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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
 SBC 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, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201-3355, Telephone (214) 720-0550**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. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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86-13

**SBC Asks Dismissal
 Of U.S. Court Suit**

By Dan Martin

ATLANTA (BP)--Citing the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, the Southern Baptist Convention has asked dismissal of a federal court lawsuit against the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination.

The motion, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, seeks to have federal judge Robert Hall decline jurisdiction over a suit filed Dec. 5 by a Birmingham, Ala., couple and a Windsor, Mo., layman.

The suit--and a parallel one in Fulton County (Ga.) Superior Court--revolves around events at the 1985 annual meeting of the SBC concerning the election of the Committee on Boards, Commissions and Standing Committees, which nominates trustees for the 20 national SBC agencies.

Robert S. Crowder and his wife, Julia, and Henry C. Cooper claim their rights were violated when SBC President Charles F. Stanley of Atlanta made "erroneous rulings" when he declared out of order attempts to amend the report of the 1985 SBC Committee on Committees, which nominated the 1986 Committee on Boards.

In January, the Crowders and Cooper were joined in the suit by retired Marine H. Allen McCartney of Vero Beach, Fla., as a plaintiff.

Five other laypersons--from Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, Louisiana and Kentucky--filed a parallel suit in Georgia state court Jan. 23, seeking a "declaratory judgment as to the proper interpretation of the procedural bylaws" of the SBC and an injunction to prevent "the defendants from further violations of these bylaws."

Plaintiffs in both suits are represented by Emmet J. Bondurant and Jane Vehko of the Atlanta lawfirm of Bondurant, Mixson and Elmore.

In the reply, filed in late January, the SBC and its Executive Committee seek to have the suit dismissed, claiming the U.S. District Court does not have jurisdiction because the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution "precludes this court from exercising jurisdiction...."

The motion to dismiss also claims the federal court lacks jurisdiction, citing a federal statute which says federal court jurisdiction "exists only if the matter in controversy exceeds the sum of value of \$10,000."

It goes on to add the plaintiffs "claim no entitlement to an award of damages in excess of \$10,000; instead, they seek only to prove and then vindicate their alleged ecclesiastical representational rights within the four walls of a religious organization."

The motion to dismiss the federal suit was filed by James P. Guenther of the Nashville, Tenn., lawfirm of Guenther and Jordan, and former U.S. Attorney General Griffin Bell of the Atlanta lawfirm of King and Spaulding.

In the motion, the attorneys argue the SBC "is a religious body, incorporated and created 'for the purpose of eliciting, combining and directing the energies of the Baptist denomination of Christians (and) for the propagation of the gospel....'"

They also note the convention exists "...for three days each year when that year's duly elected and registered messengers convene for an annual meeting to conduct the convention's ecclesiastical affairs" which includes election of officers and persons to fill trustee posts.

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"In recent years," it says, "the convention has also been concerned with and affected by an ongoing theological and doctrinal controversy concerning...the interpretation of the Bible."

The motion points out the Crowders and Cooper "were three of some 45,000 Baptist messengers who converged in Dallas...in June 1985 to conduct the internal ecclesiastical affairs of the convention for 1985." It also adds the plaintiffs' "claims are premised upon their past status as messengers in 1985 at a religious convention that has permanently and forever adjourned."

It adds the election of the 1986 Committee on Boards was elected by "a substantial margin" of 57.8 percent of those present and voting, and that on the day after the election two messengers "made a motion to end further discussion of the election...and that motion was passed by a majority of the registered messengers present and voting."

In their arguments concerning the First Amendment, the attorneys say: "In 1871, the United States Supreme Court declared that civil courts have no power to decide disputes which are 'strictly and purely ecclesiastical in...character....' In the ensuing years, the Supreme Court has accepted this fundamental proposition as one of the constitutional rules flowing from the First Amendment."

The Crowder lawsuit, the brief claims, "falls squarely within the realm of ecclesiastical disputes which are constitutionally removed from civil resolution...."

"The unmistakable focus of this action is on the inner workings of the Southern Baptist Convention. The issues raised and the relief sought relate exclusively to relationships within the convention and have meaning and significance only for those, like plaintiffs, who claim to be part of that religious body. Plaintiffs' claims are hitched to the internal law of the convention and the rights they claim, if they exist at all, exist only within the convention's system of ecclesiastical polity and governance," the brief goes on to say.

