in the public mind, the ethicist indicates.

"In Germany, the church did not speak out against Hitler, and now people there have little confidence in the church. Christianity cannot let itself get sucked in by Caesar," Stassen says.

According to Simmons, leaders of the Religious Right tend to avoid the ethical teachings of Jesus and center instead on Old Testament theocratic themes because of the dispensational theology.

"They turn to a type of civil religion, or theocracy, along Old Testament monarchial lines. It is also highly moralistic because of the pietistic tradition in Fundamentalism; thus, its str ss on things like pornography which should be banned, but its easy compatability with a strong defense and militaristic posture toward 'atheistic communism.'"

All three Southern Baptist scholars urge pastors to teach a biblical ethic to their congregations so they won't be so easily manipulated.

"I think the pastor can preach from the pulpit certain basic ethical principles. Meeting human need is the basis of Christianity, and we haven't taught our people that," Barnette declares, adding, "We spend more time arguing about what kind of carpet to put on the floor than talking about peace."

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Nicaraguan Baptist
Reported Kidnapped

Baptist Press
10/25/84

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (BP)—A group of about 60 armed men killed one person and kidnapped five others, including Baptist youth leader Marcia Chamorro, on Oct. 5, according to Nicaraguan Baptist sources.

The report said "contra" forces fighting the Marxist Sandinista government of Nicaragua stopped a vehicle carrying a group of volunteer government teachers heading toward Waslala, a town 149 miles northeast of Managua in the Jinotega region. They shot one teacher to death and seized five others, including 18-year-old Chamorro, the report said. Her fate and that of the others remains unknown.

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The incident, originally reported by a Southern Baptist teacher working at the Baptist seminary in Managua, was confirmed Oct. 24 by Tomas Tellez, executive secretary of the Baptist Convention of Nicaragua, and Jairo Gutierrez, pastor of the Managua church where Chamorro is a youth leader and children's teacher.

Tellez said it was the first time a Baptist church member had been kidnapped, but he claimed "hundreds" of other non-military people working with the government have been kidnapped or killed by contras. The term "contra" refers to a variety of Nicaraguan rebel groups, most of which are reported receiving aid from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency in their efforts to oust the current Sandinista regime.

Last December Baptist health worker Ana Julia Lopez, 22, was reportedly murdered by contras in Rio Blanco, another Nicaraguan town.

No one knows whether Chamorro and the other teachers are still alive, Tellez said. Nicaraguan army sources have rumored they were taken to Honduras where contra forces operate numerous base camps, but no definite information has been received. Tellez said people in the Baptist convention are praying for her.

Southern Baptists have had no missionaries in Nicaragua since 1982 but a bookstore ministry started by Southern Baptist missionaries continues, with books and Bibles being supplied through the Baptist Spanish Publishing House in El Paso, Texas. The Foreign Mission Board also has continued to provide relief aid when requested. The Southern Baptist seminary teacher who sent word about the kidnapping is not sponsored by the board, but has indicated a desire to be a Mission Service Corps volunteer.

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Dehoney Announces
Pastoral Retirement

Baptist Press
10/25/84

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)—Wayne Dehoney, who was president of the Southern Baptist Convention 1965-66, has announced his retirement as pastor of Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.

In an statement to the congregation, Dehoney, 66, said: "After much prayer and deliberation, I respectfully request that the church take the necessary steps and make the appropriate plans to allow for my retirement from the active role and responsibility as pastor, effective Feb. 1, 1985, which will be the eighteenth anniversary of our wonderful, blessed relationship together as pastor and people."

Dehoney told the congregation he came "to the conviction that now is the appropriate time for the church to make its transition" into a new era. "It is time for you to seek a new man, God's man, to lead you. He will bring new dreams, a new vision, new vigor, a new challenge, new goals for growing the church and reaching people for Christ."

As for himself, Dehoney said he recognizes "I can't pitch the fast ball like I used to, and have to depend on the curves and sinkers, but I feel I still have a good arm and want to keep on using it for the Lord."

Following retirement, Dehoney said he hopes to write, to conduct conferences "in other downtown inner city churches," to continue to preach, to be involved in missions ministries overseas and to do some teaching.

Following his announcement, the congregation approved a recommendation to begin a study of procedures necessary to search for and secure a pastor.

