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Peace Committee Chairman
Urges Continued Restraint

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Charles Fuller, chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee, has issued an appeal for continued restraint as the 22-member group works to resolve the controversy in the 14.4-million member denomination.

Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Va., was named to chair the special committee during the 1985 annual meeting of the SBC in Dallas. The committee was instructed "to seek to determine the sources of the controversies in our convention and make findings and recommendations regarding these controversies."

The action also urged Southern Baptists to "exercise restraint, to refrain from divisive action and comments and to reflect Christian love while this committee is doing its work."

In his statement, Fuller said: "In the main, Southern Baptists have honored the action taken by the convention...and have lowered the profile and rhetoric of our controversy. Such a spirit is to be commended and, hopefully, reflects a sense of confidence regarding the Peace Committee's assignment and their ability to carry it out."

"Certainly, no attempt should ever be made to muzzle anyone, for that would violate the responsibility of conscience we Baptists hold so dear. On the other hand, in an effort to be obedient to God's word--'endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'--there is legitimate basis for restraining one's compulsion to speak, especially in the public arena."

Fuller, who has overseen two meetings of the committee in its efforts to resolve the conflict which has been afflicting the SBC for more than seven years, added:

"Cooperation is a vital word in Southern Baptist life, and many recognize its importance, not only in the operation of our missions enterprises, but also in respecting the wishes of the convention when it has taken action. A few will always value their opinions above whatever the corporate body decides, but that remains a problem of individual spirit. Some of us simply find it difficult to 'prefer another' when we so earnestly want our ideas heard."

Fuller told Baptist Press he issued his appeal because he feels Baptists "might feel the temptation to get back at it again during the upcoming state conventions and state evangelism conferences" held in October and November and in January and February.

"Those meetings will bring groups of people back together and will present a platform and opportunity to elevate the profile of our controversy," he said.

The Roanoke pastor said two recent publications--the Baylor Line and SBC Today--contained articles about the controversy, but added his appeal "is prompted by a lot more than those two things. They were reminders not to succumb to the temptation to add fuel to the flames."

One of the articles, by University of Richmond theology professor Robison B. James, accuses "militant inerrantists" of being heretics because of what he claims is their "creedal belief in inerrancy" which becomes "the final arbiter of what the biblical message shall be."

The article was published in the November issue of SBC Today, a national autonomous publication for Southern Baptists with a circulation of about 12,000.

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The other article was written by Cecil Sherman, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, and a member of the Peace Committee. Entitled "The 'New Baptists'", the article appeared in the September 1985 issue of Baylor Line, a publication of the Baylor University Alumni Association with a circulation of about 47,000.

Fuller said he wrote to Sherman, a leader in the moderate camp in the denomination, concerning the Baylor Line article. "I did not write to him in terms of being irate, but was thinking more in terms of what the effect (of the article) would be on the committee.

"Cecil has a contribution to make.... I only hope the article is not perceived as being an encroachment on our guidelines on lowering the profile," Fuller said.

The chairman added the statement was not in response to the Sherman and James articles, but is a reminder to Southern Baptists to resist the temptation to restart some of the controversy. "Also," he said, "sufficient time has passed since the convention and we are tending to lose some of the spirit of the action."

Fuller added his comments are directed at "all positions in the controversy. If there are other articles written by other people, my statement is just as applicable to them. I hope that everyone--from every position--will extend the Peace Committee the opportunity to work with as much freedom and with as much authenticity as it can."

The chairman thanked Southern Baptists for "your daily prayers and your spirit of cooperation for the good of the family," and added: "The Peace Committee cannot resolve all, or even most, of our differences within the denominational family, but it has an assignment to seek some bases of reconciliation regarding our major points of difference. The assignment is great, but so is our God."

He concluded: "It is not peace at any price we seek, but surely we understand peace always requires the investment of some self-control."

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Religion Prof Charges
Inerrantists With Heresy

By Julian Pentecost

Baptist Press
11/1/85

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Robison B. James, a religion professor at the University of Richmond, says "militant inerrantists" in the Southern Baptist Convention are heretics.

The charge was made in an article published in the November issue of SBC Today, a national autonomous publication for Southern Baptists. The article, provided to a number of secular religion reporters, has stirred renewed controversy in the 14.4-million member denomination.

James, who has taught applied ethics at the University of Richmond, a 3,750-student institution affiliated with the Baptist General Association of Virginia, since 1962, says he does "not doubt their (inerrantists') sincerity and I in no way question their Christian commitment. I just believe they are wrong, very wrong. And very dangerous."

