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December 4, 1987

87-184

Moderates Meet
At DFW Airport

N-CO
(Texas Std.)

DALLAS (BP)--More than 40 moderate leaders from a dozen states met at Dallas-Fort Worth Airport Nov. 30-Dec. 1 to review events in the Southern Baptist Convention over the past several weeks and to look "for ways to retrieve our national convention from the hands of the fundamentalists and return it to the mainstream Baptist people."

Norman Cavender, layman from Claxton, Ga., distributed a prepared statement following the two-day meeting and answered questions from the media.

Contrary to what others might think, Cavender said, the meeting was not to discuss plans to elect a president at the SBC annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas, next June, although the presidential election was mentioned briefly and is "the bottom line," in the struggle. He added Arizona pastor Richard Jackson is a likely nominee.

The meeting was closed to the public, although Toby Druin, associate editor of Texas' Baptist Standard, who had learned the meeting was being held, was told he could sit in on the initial session. The offer was refused when he was told that not all of the meeting would be on the record.

Cavender distributed a list of signatures of 25 of the people who attended the meeting. He said 42 had been in on the various sessions, but some had left before the paper asking for the signatures had been distributed and a few had chosen not to sign it.

Both the statement and Cavender noted conservative leaders had met Nov. 16 in Atlanta and had described their gathering as a "private fellowship meeting" and had declined to discuss the purpose of their meeting, who attended, what was discussed or who invited them.

"We are not engaging in this kind of cover-up," the statement from the moderate group said. "We still believe Baptist people are entitled to honesty."

The Dallas-Fort Worth meeting was called by Winfred Moore, pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, to discuss "the wrongs being inflicted upon the SBC, including the wrongs of dishonesty, secrecy and private agendas aimed at giving one faction total control of our convention and its agencies, boards and institutions," the statement said.

Attending were pastors and laypeople from a dozen states "who are concerned about what the Pressler/Patterson coalition is doing to our convention and the serious damage we see it inflicting on our agencies and institutions."

Paul Pressler, a Houston appeals court judge, and Paige Patterson, president of Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, are considered the leaders of the conservative group in the SBC and were present at the Nov. 16 meeting in Atlanta.

The statement from the DFW group said items discussed included the results of the recent state conventions, "which demonstrated that mainstream Baptist people back home have rejected political fundamentalism. The people are beginning to see proof that the fundamentalists are systematically trying to seize control of local pulpits and state conventions, as well as the SBC."

The purpose of the meeting, the statement said, was to discuss events of the last several weeks on state and national levels and "to react for the growing number of Baptist people who are fed up with fundamentalist control of the SBC."

"We are trying to give shape to that grassroots Baptist reaction. We are looking for ways to retrieve our national convention from the hands of the fundamentalists and return it to the mainstream Baptist people. The purpose of the meeting is simple: to resist fundamentalist control of our local churches, our state conventions and our national convention.

"We see a new energy and wisdom among the people. Baptists in the individual states want an end to fundamentalist control. We are working to cooperate with them and coordinate these Baptist efforts."

The statement was signed by both Cavender and Jim Slatton, pastor of River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, Va. Cavender said the two of them and Moore were spokesmen for the group, but Moore was unable to attend because of illness.

The Dallas-Fort Worth meeting had been in the planning stages for several weeks, Cavender said, and was not in response to the Nov. 16 meeting in Atlanta.

The room at the DFW Airport Hyatt Hotel was arranged by Claudia Barner, a layperson from Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, Cavender said, and was paid for by participants in the meeting, all of whom paid their own expenses to attend.

For the most part, the meeting was a sharing of what is going on in the SBC and state conventions, how the various issues are viewed there and how to give focus to those issues, Cavender said. Participants did not discuss, per se, a candidate for president of the Southern Baptist Convention to be presented at the annual meeting in San Antonio next June, he said.

However, a candidate will be supported for election in San Antonio, and "there is a good chance it will be Richard Jackson," Cavender said. Jackson is pastor of North Phoenix (Arizona) Baptist Church and lost to incumbent President Adrian Rogers for the 1987 SBC presidency.