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Baptists Provide \$40,000
After Philippin Disasters

LUZON, Philippines (BP)—Southern Baptists and Baptists from Hong Kong and Guam responded to natural disasters in the Philippines during September and October with more than \$40,000 in relief.

Most went to help rehabilitate areas after the strongest typhoon since 1972 leveled entire villages. Another typhoon left many people homeless and hungry. And a volcanic eruption with ensuing mudslides sent 70,000 people fleeing from their homes.

The Foreign Mission Board released \$22,000 Sept. 26 to provide temporary shelter, roofing materials and clothes for about 650 families, and to distribute rice to about 450 families in Surigao del Norte and Bohol provinces. Missionaries hope to start churches in four villages in those areas.

The board released \$9,000 Oct. 11 to repair roofs for 19 families and to provide food and r planting seed for 562 families on the northern island of Luzon.

It also released \$8,700 Oct. 4 to provide food and seed for 600 families in four villages affected by the eruption of Mayon volcano near Legaspi City on Luzon.

Guam Baptists donated \$1,000 and Hong Kong Baptists donated \$372.35 for the relief projects.

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Denominational Strife
Tiring, Layman Says

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
10/25/84

ALEXANDRIA, La. (BP)—Southern Baptist laypeople have grown weary of denominational strife and long for unified progress, says a layman who is president of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

And if Raymond Boswell's wish comes true, Southern Baptists will live in harmony, be more vangelistic and have stronger Sunday schools.

Boswell, a Shreveport businessman and Louisiana convention president, shared his "wish list" with members of the LBC executive board and staff during a recent meeting.

"I wish our Baptist people could find a theological position under a broad umbrella that would not violate the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer," Boswell said, adding he wishes Baptists "would not make every issue a test of fellowship."

He admitted "no church or denomination can exist very long without a sound doctrinal position anchored in the Word of God." However, he warned "laity is getting a bit weary of continued discussion about the things that we disagree on while neglecting the things we hold in common."

Boswell said no element of the current SBC theological/political controversy "should keep us from doing what we are called to do—bring men to God through Christ our Lord."

In another wish, Boswell expressed the hope "our churches could get a fresh new insight into the genius of the Sunday school for reaching people."

"Great Sunday schools build great churches," he insisted. As support for his claim, he cited various trends and events in recent church history in which Sunday schools were the foundations of strong churches.

"I wish all our people, including myself, would daily practice lifestyle evangelism," Boswell said, expressing yet another hope.

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"Solomon said, 'He that winneth souls is wise,'" he quoted. "If we gave ourselves to winning the lost and equipping the saved, we'd have less time for the critiquing of another man's theology."

The LEC president also said he wishes Southern Baptists would understand "our total outreach efforts channeled through Cooperative Program giving." The Cooperative Program is the SBC's unified budget.

He pointed out many of the ministries which the Cooperative Program enables Southern Baptists to do "thrill" him and make him excited about being part of such an undertaking.

I thrill to be a Southern Baptist, he added. "When the last electronic church has gone off the air for lack of funds, Southern Baptists will still be out there preaching the gospel to the four corners of the earth till Jesus comes again."

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Thais Censor Baptist Film,
Call it Divisive 'Nonsense'

Baptist Press
10/25/84

BANGKOK, Thailand (BP)—Thai government officials have censored the newest 16mm film produced through Southern Baptists in the country, calling it "nonsense" and divisive.

The Thailand Censorship Committee in Bangkok has declared "Rak Aphai" (Forgiving Love) to be "spreading religion by using economics, politics and social events to divide the unity of the people of Thailand."

Baptist Mass Communications of the Thailand Baptist Mission officially premiered the film Sept. 23 at the Immanuel Baptist Church in Bangkok and later learned it had to be shown to the censorship committee. The mission hopes to appeal the committee's decision.

Mattani Rutnin, a Thai Christian drama professor at Thammasat University, one of the leading universities in Thailand, adapted "Rak Aphai" as a screenplay from the Old Testament story of Joseph. The professor worked into the story scenes dealing with the office of the prime minister—the reason given for letting censors examine it.

Baptist Mass Communications films were shown 1,010 times to more than 115,000 viewers during the 12 months ending April 30. As a result, 132 people accepted Jesus Christ as their savior and another 46 made other life-changing decisions.

