



- - BAPTIST PRESS

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
Marv Knox, 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. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Nashville, Tennessee

April 9, 1986

Rogers Willing
To Be Nominated

By Dan Martin

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)—Former Southern Baptist Convention President Adrian Rogers says he is willing to be nominated again as president of the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination.

Rogers told members of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis April 2 of his decision. "I just told my congregation and asked them to pray for and with me about the matter. I told them I felt I needed to make myself available if, indeed, the people wanted me (as president)."

In an interview with Baptist Press, Rogers said he has had many requests and "a constant barrage of letters encouraging me" to allow the nomination when the SBC meets for its 1986 annual meeting June 10-12 in Atlanta.

"To my knowledge, I have never sought this office," he said. Rogers served one term as president, 1979-80, and declined to serve a second term, although both tradition and the SBC Constitution allows it. His election was regarded as the opening gun in a campaign to turn the 14.4-million-member denomination to a "more conservative" direction.

"I am not running for office," he said. "I am willing if the brethren want me. I realize there is the potential that I may not be nominated and the potential that if nominated, I may not be elected. I just have a willingness in my heart to allow my name to be placed in nomination."

The Memphis pastor said he has been praying about his decision, and on Easter Sunday evening (March 30), he invited a group of "trusted leaders of the church" to his home, where "we prayed and discussed the matter for several hours. After that, I felt a clearness in my heart to announce my willingness."

The announcement is in contrast to Rogers' candidacy in 1979, when he said the decision "was not made until the ninth hour." He said he "did not feel the freedom to allow my name to be nominated until sometime after midnight" of the opening day of the Houston convention. "The difference between 1979 and now is that I feel a freedom in my heart now (to be nominated) that I did not feel then," he said.

Rogers swamped five other candidates to win 51.36 percent of the vote in a stunning first-ballot victory. His election, however, was tainted by accusations of "overt political activity" and of voter irregularities. It set off an investigation by Registration Secretary Lee F. Porter of Nashville, Tenn., of both the voting and registration procedures.

"Lee Porter investigated and found only a minute number of people were guilty of mishandling the ballot, and even those who did, did so out of ignorance. Nothing was revealed that would have skewed the election in any way whatsoever," Rogers said.

The investigation, however, did result in a tightening up of registration and voting procedures used during the annual meeting of the convention.

Rogers said he "was not personally wounded" by the allegations of irregularities, but "was disappointed to hear brothers accusing brothers of vote fraud and dishonesty. It disappointed but did not deeply wound me. I know who I am and took it with a grain of salt."

Rogers' announcement ends months of speculation as to whether the former president would allow himself to be nominated. Open speculation began when Florida pastor Homer Lindsay Jr. told a meeting in First Baptist Church in Jacksonville that Rogers was the choice of fundamental-conservatives to succeed current SBC President Charles F. Stanley of Atlanta.

Rogers told Baptist Press: "The announcement (in Florida) was that I was the man they wanted. They had asked me if I would be their candidate, and I told them no, but I did tell them they could say I was their choice. I did not give them permission to say I was a candidate."

The Memphis pastor said: "It is my desire, whether I am president or not, to see a clearing of the air. For this reason I am very supportive of the SBC Peace Committee (of which he is a member). I believe the committee is the best mechanism to let the facts be known. It has been my philosophy in almost any decision making that if you carefully gather the facts, the decision is almost automatic."

He added the recently adopted "Diversity Statement" by the 22-member Peace Committee is a case in point. "For many years we have been hearing that there is no real theological problem in the SBC. But now a bi-partisan, convention-elected committee has clearly said there is."

The committee, elected by the 1985 annual meeting to determine the sources of controversy in the SBC and to try to devise ways to bring about reconciliation, adopted a three-paragraph statement during its February meeting which spelled out the diversity of theological belief and asked for prayer as it sought ways to help diverse Baptists work together.

