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85-38

Ethical Concerns Focus
Of National CLC Seminar

By David Wilkinson

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Southern Baptist leaders from across the country were exhorted to lead their local churches into more effective social action in the name of Christ during the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's national seminar.

A line-up of pastors, educators, Christian ethicists and denominational leaders repeatedly called for renewed emphasis on both evangelism and social action during the three-day conference on "Applying the Gospel in the Local Church."

In a keynote address, Texas pastor Cecil Sherman declared only when "the gospel defeats culture in the contest for the soul of the church" will Christians be able effectively to respond to life's issues.

Sherman, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church, Fort Worth, urged Southern Baptist leaders to measure the success of their churches and their ministries by biblical rather than cultural standards.

The church which "buys into" the world's definition of success measured by growth and wealth "has just become one kind of American growth company," he said.

Sherman called for a healthy blend of emphases on social action, evangelism, stewardship and education in the local church.

"Holding to half a gospel is not just the sin of the right wing," he warned. "In fact, all of us suffer from small gospels, some of us just suffer more than others."

Similar themes were voiced by J. Alfred Smith, pastor of Allen Temple Baptist Church, Oakland, Calif.; Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of the Woman's Missionary Union, Birmingham, Ala.; Kenneth Chafin, professor of preaching at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.; Gordon Cosby, pastor of The Church of the Savior, Washington, and T.B. Maston, retired professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Smith warned the Christian community against becoming a "cultural ghetto," which becomes isolated from human needs.

"We have seminaries that prepare us for effective service in the temple in Jerusalem, but do we know how to make it on the Jericho road?" he asked, alluding to Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. "Jesus was saying, 'You know how to do serious theological reflection, but you don't know who your neighbor is.'"

Smith's predominantly black congregation, which has attracted national attention for its innovative social ministries, has experienced an increase in conversions rather than the decrease many had predicted, Smith noted.

Weatherford said, "The work of the church, as it acts out the gospel, begins with sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, but it does not end there. The Good News includes freedom for the captives, meeting needs that are physical, social and emotional. We must preach the whole gospel to the people."

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Chafin, former pastor of South Main Baptist Church in Houston, also urged preachers to address biblical truths to personal and social morality.

"We have abandoned our people to a ruthless, sensate, sin-sick society" by failing to speak to the issues, he said. "We must put love of justice and mercy above our personal ambition."

Chafin several times referred to the current controversy within the Southern Baptist Convention and noted in a question-and-answer session that the upcoming convention in Dallas could mark a "turn-around" in the struggle.

Alluding to criticism of his outspoken opposition to the "takeover" strategy employed by a group of fundamentalist leaders in the SBC, Chafin said, "I know what it's like to be a vet ran of an unpopular war."

"In our denomination," he said, "it's a greater sin to rock the boat than steal the boat."

Cosby declared applying the gospel in the local church begins by "being the gospel."

"We are the point in the universe where Jesus affects a breakthrough," he explained. "The first step in becoming the gospel in the local church is being love."

He encouraged Christians to be the incarnation of the gospel in the workplace. "We are to be the 'thinking heart' in (society's) structures," he said, even though many times society "will not tolerate love incarnate."

T.B. Maston, for 41 years a professor of ethics at Southwestern Baptist Seminary, also emphasized the role of Christians in the working world.

"That's the one opportunity the layman has to dress up the gospel in working clothes," he said. "I don't think there is anything more important than that."

Maston, himself a layman, gave advice to others in that role. Laymen, he said, ought faithfully to attend church, support its leadership and organization, help plan the church's programs, serve as leaders in the church and support it financially.

Several speakers addressed specific moral issues during the annual conference.

Christian Life Commission Executive Director Foy Valentine spoke on the issue of abortion; Harry Hollis Jr., CLC director of family and special moral concerns, addressed the problem of pornography, and Austin McGuigan, chief state's attorney for the state of Connecticut, discussed the issue of legalized gambling.

Other seminar speakers included Guy Greenfield, professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern Seminary, who spoke on the nurturing role of the local church; David Matthews, pastor of First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C., who delivered six theme interpretations; Lewis Smedes, professor of theology and ethics, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif., who spoke on Christian forgiveness and honesty, and Dan Yearly, pastor of University Baptist Church, Coral Gables, Fla., who delivered the closing sermon.

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Laity Convocation Examines
Social, Ethical Concerns

By Stan Haste

Baptist Press
4/1/85

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Participants in the 1985 Convocation of the Laity in Wake Forest, N.C., confronted current social and ethical issues in a series of work groups designed to sharpen thinking about and deepen commitment to the idea that Christian faith speaks to the everyday world of laypeople.