It adds: "The civil courts' lack of power to resolve ecclesiastical disputes is much more than a technical rule of jurisdiction; it is an essential attribute of the religious freedom secured by the First Amendment. The First Amendment prohibits all laws 'respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.'"

The attorneys write there is no governmental interest in the internal ecclesiastical affairs of a church and thus there is also a complete absence of justification for any governmental intrusion into ecclesiastical matters of the kind plaintiffs invite."

It says: "Plaintiffs' claims undeniably fall within the category of disputes within churches that civil courts cannot resolve. Plaintiffs assert rights as citizens of the church to vote in church elections according to the laws and constitution of the church...(and) concern their role within that sovereign religious body--a body separate from the state in fact and absolutely entitled to be so by law."

It adds: "In short, the election of the 1985 nominating committee (Committee on Boards) and all issues related thereto are indisputably matters of ecclesiastical governance over which this court has no power."

It says the 1985 Committee on Boards was elected by a majority of messengers to the 1985 annual meeting and noted "that majority is the highest tribunal within the convention."

"If that were not enough," it adds, "a majority of the 1985 messengers thereafter voted in favor of a motion to end all further discussion of the election.... Moreover, the Executive Committee reviewed the very claims plaintiffs make in this case and determined as a matter of ecclesiastical governance that they did not merit the relief plaintiffs seek in this action."

"Deference to these decisions of the congregational majority and the Executive Committee alone removes this litigation from the power of this court."

Attorneys for the Crowders and Cooper have until Feb. 5 to answer the motion to dismiss. A decision is not expected until after Feb. 11 on the motion.

Crowder Lawsuit First
In SBC History: Bennett

ATLANTA (BP)—A lawsuit filed in federal district court in Atlanta is the first such suit in the 146-year history of the Southern Baptist Convention, according to Harold C. Bennett.

Bennett, president of the SBC's Executive Committee, said "no messenger has ever undertaken to sue the Southern Baptist Convention prior to the filing of this suit."

Bennett's comment came in a 25-page affidavit filed in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia in response to a suit filed Dec. 5 by a Birmingham, Ala., couple and a layman from Windsor, Mo.

Robert S. Crowder, his wife, Julia, and Henry C. Cooper filed their suit against the SBC and the Executive Committee, claiming their rights had been violated during the annual meeting of the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination in Dallas, June 12, 1985. Their complaint revolves around the election of the denomination's Committee on Boards, Commissions and Standing Committees, which nominates trustees for the 20 national agencies of the convention.

The attorneys for the SBC filed a motion seeking to have the Crowder lawsuit dismissed on First Amendment grounds and on a statute which requires plaintiffs to show \$10,000 damages in order to sue in federal court.

In his affidavit, Bennett speaks of the history of the Southern Baptist Convention, discusses denominational organization, comments on the denominational controversy and gives his perspective on the issue at litigation and efforts to resolve the conflict.

"Rugged individualism kept Baptists from forming a denomination until 1813," he wrote. "Baptist churches were then, and are now, each an independent, self governing body...so is every other Baptist organization. There is no ecclesiastical sequence."

Bennett commented each church is free to "cooperate" with the SBC, and "is free to cease its cooperation at any time. The relationship between the church and the Southern Baptist Convention is established by the church's choice unilaterally."

Currently, there are 36,740 churches "in friendly cooperation with" the convention and "sympathetic with" its purposes, he said. In Dallas 13,960 churches from 50 states sent a total of 45,519 messengers, he said.

The SBC, he said, has no existence "except during the convention in session some three days each year. It has no employees and owns no property." He added the Crowders and Cooper were messengers, but says "their messenger status ended at the adjournment of that convention."

He added "the plaintiffs may or may not be messengers to the 1986 convention."

Bennett said all aspects of the SBC government—annual meetings, "the equality of all messengers, the majority vote concept, the insistence of the convention on its autonomy and independence and all other facets of organization, polity and governance—are rooted in religious belief."

Bennett discussed the sequence of events June 12, 1985, which resulted in the election of the 1986 Committee on Boards, and the subsequent lawsuit. He pointed out the committee was elected "by a majority of the messengers present and voting by a vote of 13,123 to 9,581."