The moderate group is not monolithic, however, Cavender said. While some have encouraged support of Jackson, "as a group we haven't. We haven't met with him. We couldn't give group support to somebody who we don't know what they are going to do, where they stand."

But the bottom line "is winning the presidency back from the fundamentalists," he said. "Unless that can be done, I don't see any realistic way of stopping the fundamentalist control. ... The power is centered in the office of the presidency."

Both Cavender and Slatton denied their meeting was in conflict with the admonitions of the SBC Peace Committee Report, which recommended political meetings be discontinued.

"The Peace Committee understands that Baptists are free people who have the right to meet together," said Slatton. "We are just exercising that right."

"We didn't start the political activity," Cavender said. "They started the political activity. We met first to respond to what they were doing. The only reason we are meeting now is that Adrian Rogers, like all the other presidents before him since 1979, has violated Recommendation 2 of the report, which calls for fairness in appointments. They have practiced pure unfairness and intolerance in their appointments.

"As long as that intolerance is practiced, there are going to be responses like this to it."

The group at DFW made no plans for getting messengers to the SBC annual meeting or for getting hotel rooms, Cavender said. Those things will be handled by state groups such as Friends of Missions in North Carolina and Laity for the Baptist Faith and Message in Texas, he noted.

No additional meetings of the DFW group have been planned, he said, but more will be held over the next several months leading up to San Antonio.

"We are going to continue opposing this fundamentalist movement," he said. "We are going to oppose it as hard as we can. There was a strength, a sort of recommitment of that resolve that came out of this meeting, and we want to translate it to the folks back home."

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(Contributor to this story was Toby Druin, associate editor of the Baptist Standard, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.)

Dallas-Fort Worth
Moderate Statement

N- (O
(Texas Std.)

DALLAS (BP)--Following is the statement released at the conclusion of the Nov. 30-Dec. 1 meeting of a group of moderates within the Southern Baptist Convention, held at the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport Hyatt Hotel:

Two weeks ago, when leaders of the fundamentalist movement met in Atlanta, they said they were having a "private fellowship meeting."

As reported in Baptist Press, they also "declined to discuss the purpose of the meeting, who attended, what was discussed or who invited them."

We are not engaging in this kind of cover-up. We still believe Baptist people are entitled to honesty. Therefore:

We have met to discuss the wrongs being inflicted upon the SBC, including the wrongs of dishonesty, secrecy and private agendas aimed at giving one faction total control of our convention and its agencies, boards and institutions.

1. Who invited us? Dr. Winfred Moore, by personal letter.
2. Who attended? Pastors and laypeople, from a dozen states, who are concerned about what the Pressler/Patterson coalition is doing to our convention and the serious damage we see it inflicting on our agencies and institutions.
3. What was discussed? We discussed the results of the recent state conventions, which demonstrated that mainstream Baptist people back home have rejected political fundamentalism. The people are beginning to see proof that the fundamentalists are systematically trying to seize control of local pulpits and state conventions, as well as the SBC.

We discussed the recent revelations that the Pressler/Patterson group had installed in Virginia a secret, computerized system for grading the state's pastors on a scale of fundamentalist voting loyalty and for putting fundamentalists in vacant pulpits throughout the state.

We discussed the open, all-out attacks this same group had launched in Georgia against Mercer University and the editor of the Christian Index.

We discussed the tragic events at Southeastern (Baptist Theological) Seminary, where the fundamentalists now control that board and where the president, the dean and the top three operating officers resigned rather than submit to that faction's rigid control.

We discussed how the fundamentalists are using the Peace Committee to install a creed throughout the SBC.

4. What was the purpose of our meeting? To discuss all this. But more, to react for the growing number of Baptist people who are fed up with fundamentalist control of the SBC.

We are trying to give shape to that grass-roots Baptist reaction. We are looking for ways to retrieve our national convention from the hands of the fundamentalists and return it to the mainstream Baptist people.

In sum, the purpose of the meeting is simple: to resist fundamentalist control of our local churches, our state conventions and our national convention.