Among the half-dozen options, the one attracting most participation dealt with faith and peacemaking and featured the contrasting views of a seminary ethics professor and a U.S. military officer assigned to the Pentagon.

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Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Professor Glenn H. Stassen, who specializes in the ethics of war and peace, gave a personal narrative of his deepening concern about the prospects of nuclear war, beginning at age six with his own father's departure for World War II and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki when he was nine. After he was converted during a revival at age 11, Stassen said, his pastor went to great lengths to explain that his new Christian commitment meant that Christ expected his all.

In that time that came to mean his vocation as well, the son of perennial presidential candidate Harold Stassen said, even though he had majored in physics and mathematics as an undergraduate and worked as an electronics engineer for a firm under contract to the Air Force. While at first he thought his engineering and physics career in the military was his Christian vocation, Stassen said he gradually became concerned about the buildup of nuclear weapons by both the United States and the Soviet Union. He then began to understand his call as "working somehow to get these things under control."

While stating emphatically, "I am not a pacifist," Stassen nevertheless labeled "idolatry" an absolute position that peace can be achieved only through military strength. "War is caused not just by weakness but by injustice," he said.

Stassen told participants about the growth of Baptist peacemaker groups in local churches, following the design of such a group at Crescent Hill Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky. Besides engaging in peacemaking activities, he explained, a key feature in such groups is an "inward journey through prayer," a discipline which includes keeping an individual prayer journal, and organized prayer for peace in the church. "It's not just peace through strength and peace through justice, but peace through prayer," he said.

Another objective of Baptist peacemaker groups, he added, is cultivation of a sense of identity with the Soviet people. "We really are tied together" by the nuclear threat, he declared.

Vaughn Johnson, a U.S. Air Force colonel whose current assignment at the Pentagon deals with the cruise missile, said decisions inside U.S. military headquarters are being made by many top Pentagon officials who pray and study the Bible together regularly.

He told of growing up in a Christian home and of his "natural" inclination toward being a peaceful person. "Nobody ever saw Vaughn Johnson starting a fight with anybody, big or small," he said. "But when I was a little older, this peaceful bubble burst. A new guy moved into the neighborhood, a big guy, a tough guy. He took over the block. I tried to avoid him. I tried to appease him. It seemed to fuel his aggressiveness. He was a typical bully."

When "accommodation" and "sweet talk" failed to make a difference, he went on and the neighborhood bully threatened his sister. "I remember I really lit into him. He hit me and I hurt. Somehow I got him down and beat the devil out of him...."

That experience taught him later, Johnson said, to look out for bullies among nations. "The bully is very big," he declared of the Soviet Union. "The Soviets have been able to carry on the biggest military buildup in the history of the world."

Johnson pointed to what he described as failed efforts to reach nuclear agreements with the Soviet Union, including the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963, SALT I and SALT II. "Do not think for a minute that laying down our arms will cause the Soviets to disarm," he warned. "His past behavior hardly justifies that pious hope. We would find ourselves living in a world where the weak and virtuous were bound to obey the strong and evil."

He concluded while "our religious beliefs may make the world problems soluble...they don't make them simple." At the same time, he indicated agreement with the view that the time is now right for a new round of peace talks.

In another workgroup dealing with faith and politics, University of Richmond Political Science Professor Rob James urged both individual and group participation by Christians in the political process. James, who also was in the Virginia House of Delegates for four terms, outlined options for such involvement and endorsed the principle of separation of church and state as a guideline.

H said while endorsing political candidates and other direct campaign activities may be legal, they also may be unwise.

William E. Poe, an active North Carolina layman and a lawyer in Charlotte, told the same workgroup, "Politics rightly understood deals with...righteousness and justice." But in the real political world, he acknowledged, the Christian ideal and the reality of greed "collide." An effective Christian politician, he added, must see things "as they ought to be, not (only) as they are."

Poe identified continued racism and unjust economic structures as two pressing issues which ought to compel Christians to enter the political arena.

Other workgroups examined faith and economics, faith and justice, faith and the business world, and faith and success.

The convocation drew more than 250 participants, including laypersons, pastors and a class of 80 Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary students enrolled in a course for the spring semester on "Equipping Laypersons for Ministry."