Bennett wrote: "The Southern Baptist Convention is a dynamic organization which assumes the position of a majority of messengers at a given convention. The systems in the convention are designed to minimize radical departure from traditional policies...and to lessen the impact which one convention may have on the direction of the convention's institutions."

He pointed out SBC President Charles F. Stanley of Atlanta was elected to a first term in 1984, appointed a Committee on Committees which, at the 1985 convention, nominated a Committee on Boards which will report to the 1986 annual meeting.

"Therefore, when the 1986 convention elects members to the various boards in 1986, it will be the culmination of an event in which the messengers at three separate conventions have had input," he added.

In addition, he said, the messengers to the 1986 annual meeting may elect the nominees of the Committee on Boards, may elect some and reject others, or "may totally reject the nominees offered...elect those of their own choosing, resolve to censure the Committee on Boards, the 1985 Committees who nominated the Committee on Boards and the president who named the Committee on Committees, or whatever the majority wishes."

"The Southern Baptist Convention in session is the ultimate decision-making body within the denomination," he added.

He said the Executive Committee has acted on the Crowders' complaint, and that the committee's Bylaws Workgroup currently is discussing modification of bylaws under which the disputed election was conducted. In addition, he said, the SBC Peace Committee has scheduled discussions of the controversy and dispute.

The SBC Committee on Order of Business has scheduled a discussion of the bylaw concerning the disputed election, Bennett said, prior to the presentation of the 1986 Committee on Committees.

"Thus within the processes of the convention, the bylaw interpretation about which the plaintiffs complain is being addressed and the messengers at the 1986 convention will have the opportunity to work their will on the subject," he said.

"The same convention also will have an opportunity, if the messengers share the plaintiffs' opinion of the manner by which the Committee on Boards...was elected in 1985, to repudiate that election by rejecting that committee's nominees to the director positions on the various institutions of the convention and membership on the standing committees," he said.

Bennett noted that since 1979, "messengers...have elected presidents identified with the 'inerrantist' faction within the convention. The power of the messengers to influence the doctrinal policies of the boards, commissions and institutions of the convention is seen to begin in the election of the convention president who holds the power to name the committee on committees, which begins the process by which the directors of these boards, commissions and institutions ultimately are elected by the messengers.

"These directors determine, within the parameters of standing convention instructions, the policies and theological stances of the boards..." he added.

Bennett said the controversy over the 1985 annual meeting "arises out of, relates to and is a product of...disputes over religious doctrine and related disputes over control of the trustee bodies which make policy for institutions associated with the...convention, which disputes have affected the...convention since 1979."

The Executive Committee president concluded his affidavit by quoting from Paul's letter to the Ephesians (4:31-32), which urges Christians not to harbor "bitter resentment or anger" and for there to be "no bad feeling of any kind among you. It encourages kindness and compassion and calls on Christians to "forgive others as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This substitutes for "Haiti Looters Take Baptist Food As National Violence Builds," mailed Jan. 31.

Baptist Food, Tools Stolen
During Haitian Violence

Baptist Press
2/4/86

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (BP)--Armed looters broke into a Baptist warehouse near Port-au-Prince three times Jan. 31 during a wave of national violence and unrest in Haiti.

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Stolen were food intended for Baptist children's camps, various small tools for well-drilling projects and 25 to 30 cages with rabbits for an agricultural project.

At least 55 Haitians have been killed nationwide, according to Associated Press reports.

Jack and Doris Hancox, the only Southern Baptist missionaries in Haiti, were at home, about 15 minutes from the warehouse, when the looting occurred during daylight hours. The U.S. government recommended American tourists leave Haiti and other Americans stay in Port-au-Prince.

The warehouse manager was present when looters struck but was not injured. A night watchman in a house on the grounds received minor injuries. Looters took his money and other belongings.

In a separate incident Jan. 31, a worker in a Baptist-sponsored tree-planting project was robbed of a \$600 payroll for 15 to 20 employees. The worker was not injured. He is a Baptist church member who has been involved in the project for about two years.

A Baptist farm storehouse near Cap Haitien was looted Jan. 30. The stolen food had been intended for schoolchildren involved in Baptists' extensive school nutrition program in Haiti, but schools have been closed since unrest began in late November.

The warehouse manager in Port-au-Prince has worked with the Hancoxes about five years. Mrs. Hancox said the three men involved in the incidents, though shaken, were "back working...and seeing where to go from here."