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Southeastern Faculty
Supports President

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10/25/84

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)—The faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., unanimously adopted a resolution of support for President W. Randall Lolley and renewed their commitment to "fulfill our calling."

The resolution, adopted at the regular monthly meeting of the 38-member faculty, cited Lolley for "providing significant leadership for this seminary and throughout the Southern Baptist Convention in a time of grave challenges to our evangelistic, missionary and educational work..."

Lolley's commitment of time, talent and energy was seen as "a source of encouragement and inspiration" to the members of the teaching staff, according to the resolution.

He was further lauded for his affirmation of "the ministries of women in the tasks to which God has called them or yet shall call them..." and for his work "to open the doors of opportunity for ministry to all persons who are thus called..."

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The resolution expressed "gratitude for and our hearty support of President Lolley."

Lolley, who was not present for the discussion and adoption of the resolution, celebrated on Aug. 1 ten years as president of the Southern Baptist Convention seminary.

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Reagan, Mondale Urged To
Reject Armageddon Theory

By Larry Chesser

Baptist Press
10/25/84

WASHINGTON (BP)--Presidential candidates Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale have been urged by more than 100 Protestant, Catholic and Jewish leaders to repudiate "the extremist world view of nuclear Armageddon," the notion that nuclear war in the Middle East associated with the end of history is both imminent and inevitable.

Long a subject of theological debate and controversy in religious circles, Armageddon theology surfaced in the political arena this fall as media reports focused on Reagan's interest in and comments on the subject. Concerned about several Reagan comments suggesting that Armageddon could occur in this generation prompted the religious leaders to call on both presidential candidates to reject the Armageddon ideology which they said is linked primarily to the "New Religious Right."

"It is profoundly disturbing that religious leaders would use their influence to promote this ideology of nuclear Armageddon," the statement declared. "It is even more disturbing that any political leaders--especially leaders with the responsibility for decisions affecting war and peace--might identify themselves with extremists who believe that nuclear Armageddon is inevitable and imminent."

According to the statement, nuclear Armageddon theology "seems to justify nuclear war as a divine instrument to punish the wicked and complete God's plan for history."

Denouncing nuclear Armageddon theology as "a perversion of Holy Scripture and a danger to the security of our Republic," the religious leaders warned: "The people of the world face the terrible danger of nuclear war. An ideology that would deprive our nation of the will to resist this holocaust is unworthy of America's spiritual and democratic heritage."

The statement was released at a press conference coordinated by the Christic Institute, an interfaith policy group based in Washington.

Among the Reagan comments cited at the press conference were a broadcast interview statement during the 1980 campaign "we may be the generation that sees Armageddon," and a 1983 remark quoted in the Jerusalem Post in which Reagan told interviewer Tom Dine: "You know, I turn back to your ancient prophets in the Old Testament and the signs foretelling Armageddon, and I find myself wondering if--if we're the generation that's going to see that come about. I don't know if you've noted any of those prophecies lately, but believe me, they certainly describe the times we're going through."

During the second Reagan-Mondale debate Oct. 21, the president acknowledged having philosophical discussions with people interested in "the Biblical prophecies of what would portend the coming of Armageddon and so forth," but did not clearly endorse or repudiate Armageddon theology.

In that response, Reagan said, "no one knows whether those prophecies mean that Armageddon is 1,000 years away or the day after tomorrow. So I have never seriously warned or said we must plan according to Armageddon."

Also at the press conference, representatives of Moral Majority head Jerry Falwell passed out statements released by the television evangelist insisting "most evangelicals fully believe there will not be a nuclear war" and the religious leaders' statement was "just one more effort by anti-Reagan leaders to attempt to hurt the president."

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The Falwell statement added: "We join with these anti-Reagan leaders in urging presidential candidates of both parties to repudiate any association with any extremist world view which demands a nuclear Armageddon—if, in fact, any such view exists among credible theologians anywhere."

In response to Falwell's charges, press conference leaders pointed to a number of Falwell quotes and writings contradicting his denial of belief in nuclear Armageddon. Among those was a 1981 statement to a Los Angeles Times interviewer in which Falwell remarked: "We believe that Russia, because of her need of oil—and she's running out now—is going to move in on the Middle East, and particularly Israel because of their hatred of the Jews, and that it is at that time when all hell will break out. And it is at that time when I believe there will be some nuclear holocaust on this earth, because it says that blood shall flow in the streets up to the bridle of the horses in the Valley of Esdraelon for some 200 miles."

