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87-100

Southern Baptists In Identity
Crisis, Church Historian Claims

By Lonnie Wilkey

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Southern Baptists are in the midst of an identity crisis, church history professor Bill Leonard, told denominational educators.

Southern Baptists are living during a time when it is increasingly difficult to determine what it means to be both Southern and a Baptist, Leonard, professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., said during the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools annual meeting in Kansas City, Mo.

"While theological tensions have become the immediate issue in the Southern Baptist Convention, they must be viewed as symptoms of a wider and more complex identity crisis in both the denomination and the culture," Leonard noted.

Southern Baptists developed a close identification with Southern culture after the Civil War, he explained: "Southern Baptist identification with Southern society developed alongside the primary source of identity -- the denomination. This denominational consciousness, which had to be protected at all costs as it evolved, provided an increasing sense of unity and uniqueness for churches affiliated with the SBC. It served to distinguish Southern Baptists from their Northern counterparts and other more independent Baptists of the southland."

But the pluralism of American life tends to weaken denominational loyalties from without, Leonard warned.

"As the South loses its traditional identity, as it is invaded by outsiders and as Southern Baptists expand outside the South, pluralism of belief and experience is bound to occur," he said.

Diversity "has undermined denominational identity with the SBC," Leonard observed, noting the influx of people from the North and East has brought people into the SBC with no experience of the social and religious traditions of the convention.

This influx, combined with the efforts of Southern Baptists to take their faith to pioneer areas, meant people "became Southern Baptists who had never been south of the George Washington Bridge (in New York City) or eaten a bowl of grits."

"They did not, many denominationalists lamented, understand the need to do things the way we do it in our Southern Baptist Zion of the South," he noted.

As a result of the breakdown of cultural and denominational restraints, theological tensions, long present in Southern Baptist life, became increasingly pronounced, Leonard maintained.

He said many church leaders have urged the convention to unite around historical Baptist doctrines as a response to denominational and cultural pluralism.

Yet this solution is not as simple as it seems, he noted: "Given the diversity of Baptist theological traditions, precise doctrinal definitions have been difficult if not impossible to construct. In many debates both sides in the convention can claim to represent historic Baptist positions with some validity."

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Leonard called for Baptist colleges to play a role in aiding the convention in seeking "to re-mythologize its own traditions as a denomination of theological integrity but doctrinal diversity, responding to cultural transitions while retaining the best of its Southern heritage."

If that were to happen, he said, the convention could then re-evaluate its motives for evangelism and missions and its current captivity to aspects of American culture.

"It (the convention) would also pursue a new pluralism by which a people bound by certain biblical imperatives might allow for diverse, practical, even theological, approaches to the evangelical and communal calling of the church of Jesus Christ," Leonard said.

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Baker Urges Support
Of Danforth Amendment

By Tim Fields

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE (BP)--N. Larry Baker, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, has written a letter to U.S. senators urging them to support the Danforth Abortion-Neutral Amendment or a similar amendment to the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, which is waiting to be introduced on the floor of the Senate.

"At the recent annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, a resolution was adopted endorsing the Danforth Amendment," Baker wrote. "As the Southern Baptist Convention agency representing more than 37,000 cooperating churches and more than 23,000 messengers from those churches attending the convention, the Christian Life Commission urges you to ... support the Danforth Amendment or some such effort to achieve its purpose of rendering the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 neutral in effect and intent on the abortion issue."

According to Baker and other anti-abortion proponents, the legislation now before the Senate could be used to force Southern Baptist and other educational institutions and hospitals that accept any federal funds to include abortion in health benefit plans for students and employees.

"If institutions did not comply, they might be threatened by lawsuits for sex discrimination," Baker said. "The CRRA S.557 legislation would reverse the 1984 Supreme Court 'Grove v. Bell' decision that narrowed application of the federal civil rights laws," he said. "The high court held that Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 applied only to a specific 'program or activity' receiving federal grants, not the entire institution."