Rogers said, "Whoever is elected president should work to create a climate in which we can solve our problems. I am talking about one of love and fairness, a spiritual revival. I don't believe Southern Baptists will be changed ultimately by parliamentary maneuvering, appointments or gavel-banging. We need a fresh touch from God and I will pray and work toward that end."

He said he believes whoever is elected president "should continue to nudge the denomination back to its conservative roots and away from neo-orthodoxy. Responsible 'conservative' leadership that I know is not wanting a bloodletting or a radical revolution, but an effort to persistently and gently nudge the denomination back to its roots. The emphasis is on both persistently and gently."

Rogers said he believes there is "more unity under the skin" of Southern Baptists than most people realize. I do not believe our convention is divided 55 (percent) to 45 (percent). I think it is more like 90-10. I believe when the facts are known, the many people who are Bible-believers in the traditional Southern Baptist sense will coalesce against the neo-orthodox (people) who represent a very small portion of our constituency but have the potential to do damage far beyond their proportional size."

He indicated much of the "neo-orthodox" leadership is centered in denomination institutions and agencies, but said, if elected, he would not seek to fire anyone. "I couldn't if I wanted to and I wouldn't if I could. That is a trustee responsibility and it needs to be undertaken by a wider group, if it needs to be done."

Rogers said the matter "needs to be dealt with gently and wisely," but said: "Historically, there have been those who have had to be relieved of duties by boards of trustees, and it did not represent the end of our denomination. They were dealt with kindly and fairly, so if some of that is necessary in overt and blatant cases, it will not be the end of the world for our denomination."

In regard to charges by moderate-conservatives they have been disenfranchised by fundamental-conservatives during the seven years the "right side of the house" has won denominational leadership, Rogers said: "Every Southern Baptist is in the family as long as he has the opportunity to come to the convention and vote. That is the litmus test."

Rogers, however, did say a president "is honor bound to make his appointments from those he feels would be best from every perspective—denominationally, morally and doctrinally. When the majority of Southern Baptists elect a president, they know the kind of president they are electing and expect his leadership to reflect who he is."

Cooperative Program Remains
Ahead Of U.S. Inflation Rate

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Halfway through its fiscal year, the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program of worldwide mission and ministry support has grown more than twice as fast as the U.S. inflation rate.

After six months, 1985-86 Cooperative Program receipts total \$62,781,162, up 8.05 percent over the same period in 1984-85, reported Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee. The current total is \$4,678,205 ahead of the six-month figure for last year, which was \$58,102,957, he said.

The 8.05 percent increase for the current year compares to an inflation rate that has remained around 3 percent, noted Tim Hedquist, Executive Committee vice president for business and finance.

However, March receipts of \$10,033,586 were 0.91 percent behind receipts for March of 1985, he said, noting the March 1985 figure was unusually high, especially for a few large state Baptist conventions whose 1986 March totals did not reach March 1985 figures.

Still, this March was the third consecutive month in which Cooperative Program receipts had surpassed \$10 million. January receipts of almost \$12.8 million were 18.13 percent ahead of the same time in 1985, and February receipts of almost \$10.9 million were 18.1 percent beyond February 1985 income.

Bennett said he is disappointed but not discouraged because of the March receipts.

"I am disappointed the March income reflected a decrease in relation to receipts for March of last year," he explained. "But a one-month decrease does not cause me to be discouraged.

"I am encouraged by the totality of Southern Baptists' giving pattern this year. The trend-line is on the upswing. Our giving is more than doubling the inflation rate, and that is good news."

Earlier predictions the 1985-86 Cooperative Program will receive between \$126 million and \$127 million appear to be accurate, Bennett noted.

For the Cooperative Program to reach its \$130 million goal, monthly receipts must average \$11,203,140 for the final six months of the fiscal year.

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SBC Telecast
Set For 1986

Baptist Press
4/9/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—The 1986 Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta will be televised for the second consecutive year with live, gavel-to-gavel coverage by BTN (Baptist Telecommunication Network).