We see a new energy and wisdom among the people. Baptists in the individual states want an end to fundamentalist control. We are working to cooperate with them and coordinate these Baptist efforts.

DFW Airport Meeting
Draws 42 Moderates

N-10
(Texas Std.)

DALLAS (BP)--A list of 25 people attending the Nov. 30-Dec. 1 meeting of a group of Southern Baptist Convention moderates at Dallas-Fort Worth Airport was released following the sessions. Forty-two people were at the various sessions at the Hyatt Hotel East, but some left before they were asked to sign the list and others declined to sign, said Norman Cavender, a Georgia layman who was the group's spokesman.

The list includes six from Texas, six from Georgia, three each from Tennessee and Missouri, two each from Alabama and Oklahoma and one each from South Carolina, Louisiana, Maryland and Virginia.

Signers were:

Texas -- W. Dewey Presley, layman, Park Cities Baptist Church, Dallas; Charles R. Wade, pastor, First Baptist Church, Arlington; J. Neal Rodgers, editor of Baptist Laity Journal, Dallas; John F. Baugh, layman, Second Baptist Church, Houston; A. David Courtade, layman, Gambrell Street Baptist Church, Fort Worth; Claudia Barner, layperson, Wilshire Baptist Church, Dallas.

Georgia -- Welton Gaddy, Mercer University, Macon; William F. Scarbrough, pastor, National Heights Baptist Church, Fayetteville; L. Blair Trewitt, layman, Northside Drive Baptist Church, Atlanta; Jim C. Bruner, Mercer University, Macon; David Sapp, pastor, First Baptist Church, Chamblee; Cavender, Claxton.

Tennessee -- Bill Sherman, pastor, Woodmont Baptist Church, Nashville; Howard G. Olive, pastor, Monte Vista Baptist Church, Maryville; Andrew J. Prince, pastor, West Hills Baptist Church, Knoxville.

Missouri -- Ashli Cartwright Peak, representing Women in Ministry, Cornerstone Baptist Church, Columbia; Jo Ellen Witt, president of Missouri Laymen United, First Baptist Church, Platte City; T. Lee Stephens, pastor, Englewood Baptist Church, Kansas City.

Alabama -- John Jeffers, retired pastor, Auburn; Philip D. Wise, pastor, Morningview Baptist Church, Montgomery.

Oklahoma -- Gerald Adams, layman, First Baptist Church, Shawnee; Joe Brown, pastor, First Baptist Church, Shawnee.

South Carolina -- Marian D. Aldridge, pastor, Greenlawn Baptist Church, Columbia.

Louisiana -- John S. Harris, pastor, Pineville Park Baptist Church, Pineville.

Maryland -- Cindy Johnson, layperson, Taneytown Baptist Church, Taneytown.

Virginia -- Jim Slatton, pastor, River Road Baptist Church, Richmond.

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1987 SBC Baptisms Decline
To Lowest Level Since 1978

N-HMB
By Joe Westbury

Baptist Press
12/4/87

HONOLULU (BP)--Southern Baptist baptisms for 1987 could plummet to their lowest level in nearly a decade if projections by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board are on target.

The year-end forecast, announced during the annual conference for Southern Baptist state evangelism directors, predicts baptisms will drop 5 percent, to 344,000 conversions to faith in Christ. That figure is the lowest since 336,000 baptisms were registered in 1978.

The projections were based on information supplied by the directors and will result in a net loss of 19,000 baptisms from the 363,124 reported in 1986, said Clay Price, HMB program research director.

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That was the year Southern Baptists conducted national simultaneous revivals and reversed baptisms from a four-year decline. Conversions for 1986 were up 4 percent, or nearly 13,000, from the 351,071 reported the previous year.

The data is a more optimistic projection than that expected to be released by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, which bases its report on partial analysis of actual reports from local churches, Price said. Based on information from the denomination's 37,000 churches, the Sunday School Board is predicting the drop to be as high as 6 percent.