A number of Baptist churches in Port-au-Prince held morning worship services Feb. 2 but canceled evening services, Mrs. Hancox said. Churches in Cap Haitien were closed.

Two of three well-drilling units were in the Port-au-Prince warehouse. Hancox said after an initial examination he believed they were undamaged. A third unit was in use, adding to the approximately 200 wells drilled for drinking water for communities, schools and public access during the Hancoxes' eight years in Haiti.

During one of the three robberies, looters used a truck, Mrs. Hancox said. There were three trucks on the grounds but none was stolen.

Also stolen from the warehouse were food and tools from the United States for Mennonite ministries in Haiti. Looters also raided three CARE food warehouses in the country.

Earlier in the week, large supplies of food had been transported from the warehouse to Baptist school nutrition programs throughout Haiti.

During the violence, the Hancoxes could hear gunfire. They live about 15 to 20 minutes from where some of the worst rioting occurred.

Hancox has told several Southern Baptist volunteer groups in the United States not to come to Haiti. He handled arrangements for 21 American Baptist volunteers to fly home Feb. 1. The American Baptist group, which was in Port-au-Prince, had come to work with missionaries from their denomination stationed in Cap Haitien.

Southern Baptist lay worker Freddie Peters of Oklahoma City and her two daughters are safe in Port-au-Prince, Hancox said. Mrs. Peters' husband, Dan, of Castle Rock, Colo., is in Miami receiving medical treatment. Longtime Southern Baptist volunteers John and Edna Payne of Kentucky have been in the United States since coming home for Christmas. "We have advised them not to come back until this is over," Mrs. Hancox said.

The Hancoxes said they instructed workers at the warehouse not to resist looters if they strike again. "(Jack) told the guardians just to open the door rather than be hurt," Mrs. Hancox said. "(The looters) come in with guns. You don't want your people hurt over a sack of rice."

Cap Haitien and all other major towns besides Port-au-Prince are "shut tight," Hancox reported. He said martial law and a state of siege had been announced on national radio the morning of Jan. 31. Port-au-Prince itself was relatively calm, he noted, but he said traffic into the city had been stopped.

Astronauts Mourn
Fallen Colleagues

By Steve Maynard

HOUSTON (BP)—Four astronauts read poems, Bible verses and letters to comfort their neighbors and friends who mourned the fallen Challenger Seven Sunday (Feb. 2) at University Baptist Church.

Astronaut Guy Gardner, a member of the church, in Clear Lake near the Johnson Space Center, his voice ringing with emotion, said: "I cried many tears during this week.

Some, he said, were tears of grief over the loss of seven of his fellow astronauts. But Gardner told 1,500 mourners attending memorial services at the church, he also cried tears of joy "over the abundance of God's grace."

"This week has been a week of sorrow, but it's also been a week of healing and togetherness," Gardner said, adding he has been "touched by all the kindness" of those who have sought to console the fallen astronauts' families. With the exception of teacher Christa McAuliffe, all of the members of the Space Shuttle Challenger, which exploded during launch Jan. 28, lived near the Johnson Space Center near Houston.

Gardner and two other Shuttle astronauts—Blaine Hammond and Joe Engle—took part in the community memorial service sponsored by University, Nassau Bay and Clear Lake Baptist churches. All three churches are near the NASA headquarters and have many members connected with the space program.

They were joined by James Irwin, an Apollo 15 astronaut who walked on the moon and has since become an ordained Southern Baptist minister.

The Challenger tragedy struck University Baptist especially hard since Challenger Commander Francis R. (Dick) Scobee attended there and his widow, June, is a member.

Gardner, the most visibly shaken of the speakers, wore a blue tie with a pattern of white space shuttles. Near him in the packed church was a blue cross with seven hearts, each filled with a red rose, one for each of the astronauts who died.

Hammond, a member of Clear Lake Baptist Church, read I Corinthians 13, the traditional "love chapter" in the New Testament.

Engle, a member of Clear Lake United Methodist Church, recited the names of the fallen astronauts, prayed and thanked the fallen colleagues for their contributions. "We're all stronger, we're all richer, we're all better prepared because of them," he said.

Irwin, who said he learned of the tragedy while in Edmonton, Alberta on a speaking tour of Canadian school campuses, said he at first thought the shuttle was "still on earth; it couldn't be in space." Then, he said, he learned the "painful details."