Coverage will begin at 8:30 (EDT) Tuesday morning, June 10, with music by the choir from First Baptist Church of Atlanta. The first item of business will be the call to order at 9 a.m.

The coverage will conclude at 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 12. All of the transmission will be unscrambled so any church or individual can view the proceedings if they have a satellite receiving antenna.

anchors for the coverage will be Gomer Lesch, anchor of SBC NewScene and senior BTN consultant at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, and Dick McCartney, editor of the Baptist Messenger, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

NewScene updates will be offered to viewers at 8:45 a.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and at 6:45 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday. The five-minute updates will provide a capsule look at the events which have occurred most recently and provide insights into potentially significant events during the next sessions.

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Joe Denney, manager of the telecommunications department at the Sunday School Board, urged all BTN subscribers, churches, associations, state conventions and SBC agencies, to open their facilities and encourage persons in the area to watch the annual convention.

An SBC Programming Guide outlining ways to promote viewing of the convention is available to all BTN subscribers upon request from the office of communications of the Sunday School Board. All subscribers will receive a letter with information about the guide.

Two programs will be offered to help churches as they prepare to participate in the SBC. "SBC Preview" will air May 14 at 11:15 a.m. (EDT) to provide information to persons planning to be messengers in Atlanta. This program will repeat at 3 p.m. May 20.

"Viewing the SBC" will be telecast May 28 at 11:15 a.m. as a help for persons planning to watch the annual convention in their churches. This also will be shown June 4 at 4:15 p.m.

The convention will be broadcast on the Spacenet I satellite, channel 21, at 120 degrees west. Satellite receiving systems still are available at no charge to churches interested in signing a five-year subscription agreement to BTN.

There are almost 800 subscribers to BTN. BTN viewers last year added an estimated 50 percent to the number of persons who were able to see the Southern Baptist Convention.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by BSSB bureau of Baptist Press

Vestal Encourages
Urgency Of Gospel

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press
4/9/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Southern Baptist Sunday School Board employees need to keep a special perspective that transforms their daily work into an enterprise focusing on the urgency of sharing the gospel, Daniel Vestal told them recently.

Vestal, pastor of First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas, and speaker for the board's annual Spiritual Emphasis Days, urged employees to remember the centrality of the gospel at work, in their churches and in their homes.

"What transforms church work into enterprise is motive and purpose," Vestal said. "I think revival is a renewal of perspective and motive, which is needed by preachers, denominational workers and church members."

Vestal explained the most effective way for Southern Baptists to achieve renewal is through cooperation to maintain strength in the denomination.

"Cooperation has been at the very center of Southern Baptist life from the beginning," Vestal said. "The purpose of that is to do together what we can't do individually."

Vestal's church in Midland has been the top contributor to the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' joint budget, for the past several years. He said the church has a missions-minded attitude of commitment to the Cooperative Program.

"We don't give to the Cooperative Program because there is no other place to give our money," he said. "We give because we believe through this method we can reach more people and do more good."

"The whole cooperative enterprise of the Southern Baptist Convention fellowship rests on the local church. I choose to believe we are going to remain committed to cooperative missions, education, ministry and evangelism."

"There are forces which would distract from that cooperation and approach to missions," he said. "There is always that risk and danger we will lessen our commitment to cooperative missions. However, when you accept Jesus Christ, you enter into partnership with others and with God. There is no such thing as a 'Lone Ranger' Christian."

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"Our foundation is our common commitment to Jesus Christ," he said. "Unity does not mean unanimity, but a oneness of heart and mind. Unity is fostered by kindness, intercessory prayer, mutual respect and concern."

Vestal said a tragedy is that the urgency and immediacy of caring for the gospel are missing among many Southern Baptists.

"Opportunities come every day, but if we do not seize that moment, we have lost it," he said. "God wants to use you right now."