"Passage of the CRRA without the amendment would mean that civil rights laws would cover the entire institution, opening the possibility that abortion coverage would be a requirement of religiously affiliated institutions, including those morally opposed to abortion."

Baker also told senators in the letter: "It is our opinion that S.557, whether intentionally or unintentionally, might in effect codify current problematic regulations in a way that would further extend legalized abortion rights."

"This result seems incompatible with current restrictions on the use of federal funds for abortion services. It also raises serious questions about the legitimate self-determination of healthcare institutions."

In addition to the letter, Baker said he is calling on all Southern Baptists who are concerned about abortion to write their senators immediately, urging support of the Danforth or similar amendment.

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Group Releases Report
On Religion, Curriculum

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--In the wake of reports on the absence of religion in public school textbooks, the nation's largest educational leadership organization has called for an end to curricular silence on religion.

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Releasing its own report on "Religion in the Curriculum," the 80,000-member Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development listed recommendations for correcting the "glaring omission" of religion in public school curricula.

The report -- which advocated teaching about religion and its role in society, but rejected teaching of religious doctrines in public schools -- included recommendations that:

-- Educators at the local level involve religious professionals and other community leaders in curricular decision making.

-- Education agencies conduct staff development sessions on religion in curriculum and provide guidelines for textbook selection committees.

-- Publishers revise textbooks and other instructional materials to provide adequate treatment of diverse religions and their roles in American and world culture.

-- Local educators and their national organizations explore ways to garner public support for teaching about religion.

-- Scholars and educators undertake a major research and development effort to develop new curricular materials and instructional methods for teaching about religion in various subject areas.

The organization's executive director, Gordon Cawelti, said during a news conference that the disappearance of religion from public school curricula is not a recent event but has evolved over several decades.

Cawelti credited a misinterpretation of the concept of separation of church and state and an oversensitivity to community pressures on the part of school personnel and textbook publishers with contributing to the problem.

A member of the panel that drafted the report said religion has been omitted from the study of literature, political science and other fields of study, as well as from history, the area that has received the most attention in other recent reports.

O.L. Davis, panel member and professor of education at the University of Texas, said the absence of religion in curriculum has resulted in a "collapse and distortion of history." He pointed to such examples as the Crusades, which he said now are portrayed as little more than a "joyride" or "exotic shopping trip," and the life of Martin Luther King Jr., which he said cannot be understood fully outside the context of the civil rights advocate's black Baptist roots.

Also absent, Davis said, are facts about religion's negative influences on society, such as the religious justifications for slavery and housing restrictions aimed at Jews. "The whole story of the role of religions in this country needs to be illustrated, warts and all," he said.

Davis added teaching about religion also can help citizens in a diverse nation such as the United States better understand each other.

When asked by a reporter whether the trend away from teaching about religion is related to the growing influence of "secular humanism," Davis answered with an emphatic "no." He later added the term "is not only a red flag, but a red herring."

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Baptists Overseas Adopting
Foreign Missions Commitments

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
7/6/87

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptists and other evangelicals in the United States are not the only ones sending out missionaries these days.

Baptists in two dozen countries sponsor 250 missionaries in 50 or more nations -- up significantly from a decade ago.

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In several countries, partnerships have been forged. Baptist churches in Sweden and Norway, for example, have sent numerous volunteer teams into Poland for preaching, choral presentations and church construction.

The foreign missions involvement of Baptist conventions and unions overseas is "one of the brightest lights of missions tomorrow," says Clark Scanlon, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's director of research and planning. "These growing Christians have captured a world vision God meant for all his children."

A heightened emphasis in Southern Baptist missions on partnership with -- rather than paternalism toward -- overseas Baptists is one reason for the trend. And the Baptist World Alliance has fostered a global vision among many Baptist leaders.

Jamaica is one of those countries involved in foreign missions, with a couple assigned to Grenada. In fact, since the Jamaica Baptist Missionary Society was formed in 1842 "to preach the gospel in Africa, Central America, the Caribbean and the world," its 50-plus appointees have worked in 12 countries.