"I was stunned, saddened and shocked," he said.

Irwin said he tried to put himself in the place of the shuttle astronauts when he watched the video replays of the explosion. He talked of the exhilaration he felt when the capsule he rode to the moon cleared the launch tower.

"There's just a natural reflex to relax. They had probably just begun to enjoy their ride into space," he said.

Irwin also recounted the Apollo I fire which claimed three astronauts Jan. 27, 1967.

"I'm grimly reminded that we have deferred the payment on the space shuttle program until this week. Just when we thought we had it made, we lost it. The world lost a proven capability to enter space; we lost seven dear friends.

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(Maynard, religion writer for the Houston Chronicle, covered the memorial service at the request of the Dallas bureau of Baptist Press.)

Georgia Pastor Sentenced For Stealing From Church

MACON, Ga. (BP)—A former Southern Baptist pastor and Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee member has been sentenced to six years in prison for stealing from his church.

During his trial last November, C. Michael Blizzard entered guilty pleas to five counts of theft from Tabernacle Baptist Church, one of the largest churches in Macon, Ga.

In exchange for the guilty pleas, prosecutors agreed to drop 40 other counts against Blizzard, who resigned as pastor of Tabernacle in January 1985 and served on the SBC Executive Committee from 1979-83. Although eligible for a second four-year term on the Executive Committee, Blizzard declined to serve.

Assistant Bibb County District Attorney Sharon Ratley said Judge Hal Bell imposed a 15-year sentence on Blizzard Jan. 27. The sentence includes the provision the former pastor will be required to serve a six-year prison term, followed by nine years' probation.

Blizzard will be eligible for parole after serving only a few months in the penitentiary, Ratley added.

Blizzard was accused of stealing more than \$58,000—including \$522 donated by a church member to buy Christmas turkeys for the poor—from the church during 1983-84.

Luther Strickland, Blizzard's attorney, who before the trial had said his client "welcomes his day in court," called sixteen character witnesses during the sentencing hearing and introduced cancelled checks to show acts of charity by Blizzard.

Blizzard was pastor of Tabernacle from 1980-1985. Earlier churches included Indian Creek Baptist Church in Stone Mountain, Ga., and Lizella Baptist Church near Macon.

He is a graduate of Mercer University, Macon, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, and received the doctor of ministry degree from Emory University in Atlanta.

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Hastey Debates Role Of Judicial Activism

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
2/4/86

WASHINGTON (BP)—Amid increasing disagreement over the role of the government's judicial branch, a Southern Baptist church-state spokesman and a U.S. Department of Justice representative met to debate the issue of judicial activism.

Stan Hastey, associate executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, and Terry Eastland, director of the Justice Department's office of public affairs, argued the role of the Supreme Court in regard to the U.S. Constitution during a session of the National Association of Evangelicals' annual Federal Seminar.

The current national debate involves the issue of judicial review, said Eastland, who described that activity as "the review by a court of a piece of legislation or an action by a government to determine whether the legislation or that activity was in conflict or was consistent with the Constitution of the United States." Judicial review is one of three aspects of the broader concept of judicial power, which also involves interpretation of statutes and determination of equity, he added.

Arguing that the ideas of judicial activism and judicial restraint involve a larger idea than simply the Constitution, Eastland noted, "They go to this larger issue of judicial power and, in general, the role of the court. Those who support judicial activism generally favor a very large role for the court. Those who preach the gospel of judicial restraint typically believe that role should be limited."

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Hastey said judicial activism is not a new trend but rather "a noble part of our national tradition and an essential component of our American experiment in self-government." He added that at the heart of the current debate is the question of what the nation's founders intended.

Eastland, however, said he believes the role of the court was intended by the country's founders to be limited. That role has expanded tremendously during the past 30 to 40 years, he added, describing the expansion as being less by design or by intention of the people than by a combination of other factors, including the legal profession itself.

Eastland, who does not hold a law degree, criticized legal commentators, law school professors and those he called "verbal elites"—persons who write for newspapers and magazines and who, he said, "may not be educated in the law but nonetheless are sophisticated or, in the alternative, think themselves sophisticated."

"These people typically have been in favor of a larger and larger role of the court," he said. "I think that has something to do with intellectuals who often have a stake in the aggrandizement of their own power."