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Images Come Alive
On McKeever's Pad

By Breena Kent

Baptist Press
4/9/86

COLUMBUS, Miss. (BP)—Joe McKeever carries a smile and a sketchpad with him everywhere he goes. And it is on the sketchpad that thousands of images come alive.

McKeever is a pastor, but he also is a cartoonist whose signature is familiar to Baptists around the world. His cartoons appear regularly in Baptist state papers, agency magazines and community newspapers.

The Nauvoo, Ala., native is pastor of First Baptist Church of Columbus, Miss., and president-elect of the National Alumni Association of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he earned both a master's degree and a doctorate.

"I'm not a cartoonist who happens to preach," McKeever says. "I'm a preacher who happens to be a cartoonist."

McKeever began drawing in preschool. His father was a coal miner with four sons and two daughters. To keep the six children occupied, McKeever's mother encouraged them to draw, a pastime he enjoyed so much he continued the hobby throughout elementary school, high school and college.

He did not become serious about publishing his cartoons until he was in seminary, however. As he was commuting to school one morning from a church in Paradis, La., he thought of a cartoon with a caricature of one of his professors.

"I sneaked into class early, drew the cartoon on the blackboard and then sneaked out again so that no one would know who had drawn it," he says. He re-entered the classroom later to find both the students and the professor enjoying it.

That was all the encouragement McKeever needed. At first, all he really wanted was to draw a religious cartoon for his devotional in a community newspaper. He sent his artwork to other publications as well, however, and between his sense of humor and his speed in drawing, McKeever impressed many editors.

In 1979, the religion editor for the Jackson Daily News in Mississippi saw some of his cartoons in the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's Commission magazine and asked McKeever to draw a daily cartoon for the paper's religion page.

After that, Copley News Service in San Diego contracted with him to buy his cartoons for \$35 each. McKeever sent the same cartoons to Baptist magazines and state papers, receiving as much as \$150 for one cartoon by selling it to several publications.

McKeever's cartoons are not used only to entertain; he uses them to witness. "It's easy to tell passersby about the Lord as I draw them, because as long as I'm doing them a favor, they don't feel imposed on," he says.

Drawing cartoons is merely a "hobby" for the 46-year-old pastor. But through it he has reached out to the world and made it smile, too.

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(Breena Kent is a student newswriter at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. McKeever photo available to state Baptist newspapers upon request from New Orleans seminary news office.)

SOUTHERN BAPTIST RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

June 7, 1986

Atlanta Hilton Hotel

Atlanta, Georgia

Saturday Afternoon

1:00—Registration

1:10—Introduction, O.D. Morris, director, research division, SBC Home Mission Board; Atlanta

1:20—Presentation, Nancy Ammerman, assistant professor of sociology of religion, Emory University; Atlanta

2:00—Dialogue with Ammerman

2:30—Break

2:45—Business session, O.D. Morris

3:10—President's Address, "The State of the Fellowship," O.D. Morris

3:30—Presentation, Rudee Boan, associate director, planning and services research department, SBC Home Mission Board; Atlanta

4:15—Dialogue with Boan

4:30—"Newly Developed Uniform Church Letter Tables," dialogue with Jim Lowry, denominational statistics specialist, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board; Nashville, Tenn.

5:00—Adjourn

Saturday Evening

6:30—Banquet

7:30—Presentation, Lloyd Elder, president, Baptist Sunday School Board; Nashville

8:30—Dialogue with Elder

9:00—Adjourn

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Researchers To Study
Variety Of Issues

Baptist Press
4/9/86

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Research Fellowship will explore a variety of topics during its annual meeting June 7 in Atlanta.

The meeting will begin at 1 p.m. in the downtown Atlanta Hilton Hotel. It coincides with the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting, to be held June 10-12, also in Atlanta.

The general purpose of the researchers' meeting will be to expose Southern Baptist producers and utilizers of research to the work of other researchers in the convention, said O.D. Morris, president of the organization and director of the research division of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta.