Jim Wallis, an evangelical pastor and editor of Sojourners magazine, charged the "manipulation of Scripture" by proponents of nuclear Armageddon ideology "must be called what it is—a heresy."

Wallis told reporters the Bible "has been used and twisted to justify some of the worst sins in history," citing slavery and racism as examples.

Among the Baptist signers of the statement were Robert C. Campbell, general secretary of American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.; William K. Cober, executive director of National Ministries of American Baptist Churches, U.S.A., and George Hill, minister of Calvary Baptist Church, Washington, a congregation affiliated with both the ABC and Southern Baptist Convention.

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Seminary Trustees Affirm
President's Leadership Role

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10/25/84

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)—The executive committee of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's board of trustees has affirmed the right and responsibility of seminary President Roy Lee Honeycutt to take an active leadership role in the Southern Baptist Convention.

In a strongly worded resolution, trustees expressed support for Honeycutt's "current leadership role in the denomination as an appropriate part of his responsibility as president."

Trustees also indicated agreement with Honeycutt's "assessment and response to the political issues addressed in his 1984 convocation address and in "The Tie", the official seminary publication.

In the convocation address in late August, Honeycutt declared "holy war" on what he called "unholy forces which, if left unchecked, will destroy essential qualities of both our convention and this seminary."

Honeycutt also challenged the seminary community and all Southern Baptists to fulfill their Christian and denominational duty to preserve the Baptist heritage of priesthood of the believer, soul competency and freedom of conscience in Christ.

Honeycutt's plea to "maintain the unity and the diversity of the Southern Baptist Convention and to conduct ourselves at all times with honor and personal integrity" also were reaffirmed by the resolution.

The resolution points to the historic involvement of seminary presidents in confronting denominational crises. The role of Southern Seminary President E.Y. Mullins in leading Southern Baptists through the denominational controversy of the 1920s specifically was cited.

"Successive presidents of the seminary have confronted critical and, at times, controversial national and denominational issues not only on the basis of personal Christian conscience but as a direct and appropriate responsibility of the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary," the resolution says.

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The trustees said the seminary president must have "such freedom as characterizes the prophetic and apostolic witness to the Gospel and its implications for individual believers and for our corporate life as Southern Baptists."

In pledging support of Honeycutt, the trustees called on Southern Baptists "to reaffirm our historic Baptists emphases," to return to an open Southern Baptist Convention, and reaffirmed "the Southern Baptist Convention's action in 1979 at Houston, by which the convention adopted a motion rejecting overt political activity as a convention process."

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Mary Hardin-Baylor Opens
Christian Mission Center

Baptist Press
10/25/84

BELTON, Texas (BP)--The University of Mary Hardin-Baylor has established a Christian Mission Center which brings seven existing and projected areas of ministry under one umbrella organization.

Included in the center are the Logos Language Institute, Inc., lay renewal evangelism training, world hunger relief training, a new telecommunications program, international Christian training, vocational training and evangelism training.

The program is designed so UMHB students, as well as laymen or church staff, may receive extra training in one of these fields of interest.

The Logos Language Institute already is in operation on the UMHB campus. Self-study packets in 38 foreign languages are available with an emphasis on Christian vocabulary. Packets are in the planning stages for another 162 languages designed for the person who wishes or needs to share a Christian witness in a foreign country or with those for whom English is not a first language.

The lay renewal evangelism program will offer specific training in the laity ministries which God already is using around the world. Seminars, regular course work in programs such as MasterLife, certificate programs for laymen, etc. are all in the projected plans for the area. In addition, two days' classroom training in lay renewal work will be available, as well as credit courses in personal evangelism and continuing education courses teaching laymen how to lead revivals.

UMHB presently is developing a training program to help alleviate the world hunger problem. Demonstration gardens will be developed and an education program to promote this effort will be maintained.

UMHB will begin development of a training program for the telecommunications ministry by continuing its efforts to bring the American Christian Television System (ACTS) to central Texas. Long-range plans include acquiring equipment for local origination programming and a training program for the telecommunications ministry.

