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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICESBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Craig Bird, Feature Editor**BUREAUS**ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Haste, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Parks Won't Back Stanley;
Sees Threat To Missions

By Bob Stanley

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—The head of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board said April 19 h will not support the reelection of Charles Stanley as Southern Baptist Convention president.

R. Keith Parks said his decision was based on a threat to the cause of missions which he sees in recent developments within the 14.3-million member denomination.

The mission board administrator said attacks on Southern Baptists' cooperative mission approach and suspicion cast on SBC agencies have erupted into a distrust of Southern Baptist missionaries.

Parks said he felt compelled to speak out after he attended the funeral of Baker James Cauthen, the board's executive-director emeritus, who died April 15. Parks said he "remembered how this spiritual giant had given 40 years to calling us to our central task (missions)."

For the past 60 years Southern Baptists have supported missions and other denominational programs through the Cooperative Program, a plan through which individual churches designate part of the money given by members to fund programs on a state and denomination-wide level.

The denomination's home and foreign mission programs receive more than two-thirds of all money made available to support denominationwide programs.

When threats are made to withhold funds and churches begin to reduce Cooperative Program giving, Parks said, the result is that "the missionaries are the ones becoming hostage to the conflict and the lost of the world are the losers."

He said Charles Stanley's participation in the convention and his church's support of convention causes have been "minimal." Stanley is pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta.

Parks described Stanley as an outstanding preacher and said he does not have anything against him personally. But he urged Southern Baptists, when they meet in Dallas in June for their annual convention, to choose officers and agency trustees "who are unquestionably committed both to the Bible and to our cooperative convention approach to missions."

Parks said a recent action by one Southern Baptist church, signed by the pastor and seven deacons, "brought the present attack on the agencies and the Cooperative Program to its logical conclusion." Because supporters of Stanley have accused Southern Baptist seminaries of being liberal in their theological teaching, and because all foreign missionaries are required to have attended a Southern Baptist seminary, Parks said the church had concluded that many of the missionaries must be liberal and must be teaching liberal theology overseas.

The church asked Parks to send the church the names of the missionaries he felt were "genuine, Bible-believing evangelistic missionaries." But, Parks said, since he himself was also suspect as an agency head, the church said it then would write these missionaries and, after questioning, determine which ones their conscience would allow them to support.

"I refused to honor the request of that church, for the request had in it the potential dismantling of the Southern Baptist Convention," h said.

Parks has received letters from a few churches saying that, because of "liberalism" in SBC seminaries or some action by another agency, they have decided to designate money for the two mission boards alone.

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"In each case I have pled with them not to do that," Parks said. "To be sure for a time both mission boards would receive more money. But soon the disintegration of our total cooperative effort would set in, and we would be set back 60 years."

Parks said the current turmoil in the convention is "the inevitable result of what has been stated by influential leaders and written in certain publications consistently over the last four or five years." The Cooperative Program, he said, has been attacked as if it were a living organism, rather than the channel through which Southern Baptist churches support missions and other causes their members have agreed on.

Such attacks have eroded confidence in the way Southern Baptists have worked, including their support of missions, Parks declared. Regular and consistent attacks also have been made on all Southern Baptist agencies, their boards of trustees and the agency heads, he added.

Parks said there is no drift toward liberalism in the convention. "The agency heads, the trustees of the agencies, the professors in the seminaries are Bible-believing Southern Baptists. When a former missionary called to ask a (Foreign Mission Board) staff member if I really believed the Bible, I recognized the insidious results of the campaign that has been going on. The question was not about anything that I have ever said or written in more than 30 years of representing our Lord and preaching his word and serving in missions. But rather the question came because there is so much criticism of agencies that anybody related to an agency is now suspect. I resent that and declare without equivocation that I and the other agency heads believe the Bible and are as committed to it as any of those who would seek to dismantle our convention."

The accusations have come, Parks said, at a time when "our denomination continues to grow in missions, in students in our seminaries, in evangelism, in giving and in every other way convention strength can be measured.

"Certainly there are a few among us who do not believe the Bible like I think they should or like some others think they should. They are a very, very small number. They are not the mainstream, and the drift is not toward liberalism. No evidence is found. We are in Bold Mission Thrust with more people being saved, more countries being entered, more missionaries being sent and a greater evangelistic thrust around the world than any other evangelical group."

Despite the denomination's growth and vigor, Parks said, its critics are urging:

--A more rigid creedal approach to doctrine as the convention's controlling force rather than cooperative missions;

--Independent local church mission programs rather than a denominationwide cooperative mission effort;

--Supplanting the local churches' right to make decisions on doctrine, ordination and ethical issues, with these to be determined at convention level;

--Insistence on creedal conformity instead of trusting each individual to live under the authority of the Bible (the traditional Southern Baptist understanding of the priesthood of the believer);

--Civil religion replacing the time-honored biblical concept of separation of church and state.