Participants will hear a report by Nancy Ammerman, assistant professor of sociology of religion at Emory University in Atlanta, who conducted a survey of messengers to the 1985 Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas.

Ammerman's presentation will focus more on her research methodology rather than the results of her survey, Morris said. This fits with an overall purpose of the organization, which is to help members--many of whom are not technical researchers--understand research methods and their uses, he explained.

Other speakers will include:

--Rudee Boan, associate director of the Home Mission Board's planning and services research department, who will present results of a study on new missions and what transpires in them from the time they are started until they are constituted as churches.

--Jim Lowry, denominational statistics specialist for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn., who will provide information about the cross-tabulation of SBC Uniform Church Letter data.

--Lloyd Elder, Sunday School Board president, who will present a paper on "key leadership churches," characteristics of the congregations which provide the convention with key leaders.

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Historian Says Baptist Heritage
Can Bring About Reconciliation

By Marv Knox

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Southern Baptists' heritage provides keys to reconciliation within their troubled convention, Penrose St. Amant believes.

Church historian St. Amant addresses the seven-year-old theological/political power struggle within the Southern Baptist Convention in the spring issue of Baptist Heritage Update, published by the SBC Historical Commission.

"Our Baptist heritage, far from being irrelevant, can provide resources to help us in this time of tension," writes St. Amant, senior professor of church history and former dean of the School of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

By understanding their heritage—or examining "history as a resource for reconciliation"—Southern Baptists can discover ways in which they can overcome their differences, he insists.

"Our heritage provides perspective," he notes. "Controversy tends to polarize people by pushing them away from the center and pulling them to one side or the other. Historical perspective can keep us away from extremes."

Perspective allows people to assess the size of issues, find the serenity to study crises objectively and discover consolation in the recollection that "Baptists have survived troubles before," he says.

Heritage also can enable Southern Baptists to "dissolve stereotypes of those with whom we disagree," he adds, noting stereotypes render dialogue fruitless, even though frank discussion can lead to reconciliation.

St. Amant also insists historical reflection can help Baptists realize unity and diversity are not opposed to each other. He cites commitment to the gospel and its proclamation, biblical faith in Christ as divine Redeemer, believer's baptism, religious liberty and rejection of creeds as sources of unity, pointing to commitment to priesthood of believers, congregational church government, freedom of conscience and church-state separation as sources of diversity.

"An 'open Bible' and an 'open mind' suggest the compatibility of unity and diversity in our heritage," he suggests.

Additionally, Baptist heritage teaches "the life of Baptists involves conflict and tension" between conservation of values and openness to alternatives, St. Amant writes. "What is needed is the capacity to change along with the capacity to remain the same. After all, some things need to be conserved and some things need to be changed. Let us shun superficial labels, try to deal with the actual issues and through it all seek to incarnate the only label we need to bear—'Lord, I Want to be a Christian.'"

Baptists' heritage can help them realize their differences are not merely semantic while refraining from "escalating...real differences into barriers that shatter our fellowship," he promises.

"We must take care lest we be duped by those who offer oversimplified solutions, superficial panaceas and quick fixes," St. Amant warns. "The Baptist heritage...does point to a past of hard work, great enthusiasm, heroic endeavors, deep devotion, rigorous debate and the will to maintain fellowship despite differences."

Finally, Southern Baptist heritage is "characterized by the centrality of the Bible in the hands of the people," he maintains. "This can be a mighty resource for reconciliation. The priesthood of believers carries with it the corresponding right of Christians to read, study and interpret the Bible and the responsibility to observe what it teaches.

"There are resources for reconciliation that need to be used right now," he challenges. "Let us translate words into deeds, the Bible into life and get on with our task together."

Craig Predicts SBC Will
Restrict Information Flow

By Jim Newton

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)—During a time when good communication is needed more than ever, Southern Baptists can expect more restrictions on the flow of information, a Baptist public relations professional from Raleigh, N.C., predicted.