The professor, who was a member of the Virginia House of Delegates (legislature) from 1976-1983, explained the heresy "I have in mind is not the kind of spontaneous and unrestrained confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture which is to be found in so many of our Southern Baptist rank and file."

"By contrast, the kind of view which I see as a clear and present danger is inerrancy of a reactionary, systematic, exclusive and militant type...in which the inerrantist is unwilling to allow the Bible, as God has given it, to challenge or call into question his inerrancy belief about the Bible.

"And that fact is an infallible indication that the Bible is not his operative authority. Rather, his creedal belief in inerrancy is the final arbiter of...the biblical message...."

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James, in his introduction, laments "...the insistence that anyone who wishes to pursue a ministry of teaching or leadership in any SBC institution must submit to the inerrantist view of the Bible as supreme over the Bible, rather than submitting directly to the Bible as supreme, if such a person wishes to avoid rejection, intimidation, suspicion or removal."

He defends use of the word heresy on the basis that Baptists have never understood "...our mission to be that of making certain creeds or doctrines about Jesus Christ the central issue."

His position is that, in Baptist tradition, "...we have submitted directly to the Bible, rather than submitting to some statement about the Bible--some creedal definition of what the Bible is thought to be."

James says of doctrines, confessions and other propositional expressions of faith: "In the truest and deepest sense, Baptists believe in the sovereign, saving Lord to whom these confessional statements point. If we really mean it when we say we have no creed but the Bible, we cannot stop there. We have to go on to say, at least, that any view which takes a creedal belief about the Bible and places it above the Bible is heresy."

"In fact, such a view should be recognized as the Baptist heresy. There is no other point in our religious life where we could more easily be seduced from our noncreedal freedom as Baptists...."

He makes an appeal for use of "biblical criticism...to use the rather unfortunate term which has been stuck on it. I shall use the term to refer to the massive and growing results of 200 years of critically historical scholarship on the Bible."

James says such scholarship is "irreplacable...to anyone who would take a Baptist view of the authority of Scripture. The reason is that this scholarship is the no-holds barred effort to learn, with unblinking honesty and maximum objectivity, just how God has given us the Bible and precisely what sort of book he has caused it to be."

He said militant inerrantists "...take the living, dynamic, self-adjusting interactions among the several voices of the Bible and turn them into a kind of frozen gridlock."

He also criticized what he calls the inerrancy practice of "...sinning against the Word of God. This happens when this kind of inerrancy takes the distinctive voices which God has placed in the Bible--Paul and James are examples--and homogenizes them. They are thrown into a blender, as it were. What results from this systematizing process is not the Bible. It is a human creation. And it is that human creation, not the Word of God, which too often functions as the inerrantists' real authority."

James concludes by reference to Baptists' "...insistence that the Bible is God's Word for our redemption, and that we will have no other creed but Scripture." And then he declares: "But we may not always see clearly that at the heart of this insistence is the following priceless insight, an insight which we betray at our peril: No human way of believing may be a standard to govern what God Almighty is saying. Not even inerrancy."

He acknowledges "a debt to Paige Patterson" in his introduction. Patterson, who has been a leader in the inerrancy movement in the SBC, is president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas. James describes Patterson as "a spirited and courteous opponent in an ongoing discussion." He indicates their "exchanges...began in a June 12 impromptu debate in the courtyard of Dallas' First Baptist Church, and have continued through an extensive correspondence which seems to be still in progress."

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(Pentecost is editor of The Religious Herald, newsjournal of the Baptist General Association of Virginia.)

Patterson Disagrees
With Heresy Argument

DALLAS (BP)--Paige Patterson, a leader of the inerrancy movement in the Southern Baptist Convention "obviously does not agree" with the argument by a University of Richmond professor that "militant inerrantists are heretics."

Robison B. James, a professor at the Baptist General Association of Virginia-related school, made the charge in the November issue of SBC Today, and acknowledged "a debt" to Patterson in the introduction, citing an extensive correspondence.

Patterson told Baptist Press he has had "an ongoing correspondence in which there have been very frank and gentlemanly expressions of substantively differing viewpoints."