Eastland also pointed to Congress' tendency to write into legislation a "private right of action," which allows anyone who thinks he has a remedy under a particular law to go into court and sue, and to judges who "have had perhaps an oversized sense of their own ability."

To illustrate his view, Hastey focused on the founders' intentions in drafting the religion clauses of the First Amendment. After mentioning several recent Supreme Court decisions regarding the separation of church and state, he specifically explored the dissenting opinion of Associate Justice William H. Rehnquist to a 1985 decision that invalidated an Alabama statute authorizing local school boards to require a daily period of silent prayer in public schools.

"In what can only be described as a legal treatise designed for future use by a more sympathetic majority on the Supreme Court, Justice Rehnquist draws a blueprint for a revised version of the First Amendment's establishment clause," Hastey said. "Rehnquist's lengthy dissent suggests that the court reassess all its church-state decisions of the past four decades in light of what he describes as the framers' intent to do no more in the establishment clause than forbid the establishment of a national church or favor one Christian sect over another."

Hastey contended that Rehnquist denigrated the role of Thomas Jefferson and the convictions of James Madison in the inclusion of religious guarantees in the First Amendment. The justice also refrained from mentioning Congress' insistence on language forbidding an establishment of religion, Hastey added.

Another failure on Rehnquist's part, he said, is his view that the duty of the Supreme Court is simply to discern the intent of the framers.

"In the case of the religion clauses of the First Amendment, of course, such a posture would virtually force the justices into a judicial straitjacket," Hastey argued. "When the framers gathered in Philadelphia, the new nation harbored scarcely a dozen religious groups. Today, the United States protects the rights of some 3,000 separate religious bodies. No other nation on earth boasts such diversity. In no other nation in the world do as many as four in 10 citizens voluntarily attend houses of worship every week. And no other nation comes close to matching the 70 percent of American citizens who of their own accord belong to a church, synagogue or mosque.

"Accordingly, application of the religion clauses of the First Amendment has of necessity been dynamic rather than static, elastic rather than inflexible."

In opposition, Eastland said he advocates the approach of "interpretivists," who he said take the Constitution seriously and believe any theory of constitutional interpretation should be grounded in the text of the Constitution as that text is illuminated by the intentions of those who framed, proposed and ratified it.

"I think that judicial restraint is an appropriate role for the court," Eastland said. "Judicial restraint invigorates the very idea of self-government. It also, I believe, would enable the religious views of the American people to flourish.

"I think one of the difficulties I have as a Christian and someone who believes that the expression of religious viewpoints is important is simply that a great many of the Supreme Court decisions have been ones that have impeded, inhibited the abilities of communities to decide for themselves the kind of public moralities that they should be able to live by."

Hastey, however, contended that the Constitution's framers could no more have envisioned the country's explosion of religious pluralism than they could have foreseen the other changes that have taken place. "What they did have the wisdom to do, was to fashion a Constitution that had the innate capacity of continual change, of adaptability to a nation they surely knew would grow into much more than what they could observe from their limited vantage point.

"Like the roles of the executive and legislative branches, that of the judicial branch must constantly be changing to meet and engage ever new circumstances and conditions. It simply will not do to rail at judicial activism as though it were some newly concocted constitutional heresy," he said.

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Pastor's Comments On Gays
Create Stir In California

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
2/4/86

SAN FRANCISCO (BP)—Controversial remarks concerning homosexuality on a television talk show have led to the removal of a San Francisco pastor from field supervision responsibilities with Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and to a cancellation of financial assistance to his church from the state convention.

In the midst of the furor over Pastor James Lowder's remarks, Southern Baptist Convention President Charles Stanley told a San Francisco newspaper "God has created the AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) epidemic to indicate his displeasure over America's acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle."

Stanley, an Atlanta pastor, was in California in January to speak at the state evangelism conference. A religion writer for the San Francisco Examiner interviewed Stanley and asked him about the Southern Baptist stand on homosexuality.

In the interview, Stanley said the Bible "is very clear on homosexuality. It is a sinful lifestyle, and I believe that AIDS is God indicating his displeasure and his attitude toward that form of lifestyle, which we in this country are about to accept."

Lowder's remarks were made during a November segment of the talk show, in which discussion centered on whether the church openly should accept the homosexual lifestyle.