"With all of these efforts to undermine and destroy the mission force that has characterized Southern Baptists, I could no longer be silent," Parks said. "As I thought of Dr. Cauthen and what he meant, I determined I would not stand in his place without lifting my voice in the support of the cause that has rallied Southern Baptists for 140 years.

"May we not deliberately and unconsciously destroy the most effective mission force in the world today."

'Increase CP Giving'
Ex-SBC President Urges

By Craig Bird

LOUISVILLE, Miss. (BP)—The last layman to be president of the Southern Baptist Convention is asking churches to resist suggestions they cut mission giving and increase their contributions through the Cooperative Program.

Owen Cooper, a member of First Baptist Church of Yazoo City, Miss., and president of the SBC for two terms 1973-75, spoke to the spring meeting of the Winston County Baptist Association in Louisville, Miss., April 15.

"I speak as one former Southern Baptist Convention president who urges you not to withhold money from the Cooperative Program—but rather you dispatch your money regularly and promptly, also that you not decrease Cooperative Program giving but rather that you increase it progressively over the years to come."

He was responding to recent remarks by the three immediate past presidents of the SBC concerning the Cooperative Program, the voluntary, national unified budget of the SBC.

James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, and president of the SBC 1982-84, has said the Cooperative Program might collapse if current president Charles Stanley, president of First Baptist Church in Atlanta, is not reelected, due to a "massive attempt" by SBC institutional heads opposing him.

Draper said his own church might withhold its Cooperative Program gifts if it would help move the convention beyond "gripe sessions" and to "force people to sit down and adopt a strategy to resolve our problems."

Bailey Smith, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., and president of the SBC 1980-82, said his church already had cut its gifts by \$50,000 as a protest against a "seminary president who is going around the country on Cooperative Program money trying to def at Charles Stanley."

Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., and pastor of the SBC for one year, 1979-80, has said his church, "has some deep theological convictions and I will not crucify those convictions on the altar of cooperation."

In contrast, Cooper urged his audience to remember the task before them as Christians—to fulfill Jesus Christ's Great Commission to "go into all the world and make disciples."

In 1979, the same year the on-going controversy within the 14.3-million member SBC broke into the public eye, the SBC formally embarked on Bold Mission Thrust—an evangelistic effort with the stated goal of presenting the message of Jesus Christ to every human in the world by the year 2000.

"Launching Bold Mission Thrust was one of the most audacious plans ever announced in the history of Christianity," Cooper said. "For the first time a group of Christians said 'we' will establish a time frame in which an effort will be made to fulfill the Great Commission.

"Southern Baptists have committed themselves as well as their resources in this effort.... The average church in the Southern Baptist Convention gives less than nine percent of its undesignated funds through the Cooperative Program. This is neither enough to bring a blessing to the church nor to finance Bold Mission Thrust.

"The local church needs the blessing that would come through more liberal giving for carrying out the Great Commission. And Bold Mission Thrust needs increased funds to carry the gospel to hundreds of millions who have never heard the message of salvation."

Cooper also urged "every Southern Baptist" to read Cooperation: The Baptist Way To A Lost World, by Cecil and Susan Ray and encouraged "every Southern Baptist church" to "get meaningfully involved" with Planned Growth In Giving—a effort to significantly raise giving at all levels of SBC life.

Women May Pay Price
For Unity, Says Russell

By Mary Jane Welch

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)—Women may pay the price for restored unity in the Southern Baptist Convention, according to Letty Russell, Yale theologian and author of numerous books on women and the Christian church.

If the two groups of men struggling for power in the convention work out a compromise, they may agree not to ordain women, Russell told participants in a convocation on women 1 sponsored by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Women's Resource Center there.

The analysis of academics like Russell provided a counterpoint to the personal testimonies of women like Chicago pastor Susan Lockwood Wright for the 200 women and men who participated in the convocation.

The issue of orthodoxy often is raised when a church faces overwhelming problems, such as difficult social issues or a power struggle, said Russell.

Those who persist in raising questions that do not fit in the view of the dominant group pay the price of being pushed out of the thinking and life of the church, she said. "The very ones who were welcomed as outsiders into God's kingdom by Jesus Christ are seen as competitors to be pushed out."

The solution endorsed by Russell is a "rainbow partnership," which treats minorities, including women, as "possibilities instead of problems." In a "rainbow partnership" authority over the community would not be granted to an elite by virtue of its sex or race, she said. Instead, individuals would be given authority as their gifts were needed and authority would change hands as others mature and needs and gifts change.