He added he thought the correspondence "was to remain a private discussion between two men in an academic context. I have been trying to keep from engaging in public discussion because of the work of the SBC Peace Committee. I have not felt private discussions, such as the one with Rob James, were hurtful, but have felt they were helpful. At least they show the varying groups are talking to each other"

Patterson said he met James during the 1985 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas. "I was crossing the street and another man stopped me and asked a question. He (James) jumped into the conversation. I didn't even know who he was until several weeks later when I got a long epistle from him.

"I responded with a four or five page letter, and he wrote back. We have exchanged several other letters. I don't know how long either of us can keep this up."

Patterson said he "probably helped him (James) clarify for his purposes exactly what the thinking of the conservative group is and what our concerns are."

While admitting he would characterize James as "one of the liberals we have been talking about," Patterson declined to comment on the substance of James' arguments. "To say anything further would only encourage controversy and we don't need that at this time."

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Hurricane Juan
Blasts Louisiana

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
11/1/85

ALEXANDRIA, La. (BP)--Hurricane Juan blasted South Louisiana for five days in late October, claiming seven lives and wreaking \$1 billion in damages.

Juan--an unprecedented third hurricane to attack Louisiana's coast in one season--dumped water into at least 11 Baptist churches. Baptist neighbors responded to the storm by sending five disaster relief vans to the flooded areas. Two Louisiana vans were sent from Alexandria in the central part of the state. Baptists in Arkansas, Tennessee and Texas also sent vans.

Southern Baptist disaster relief efforts are being directed by Cameron Byler, disaster relief coordinator for the SBC Brotherhood Commission; John Winters, Louisiana Baptist men and boys department director, and Cal Jones, Winters' assistant.

The vans and Baptist volunteers operating them are being used to prepare food for persons flooded out of their homes as well as volunteers working to repair damaged levees. The Red Cross is providing food, and Red Cross and Salvation Army volunteers are helping to distribute it.

In addition to the large-scale efforts, local Baptists in Adolphe Stagg and Atchafalaya Baptist Associations are helping their neighbors with food preparation, reported Arthur Achord, director of missions.

Volunteers from undamaged churches in those associations also have been paired with sister churches which have been flooded, Achord said. The volunteers are assisting in cleanup and renovation.

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Three damaged churches are affiliated with the Baptist Association of Greater New Orleans, in the southeastern portion of the state. Eight churches are in the Adophe Stagg and Atchafalaya associations, southwest and west of New Orleans.

Although flooding and high winds attacked other parts of South Louisiana, directors of missions from those areas report no damage to Baptist churches.

Louisiana's Governor Edwin Edwards said as many as 100,000 homes were flooded by Juan. Property damage--including crops, homes and other buildings, and oil and farm equipment--is estimated at \$1 billion.

Earlier this year, hurricanes Danny and Elena lashed the Louisiana coast, but they did not damage churches.

(Information for this report was gathered by Oscar Hoffmeyer Jr., director of public relations for the Louisiana Baptist Convention and Lacy Thompson and Marv Knox of the Louisiana Baptist Message.)

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Texas Disaster Unit
Moves To Field Again

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
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DALLAS (BP)--Less than three weeks after its return from Mexico City where more than 150,000 meals were served to earthquake victims, the Texas Baptist Disaster Relief mobile unit and a crew of nine trained volunteers travelled to New Orleans to aid the victims of Hurricane Juan.

The unit and team were requested Oct. 30 by the Red Cross, which is coordinating disaster relief operations in south Louisiana, the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

The mobile unit with its portable field kitchen will be used to feed thousands who have been forced from their homes in the New Orleans area. Early reports from south Louisiana estimated \$1 billion damages with at least 50,000 residences damaged by flooding.

On-site director for the Texas team is Charlie Moore of Richardson Heights Baptist Church, Richardson, who was part of the relief effort in Mexico City. Larry Peitz of First Baptist Church, Plano, and Bob Gilley of Lake Palestine Baptist Church, Bullard--two other veterans of the Mexico relief effort--also are among the team travelling to Louisiana.

The disaster relief mobile unit is an 18-wheel tractor-trailer rig equipped with a portable filed kitchen capable of feeding up to 10,000 people a day. Since 1972 when the unit was built and equipped with funds provided through the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions, it has been called to many disasters throughout Texas. The unit has travelled as far as Honduras where it was used to serve 260,000 meals to victims of Hurricane Fifi in 1974.

"Because Texas Baptists have given so generously to disaster relief in the past, adequate funds are on hand for this operation and no appeal for additional money is being made at this time," said Charles P. McLaughlin, chairman of the Texas Baptist Disaster Relief committee.