"I believe the Bible is the supreme authority for our lives, and as a Baptist, I try to follow that; however, I do not believe, like many of my colleagues, that the Bible has a sexual ethic," said Lowder, pastor of Dolores Street Baptist Church. "It has an ethic of human relationships that are faithful, loving, life-enhancing and caring. If a gay relationship has those qualities, then I believe the Bible affirms that relationship."

In December, Lowder was removed as one of about 100 local ministers supervising small groups in the supervised ministry program at Golden Gate seminary, located in nearby Mill Valley, Calif. That action was taken by Frank Pollard, seminary president, following charges by Golden Gate graduate R.L. Hymers Jr. that the seminary had a professor teaching acceptance of homosexuality on its staff.

Hymers, now pastor of Fundamentalist Baptist Tabernacle in Los Angeles, had made the charge in a May 1985 issue of Southern Baptist Journal. Pollard had denied the charge but later learned of Lowder's remarks on the television show.

Writing to Hymers, with copies to several California pastors, directors of associational missions and state convention officials, Pollard said Lowder "is not and never has been a professor, associate professor, instructor or adjunct professor at the seminary. He has been one of about a hundred local ministers who supervise small groups in our supervised ministry program. We, of course, had no reports or complaints until now.

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"Please be advised that the word of God is the center of curriculum at Golden Gate seminary. The Bible does not allow homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle. This is clearly stated in our catalogue. Each person employed to teach here is asked to declare that homosexuality is not their sexual preference. From hence forth, those who volunteer for supervised ministry will be asked to do likewise."

The local ministers are paid an honorarium for their services.

On Jan. 30, the state convention's executive board voted unanimously to cut out special assistance of \$14,964 in the 1986 budget to the Dolores Street church. The funds were provided jointly by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the state convention. A year earlier, the executive board had removed a similar amount as pastoral assistance to Lowder but kept the amount of support for the church's ministry in San Francisco.

Lowder formerly was a missionary appointed by the Home Mission Board, but that relationship was terminated several years ago following his participation in a protest at nearby Livermore Laboratories, which does research on nuclear weapons.

In the San Francisco interview, Stanley said he was dismayed with the public's response to the death of actor Rock Hudson, who died from AIDS last October.

"It's almost as if he's become more heroic dying of AIDS, with all the publicity he's gotten. It's like there was nothing bad about it," Stanley is quoted as saying in the Examiner article.

"It's interesting what's happening. Homosexuality has been going on for a long time, but as it has become an acceptable lifestyle in the minds of many people, we have AIDS," he said. "Why not AIDS 50 years ago, 100 years ago? Our acceptance toward it and our attitudes toward it are related."

In a later interview reported in the Atlanta Journal and Constitution, Stanley responded to criticism by homosexual activists who interpreted his San Francisco comments as saying he believes AIDS reflects God's displeasure with homosexuals.

"I do not look on AIDS as God's judgment on homosexuals, but upon sin," he said in the second interview. He called upon churches to start programs to help homosexuals "who would like to be freed from their bondage."

"We have to face up to the fact that this is a horrendous disease, and that the whole nation could be affected by it," he said. "There are those who can help in the medical area, and we can help in the spiritual realm."

He extended his comments about AIDS and mankind's relationship with God, noting he believes AIDS is evidence God is displeased with the United States as a whole.

"As any nation departs from the truth of Scripture, there are all kinds of evidences of problems that the nation has difficulty dealing with," he said.

Stanley's San Francisco comments have created conflict between pastors and a newspaper in western Tennessee which carried a news story and political cartoon about the remarks.

The Memphis Commercial Appeal's cartoon depicted Stanley as a spokesman for Southern Baptists with the caption: "Today: AIDS—God's curse for being gay. Next week: Sickle-cell anemia."

The Shelby Baptist Pastors' Conference subsequently adopted a resolution condemning the cartoon, declaring it "makes light of the idea of God's judgment and misrepresents the position of Southern Baptists" by implying that they believe sickle-cell anemia, a disease which exclusively afflicts blacks, is a judgment of that race.

Memphis pastors told the Baptist and Reflector, newsjournal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, that the cartoon's implication of Baptists' racism is absurd but that Christians' feelings toward homosexuality are grounded in Biblical and historic roots.

(BP)

BAPTIST PRESS

901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

LYNN MAY HO
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
901 COMMERCE
NASHVILLE, TN 37203

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