"Even in the Southern Baptist convention, ordination seems to become an indelible mark of caste rather than the recognition of spiritual gifts for a particular ministry of the church," she said. She advocated not just more equality for minority groups, but the elimination of permanent distinctions between clergy and laity. Most theologians agree "the Biblical witness points to one calling to service for all Christians," she said.

Although the servant theme is often sounded in today's church, today's Christians seldom mean the same thing Jesus and Paul meant when they used that terminology, Russell said. The kind of servitude discussed in the New Testament, she said, is not involuntary servitude imposed on those who aren't good enough for anything else, but is voluntary self-giving.

"This is service seen as a way that God's gifts multiply for all creation, rather than a way human beings are reduced to fit their 'proper place (at the bottom),' " she said.

It was while they were in service to their church several other speakers felt their initial call to enter the clergy. Susan Lockwood Wright drew tears and a standing ovation with her testimony that when God called her to ministry "it didn't even fit with my theology."

She had accepted a position as teacher of a singles' Sunday school class only because the minister of education at her Florida church was desperate, she said.

The minister of education sent her for leadership training to Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center and she expected to become better equipped for teaching. She was incredulous when she felt God calling her to be a minister to single adults.

When she returned home and the feeling refused to go away, her husband encouraged her to see where her compulsion would lead. She told the pastor she felt God calling her to a ministry position on the church staff. He agreed and made a place for her.

Wright compared herself to the biblical Sarah who laughed when God's messenger told her that she, a woman in her 90s, would conceive a child. As Wright felt and followed God's call to seminary and then to become pastor of Cornell Baptist Church in Chicago, she said she, too, spent a great deal of time laughing in the face of the impossible.

On her pilgrimage God has asked her to live with some realities and face some difficult situations, she said. "Last year it was not easy to have my motives for ministry questioned, to be accused of being the handmaiden of Satan, the destroyer of the home, the leader of the militant movement and the stumbling block to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"It wasn't easy to have an association vote whether to seat the messengers from Cornell Baptist Church. It wasn't any easier a month later when the state convention did the same thing. It wasn't easy to see my face on the front page of the Illinois Baptist as the focus and center of controversy.

"But this one thing I know—that while God never took away one ounce of my pain, God stood there beside me, sometimes in a mystical way and at other times in the incarnation of friends and family and people like you, some people whom I did not know," she said.

For Mary Caldwell, deacon at Hominy Baptist Church in Candler, N.C., her call to the preaching ministry also came as a surprise. She had been inactive in church for years when a miscarriage and her mother-in-law's death sent her searching for who she was and where she was going. The search led her to a renewed faith.

Soon she was elected one of the first women deacons in her church; the next year, deacon chairman. As she worked to build the family ministry of the deacons, she discovered skills she didn't know she had. She became convinced that deacons are one of the great untapped resources of the church and developed a desire to go to seminary. Seminary came to her in the form of extension classes at Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute, Henderson, N.C.

As part of her course, Caldwell had to have a daily quiet time. She resisted the idea at first, but as she tried it her relationship with God grew. And as that relationship grew, she felt a call to preach. She tried not to face the idea of a 35-year-old woman becoming a preacher, but it wouldn't go away. Last January, her church licensed her to preach.

Elizabeth Clark, professor of religion at Duke Divinity School, told convocation participants that ambivalent feelings about women are nothing new for the Christian church. There has been a centuries-old tug of war in the Judeo-Christian tradition between liberation and keeping women in traditional roles, she said.

She cited early church fathers such as Tertullian, who exhorted Christian women to go around in drab mourning clothes to show their guilt for Eve's sin.

She contrasted that with Jerome, who frequently lauded his female friends and defended his friendships with women by pointing out the number of women in the New Testament who were close to Jesus.

The church's early ambivalence toward women stemmed partly from the cultures it inherited from the world around it and partly from the church's desire to set themselves apart from sects which allowed women leadership positions, said Clark.

The Protestant Reformation, with Luther's emphasis on the priesthood of the believer, denied a privileged role to celibate women and elevated women's maternal and domestic roles as worthy, but his teachings made little impact on women's roles outside the home, said Clark.

Randall Lolley, Southeastern's president, called in his closing address for women to be made full partners with men in the work of the church. "One of the saddest sights on this earth is a man forfeiting his own wholeness in the gospel by denying a woman the partnership which the gospel requires," he said.

In Christian traditions which stress the moving of the Holy Spirit rather than doctrine, more women have been allowed and even encouraged to preach, he said.

It is God, not man, who gives gifts for ministry, said Lolley. "Women are not answerable to men for what they do with their gifts. Women, like men, are answerable to God."



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LYNN MAY HO
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
901 COMMERCE
NASHVILLE, TN. 37203

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