Floyd A. Craig, president of Craig and Associates and former member of the North Carolina governor's staff, predicted 14 trends in Baptist communications during the next five years. Craig, also former public relations director for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, delivered the keynote address for the Baptist Public Relations Association annual meeting in Glorieta, N.M.

Increased restrictions on the flow of information may be caused not only because of political considerations, fear and paranoia, but also from economics, Craig said.

Several Baptist state papers are facing serious cutbacks and possible extinction because of escalating postal rate increases, Craig said. If a paper is forced to publish monthly instead of weekly, the change will cause it to use less state and national news, thus becoming more of a house organ, he said. He also predicted there will be more pressure on Baptist communications workers to be "masters of ambiguity."

Because of these two trends, more Baptist communicators will leave the ranks; others will stay to struggle; others will struggle no longer, Craig added.

With a more restricted flow of information, Baptist "grapevines" will be more alive than ever "with untrustworthy and slanderous" rumors, he said. "The rumors will favor no group more than others."

Craig also predicted more attempts to stereotype groups and individuals; an increased desire to overreact coupled with a trend toward more burnouts, retirement syndromes and cynicism; and a reduced emphasis on the skill of listening to others.

Baptists will be less likely in the future to deal with issues because of increased "tunnel vision—that quirk in human nature to see one's own world, program, activities and beliefs to the exclusion of all others," Craig said.

The former ombudsman for North Carolina Gov. Jim Hunt said he sees seven signs which signal excitement and hope for the future.

Saying almost one-third of the 410 members of Baptist Public Relations Association are women professionals, Craig predicted that women in ministry may find their finest expression in Baptist communications as more and more of them fill Baptist managerial PR/communications jobs.

He predicted more emphasis on "mentoring" of new people in the Baptist communications field, and less dependence on "the good old boy system."

"Professional competence will be sought with increasing intensity" as Baptists compete with others for the minds and money of their members. He also predicted market and audience research will no longer be optional, and that communications professionals who offer constructive options for handling crisis situations will help their organizations survive and grow.

Describing Baptist communications workers as people who "put things together," Craig said such professionals "journey together between the lightning and the thunder."

"We journey between the flash of recognition of what is happening to us, and the reverberations of what we are willing to do about it," Craig said. "What happens between the lightning and thunder can be both invigorating and dangerous."

Baptist, Jewish Scholars
Differ On Evangelism Role

By Joe Westbury

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)—Baptist and Jewish scholars agreed on a variety of topics at a national symposium on the New Testament and Judaism but could not come to a consensus on the role of evangelism.

While Jewish scholars maintained Christian evangelism was appropriate when directed toward other peoples, they balked when Jews were mentioned as possible objects of witness.

The discussion between the two faiths, which came on the heels of the Easter and Passover seasons, was held at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

The meeting was sponsored by Southern seminary, the interfaith witness department of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the interreligious affairs department of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

"What unites us is the Hebrew Bible—the Torah—but what divides us is its interpretation," explained Leon Klenicki, director of the New York City-based Jewish organization.

"What we hope to accomplish through a symposium of this nature is to have a greater awareness of our respective missions—Jews sanctifying the name of God by being a light to all nations and Christians exercising their duty of bringing humanity to God by evangelizing the world, but not us. We have been with the Father since the beginning," Klenicki stressed.

Baptist theologians such as Charles Talbert, professor of religion at Wake Forest University in Wake Forest, N.C., took exception to the Jewish stand.

"To tell a Southern Baptist that he or she should exclude any group of people from their witness evokes the same type of emotional reaction that would be called forth in a Jew by the demand that a son not be circumcised," Talbert said. "We as Southern Baptists are not proselytizing for an organization; we are bearing witness of a person who God has sent to us. The story of the gospel is a story of a Christ who indwells each believer and is a conviction that cannot be compromised.