Setting the pace are Brazilian Baptists. More than 100 of their missionaries work in 16 countries under a Board of World Missions. The convention also has appointed 430 home missionaries. And volunteer efforts have included medical teams traveling to several neighboring countries.

"I'm not saying we don't need (Southern Baptist) missionaries," says one Brazilian seminary teacher. "But if anything happened and they were no longer here, we could proceed with the work."

That kind of self-reliance is what various pioneer Southern Baptist missionaries envisioned as they came to Brazil during the mid-1800s. They emphasized that "sending missionaries does not depend upon finances, culture and nationality," says Thurmon Bryant, a Foreign Mission Board official long involved in work in Brazil.

It's not surprising, then, that Brazilian Baptists created a foreign mission board when they organized their convention in 1907. Their first missionaries, Joao Jorge de Oliveira, and his wife, Prelediana Frias, went to Portugal in 1911 and labored three years before gaining a convert, Antonio Mauricio. The Brazil convention later appointed Mauricio as a missionary to Portugal, and he had a career of nearly 60 years.

Brazilian Baptists added Bolivia as their second mission field in 1946, assigning Waldomiro and Lidia Motto there. Motto was jailed briefly in 1948 for preaching the gospel during an era of religious persecution.

When political strife prompted various evangelical missionaries, including a Southern Baptist couple, to leave the African country of Mozambique in the 1970s, Brazilian Baptist missionary Valnice Milhomens Coelho, a single woman, was able to continue working there 15 years. Southern Baptists are just now re-establishing work in the country. In Angola, another African country where similar strife occurred, Brazilian Baptists were able to re-enter the country in 1983, three years before Southern Baptists could.

In Venezuela and Colombia, two new Baptist congregations are led by a Brazilian couple and a Southern Baptist couple. Brazilian Calixto Patricio enjoys the teamwork with Southern Baptist Mike Glenn in Venezuela. He believes they complement each other. "I'm the type to jump in," Patricio says, "and Mike is more the type to analyze."

Most of the 16 countries where Brazilian Baptists work were added during the 1980s. Most appointees are church planters. The largest numbers of missionaries are in Paraguay, about 20, and Portugal, about a dozen.

Smaller numbers are involved in missions programs of other Baptist conventions or unions. Scottish Baptists, for example, have 15 missionaries in Zaire, where Southern Baptists have but one couple. Fifteen other Scottish Baptists are spread among India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Tanzania and Brazil. About 20 Norwegian Baptists are in Zaire and two in Nepal. Three couples representing Japan's Baptists are in Indonesia, and one couple is preparing to work in Brazil. Six South African Baptist missionaries are spread among Israel, Malawi and Belgium.

Ten Baptist unions in Europe, cooperating through the European Baptist Mission, have nearly 70 missionaries in three African countries, including Cameroon and the Republic of Central Africa, where Southern Baptists have no personnel. About 10 European missionaries are in three South American countries.

In a few European Baptist unions, church members give more per capita for missionary work than Southern Baptists. And if Southern Baptists sent out missionaries in the same proportion to church membership as Australian Baptists do, SBC missionaries overseas would number more than 47,000.

While interest and involvement in global evangelization is mounting among various Baptist groups, it is not universal.

In Nigeria, for example, where Southern Baptist missionaries have worked since 1850, the Baptist convention there has but four foreign missionaries, in part due to restrictions on sending funds outside the country. Nigerian Baptists' home missions program, however, encompasses about 30 workers.

Baptist conventions or unions in many Third World countries, and even some in Europe, are overwhelmed by the evangelistic needs within their borders and are unable to finance much-needed programs.

Still, global outreach is a vision to be grasped by all Christians. Scanlon believes Baptist conventions and unions, as they dig into the Bible, will increasingly realize "that their obedience to Acts 1:8 (Christ's command to witness 'unto the uttermost part of the earth') is not complete until they feel a responsibility to the whole world."

They also will realize "that there are other areas of the world with just as valid a need of the gospel as their own," says John Mills, former director of FMB work in West Africa.