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Southeastern Trustees
Adopt 1986 Budget

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4/1/85

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)—In its spring meeting, trustees of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., adopted a budget of \$5,626,197 and elected two new trustees to serve until the next meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The 1985-86 budget, a 3.8 percent increase over the previous year, will be funded primarily by the Convention's Cooperative Program, student fees and housing rents. The Cooperative Program, made up of gifts from individual Baptist churches, will provide 68.46 percent of the budget.

Under the budget, faculty and staff salaries will receive a three percent across-the-board increase.

Acting in accordance with the seminary's by-laws, two new trustees were elected to fill unexpired terms. James Herron, Rock Hill, S.C., was elected to succeed Henry Finch, Charleston, S.C., who resigned, and Ralph Holt, Wilmington, N.C., was elected to succeed John Hicks, Asheville, N.C., who died earlier this year. Both will complete terms which end with the June meeting of the Convention.

Trustees also voted to request the dean and faculty to study the feasibility of a research doctoral program and trustee-sponsored internship for Southeastern graduates.

The two positions will be filled by the SBC Committee on Boards, whose report will be presented at the 1985 SBC in Dallas, June 11-13.

The trustees heard a progress report on construction now underway of the \$2,500,000 Ledford Student Center, and authorized the administration to proceed with negotiations on Phase II costing approximately \$225,000.

In other action, the trustees granted sabbaticals to William Clemmons, professor of Christian education; Furman Hewitt, professor of Christian ethics, and Malcolm Tolbert, professor of New Testament.

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'Cultural Ghetto' Risk
Faces SBC: Speakers

By Greg Warner

Baptist Press
4/1/85

FORT WORTH, Texas (EP)—Southern Baptists must match evangelistic witness with effective social action or risk becoming an irrelevant "cultural ghetto," isolated from human needs.

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That message was echoed by several speakers at the Christian Life Commission's national seminar, "Applying the Gospel in the Local Church."

"The work of the church, as it acts out the gospel, begins with sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, but it does not end there," said Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention. "The Good News includes freedom for the captives, meeting needs that are physical, social and emotional. We must preach the whole gospel to the people."

Defining a ghetto as a restricted area of limited experiences and cultural barriers, Weatherford said many Christians live in a ghetto of their own making, with limited contact with hurting people.

"We have more prayer groups than mission action groups, more witnessing workshops than evangelistic visitation and more self-improvement videotapes than conversations about the needy," she said.

"The most used command to the people in the pews is 'Please be seated,'" she said. "For too long we have been seated on comfortable pews in air-conditioned sanctuaries with beautiful stained-glass windows. It is time for the service to begin."

J. Alfred Smith, pastor of Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, Calif., also warned Christians against becoming a "cultural ghetto," citing Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. "We have seminaries that prepare us for effective service in the Temple in Jerusalem, but do we know how to make it on the Jericho road?" he asked. "Jesus was saying, 'You know how to do serious theological reflection, but you don't know who your neighbor is.' The missing element is a sensitive theological ethic."

Smith's predominantly black congregation has attracted national attention for its innovative social ministries, which include anti-crime programs, a community health clinic and a ministry to Hispanics. The result in Allen Temple church, he said, has been an increase in conversions, rather than the decrease many predicted.

Smith said such activities are part of the church's call. "Why do they call it social action ministry here, while all our missionaries minister the whole gospel?" he asked. "Jesus shut up in a book is not worth a second look, but Jesus in the hearts of persons shows his tenderness again."

Both Smith and Weatherford alluded to the current controversy among Southern Baptists, and its effects on ministry. "We have anemia of deed and high blood pressure of creed," Smith charged. "More often than not, orthodoxy becomes when your -doxy agrees by my -doxy. We are arguing over exegesis while there's a world out there hurting."

"The issues that are threatening to destroy our nation from within are greater than an inerrancy debate," he warned.

Weatherford said she and WMU have experienced ostracism and discrimination as a result of the resolution on women passed at the Southern Baptist Convention last June.

"I am not black, I am not sick or in prison," she said. "But I am a woman, and because of this I have suffered discrimination." Weatherford said she wished men could understand "what it means to be a child of God who is also a woman in the Southern Baptist Convention today."

Florida pastor Dan Yearly, in the closing sermon for the seminar, also commented on the denominational controversy, calling it "the Southern Baptist Intramural League."

Yearly, pastor of University Baptist Church, Coral Gables, said, "The whole world is dying and going to hell, and we're playing intramurals." As in sports, denominational intramurals are more dangerous than the real fight because while they are played without pads for protection, some players "think they are playing the real game."

"I hate to see a faith that causes people to hate and not love," he said. "I don't see Jesus walking around making people so hungry they can't see the love that he fosters."

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