The international training program includes a school for university training of international students with the capability of training both church vocation and non-vocational students. They will return to their native lands equipped to witness for and minister in the name of Jesus Christ.

The bivocational training program is being developed throughout many areas in America for non-full-time staff positions.

Evangelism training will include course work on personal evangelism taught by adjunct professors. UMHB's already active sports ministry will continue to grow through its involvement with Athletes in Action, FCA, the Baptist Men's basketball ministry to Mexico and other areas. The BSU's active involvement in personal evangelism ministry projects, both local and beyond, continues to grow each year.

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Survey Portrays
Fired Ministers

By Jim Lowry

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Perhaps the most significant lesson Southern Baptists can learn from the rash of forced terminations of ministers is how to be responsible when entering into new ministry situations.

"There needs to be more verbal negotiations between the church and the prospective minister," according to Brooks Faulkner, supervisor of the career guidance section of the church administration department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

Faulkner recently released a new survey on forced termination in which communications systems of ministers appear to be inadequate. Nearly half of the respondents said they were unaware of problems or plans to fire them.

Researchers contacted ministers who were forced to resign during the past 18 months. Names were submitted by state convention church-minister relations directors and directors of missions. From these names, a systematic sample of 400 ministers was elected for the study of which 246 responses were usable.

The two most frequent reasons stated by respondents for forced terminations were small but powerful minority of members (66 percent) and factions in the congregation (41 percent). Other frequently mentioned factors were different leadership styles, too lengthy a tenure, too authoritarian or dictatorial, couldn't get along with members, and not spending enough time on the job.

Even though 90 percent of the respondents indicated at least one of the warning signs existed in their situation, a surprising 44 percent reported the termination was sudden and without warning.

"It is important for a minister to look at the pulse beat of the church," Faulkner said. "People who don't know what's going on are awfully insensitive. I suppose most of the terminated ministers who had no advance knowledge of termination mean that no one came and discussed termination with them formally."

Respondents reported the most frequent way (36 percent) in which forced terminations were handled was "immediate severance with pay for a definite period of time."

Faulkner said ministers who are terminated should be given six months with full pay to give them time to find work. He said industry frequently has a more compassionate policy on fired workers than do churches. There are numerous reports of two weeks' or a month's salary for terminated ministers, with the added loss of housing.

For Faulkner, one of the most significant statistics in the survey was the age of the respondents. There were 62 percent of respondents between 35 and 54, ages which usually are considered the heart of a healthy contributing minister's career.

This contradicts, at least among the respondents, the belief that most ministers who are terminated are either young and inexperienced or old and unyielding.

Sources of support reported by ministers before, during and after the termination were: wife, 91 percent; church members, 73 percent; director of missions, 70 percent; fellow Baptist ministers outside the community, 68 percent; other family members, 67 percent; Baptist pastors in community, 66 percent, and close friends not included above, 61 percent.

Faulkner said ministers who rely solely on wives for support in times of crisis will quickly deplete their energies. He said it is unfair to carry home only problems to wives, but ministers should share victories as well.

Equally as revealing was the fact 78 percent of the respondents said the church had terminated previous pastors or staff members prior to their going to the church. Also, 63 percent of the churches had experienced two or more terminations.

According to the survey, an important finding is that 60 percent of the ministers who went to churches which had terminated ministers were unaware of the "termination history" of the church. Another third were not fully informed regarding the church's history of terminations.

A total of 51 percent of the churches reported by respondents were in the 300 or fewer membership category.

Faulkner advises pastors to always talk with directors of missions and other pastors in the community before going into a new church situation. The verbal negotiation at the beginning can save many problems later.

"Don't go into a new church situation blind," Faulkner said. "Don't just say 'It's God's will.'" Every Christian believes that, but God intends for us to use good judgement and not just spontaneous reaction."

Faulkner cited one Southern Baptist Convention church with which he is acquainted that has forced out five ministers in the last 11 years. "It would be naive and irrational for a minister to go into that church not knowing why the terminations took place."

For the record, 80 percent of the respondents in the survey have already found employment, and two-thirds of that number are in Southern Baptist churches. Most of the ministers found their employment on their own or through friends.

The study of forced termination of Southern Baptist ministers was prepared by the research services department of the Sunday School Board.

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