"I have to bear witness to what Jesus Christ has done in my life. That which is absolutely central in the Christian position is that Jesus is God's last word," he affirmed.

Michael Cook, professor of intertestamental and early Christian literature at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, viewed evangelization of Jews as a form of prejudice.

"From our point of view, the mission to the Jews suggests there is an inadequacy in Judaism. But that is a trespass on the integrity of the Jewish people," Cook said. Although he would not define evangelism of Jews as being anti-Semitic, he said he considers it to be offensive.

"However blind the Jews are said to be in some of the writings of early Christianity, Jews always have prided themselves on their clear-sightedness, and the statement 'Jews need to be missionized to' implies an impairment of vision," he said. "Jews simply will not accept that."

In addition to discussing the role of evangelism, conference participants explored concepts of the Messiah, the Gospel of John, the covenant, Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity and Pauline theology.

"From the Baptist perspective, I feel we have gained a new awareness that Jews are very well acquainted with and are interested in the New Testament, particularly the gospels and Pauline epistles," said Carl Savell, director of the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department.

"I am confident we have laid a strong foundation for continued sharing of our faith and hope similar conversations around the New Testament can be experienced by local congregations across the nation," Savell said.

Prophecy Preachers Distort
Messiah Concept, Stagg Says

By Joe Westbury

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)—Southern Baptists should be wary of Bible prophecy preachers who politicize Christ's return and who lobby to shape national defense policy around their theology of the end of times, a retired seminary professor has warned.

Frank Stagg, professor emeritus at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., made his observation during a four-day symposium on the New Testament and Judaism on the seminary's campus.

Stagg charged such prophecy preachers with endangering world peace and distorting the biblical concept of Jesus as Messiah.

They have projected an image of Jesus, not as a "suffering servant," but as an "ultimate Rambo" leading Israel and the United States in a war to end all wars, Stagg said. "Central to their scenario of 'last things' is Armageddon, seen not simply as apocalyptic imagery but as a literal and bloody war, led by the returning Christ."

These preachers view Armageddon as a divinely-programmed and inevitable war, with Jesus siding with the United States and Israel against the Soviet Union and the Arabs, he continued.

"Such militant messianism could be left to its advocates were it not for their political clout. National policy, including military escalation and Mid-East policies, may be significantly affected," he added.

To illustrate his fear, Stagg referred to the acceptance speech at the 1980 Republican National Convention where Ronald Reagan reiterated the idea that the United States is God's new Israel and chosen nation. He further quoted TV preacher Jimmy Swaggart, who said during a Charlotte, N.C., crusade he and two other evangelists speak to more Americans each week on foreign policy than the secretary of state.

Swaggart claimed to know more about foreign policy than the secretary of state, because he has received this knowledge by biblical revelation, Stagg said. Stagg reported Swaggart as saying he had on several occasions warned the president not to negotiate with the Soviets "but to tell them all to go home, for 'You can't negotiate with darkness.'" Swaggart also said he had told some Jewish leaders, 'Israel will rule the world' and that all of them would be Christians."

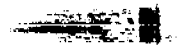
"I believe firmly in Jesus Christ, but as he identified himself and his mission," Stagg insisted. "The kingdom which he brings is the rule of God in and among those responding to him in the faith...."

"In New Testament perspective, the hope that God offers the world is the oneness of Jew and Gentile in a new creation in Jesus Christ," Stagg continued. "This new humanity owes nothing to human credentials, whether ethnic, racial, sexual or cultic, for the gift is from God, by grace through faith.

"The kingdom of God which Jesus Christ brings has nothing to do with nationality or the employment of military force."

Stagg was one of the major speakers during a Baptist-Jewish scholars' dialogue, jointly sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department, Southern seminary and the interreligious affairs department of B'nai Brith's Anti-Defamation League.

LYNN MAY
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
901 COMMERCE
NASHVILLE, TN 37203



901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

BAPTIST PRESS