As Baptists in other countries heighten their mission involvement, they will face an array of concerns and problems. Missionaries from countries with troubled economies will never receive the degree of financial support that Southern Baptist missionaries receive. In short, their lifestyle will be much less affluent -- but perhaps powerful as a witness.

Southern Baptist missionaries must not stifle missionaries from other countries with "western methodologies" or "culture-shaped 'churchianity,'" says William O'Brien, FMB executive vice president. Quite possibly, these new missionaries may find creative, effective and low-cost methods of spreading the gospel. Says William Wakefield, vice president for FMB work in Asia and the Pacific, "We face the challenge of not imposing our agenda on them but supporting them in the agenda which God has given them."

As overseas conventions or unions develop their missions programs, they may tap longstanding FMB experience in selecting and training missionaries and in coping with currency regulations both in their own countries and in their fields of service. And in many countries, new missionaries can find friendship and support from Southern Baptist missionaries while they adjust to a new environment.

Whatever time is invested in missionaries from other countries will yield valuable dividends. "In places where enemies have said that Christianity is for whites only and the product of colonialism," Scanlon illustrates, "the work of Christian missionaries from various continents, nations and languages belies that false accusation."

"Tomorrow's missionary force," Scanlon believes, "will be a many splendored one reflecting the richness of various cultures, colors and languages in the service of Christ."

Pastors Should Model
Ministries After Jesus

By Jim Lowry

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Southern Baptist pastors who style their ministries after corporate success models instead of the loving, caring life of Jesus are neglecting the revelation of Scripture, according to Joe Stacker, director of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church administration department.

"One of the critical issues of the modern church is that we have allowed corporate-style leadership to infiltrate churches," Stacker charged. "We have not looked strongly at Jesus' leadership style. Corporate models are the wrong models."

Stacker led a conference for pastors during Bible Preaching Administration Week at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

He explained that pastors are not supposed to become lord over the church, but they must model their ministries after the Great Shepherd.

"The one issue on the mind of Christ was 'God loves you,'" Stacker continued. "His entire ministry was based there."

He said pastors should not feel guilty when they do not have answers to every situation with which they are confronted: "Jesus allowed people to discover solutions and answers to problems and questions as they worked through their lifestyles. His divine nature gave him insights no one else could possess, but he allowed the struggle so we might experience spiritual growth.

"A pastor who will work toward a Jesus style of leadership will have a new authenticity in ministry," Stacker said. "Jesus' ministry was more than a systematic awareness of God based on rules, regulations and laws. Jesus dealt with life issues which challenged the religious systems of his day.

"Modern Christian leaders, in following Jesus' leadership style, must continue to challenge the system that denies people the experiences of faith in their living," he said.

"If we are to claim an inerrant Word from God, then we must accept an inerrant work for God. That's the challenge," Stacker told the pastors.

"Leadership effectiveness is critical for successful churches," he continued, but he said success must be carefully defined.

"Success in many Southern Baptist churches is built around how many dollars are given and how many people are baptized," he said. An alternative measure for success might be the number of people who leave a church to go out and serve Jesus Christ.

"Churches need good, Christian leaders who will look at situations and see what kind of leadership is needed," Stacker explained. "Situations should guide leaders of churches.

"Pastors who model after Jesus' leadership style must risk and sacrifice to prove they care and will serve," he said. "Jesus never put himself first. His status came through ministry, caring and service.

"Jesus wanted the disciples to understand what the kingdom of God was all about," Stacker continued. "Leadership involves honesty, credibility and communication of values.

"Jesus built credibility through his lifestyle, his proper use of authority and power, his teachings and supporting those who needed help," he explained. "Jesus was a wandering leader who sought people out because he cared.

The theme of the Bible Preaching Administration Conference is 'Because We Care,' Stacker noted. "We wanted to say as Jesus cared, we care," he said. "That caring attitude of Jesus Christ should be expressed in the ministry of every Southern Baptist pastor in his church, his family and his personal life."

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