If projections are on target, 1987 will be the denomination's second-lowest year for baptisms since 1950. That was the year Southern Baptists broke the 350,000 barrier by reporting 376,000 baptisms, Price noted.

Baptisms consistently remained above 350,000 for the next 26 years, until 1977 when the denomination reported a decline to 345,000 conversions. The 1980s have been a generally declining decade for baptisms, he said.

"When looking at baptisms by age-groups, one of the most promising challenges for Southern Baptists will be adults in the 30-to-59 age group. They now account for 20 percent of all baptisms, but will gain 14 million members between 1980 and 1990," Price said.

"Half of all Southern Baptist baptisms tend to occur for persons between the ages of 12 to 29 -- a portion of our population now in decline. That's not to say that's the reason for this year's drop, but it should be a warning to a denomination that has a tendency to baptize it's children," he noted.

Reaction was varied to the projection, but most directors credited the 1986 Good News America simultaneous revivals as the greatest reason last year's baptisms had reversed the denomination's four-year decline.

"Last year we registered 105,000 conversions in our simultaneous revivals. The lack of such an emphasis this year is clearly the reason for such a decline," said Robert Hamblin, HMB vice president for evangelism.

Hamblin faulted the denomination for "emphasizing other things rather than reaching people for Christ."

"We must have a compassion for the lost," he said. "We must pray for those individuals and for ourselves to be effective witnesses. The No. 1 priority with God should be the No. 1 priority with Southern Baptists -- to win the world for Christ."

Hamblin then called for all pastors and church staff members to examine whether they are personally involved in soul-winning and to mobilize their laity in the challenge.

Southern Baptist Convention President Adrian Rogers, who attended the meeting, was "deeply disappointed and grieved by the report."

"We need to bring all our energies to a burning focus on soul-winning and evangelism," Rogers said. "Even in our very best years -- not our worst -- our record for baptisms is appalling. We are doing so little with so much."

"I do realize that statistics ebb and flow, however. I trust and pray this is but a temporary downturn. I have a feeling in my heart that it is."

J.W. Hutchens, evangelism director for North Carolina Baptists, noted, "Every year after an evangelistic emphasis, we have experienced a decline in baptisms because we go back to our old ways of doing evangelism rather than continuing what we learned the previous year -- the planning and preparation that's so important."

California evangelism director Bob Kendig noted Southern Baptists "have lost the vision that a lost person is going to hell."

A subtle invasion of universalism theology -- "the idea that we're all going to heaven by different routes" -- has infiltrated Southern Baptist ranks and been embraced by a growing number of Sunday school teachers, he maintained. "You won't ever hear it being called by that name, but you'd be surprised where it shows up among grass-roots Southern Baptists."

Carlos McLeod, evangelism director for Texas Baptists, echoed Kendig's concern: "Texas was once considered the buckle on the Bible Belt, but today we have more than 8 million lost people in our state. We have slowly adopted an attitude that somehow, someday, someday everyone is going to heaven.

"We need to come back to what the Bible says -- that we are dead in trespasses and sin without the Savior. Universalism, not overtly, is being embraced by a growing number of grass-roots Southern Baptists," he said.

Dan Agee, director of evangelism for the Baptist General Association of Virginia, tagged the decline to a lack of follow-up when Baptists make evangelistic visits: "We don't know how to relate to lost people. If they don't respond to the gospel the way we present it the first time, we don't take the time to make a second or third visit. We don't tailor the gospel to meet their needs, and we don't take time to build relationships with lost people."

Jack Parrott, evangelism director for the Baptist Convention of New York, said conversions will not rebound until Baptists see evangelism as a primary emphasis of every program, rather than just one of several programs in need of promotion.

"Last year, with a national emphasis on evangelism, we saw our baptism numbers increase," he said. "This year we had no such emphasis. The tragedy is that the people who are lost without Christ this year, while we're busy promoting some other program, are not going to wait for our next evangelistic emphasis to be saved."

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State Evangelism Directors
Elect National Officers

N-HMB

Baptist Press
12/4/87

HONOLULU (BP)--Don Ledbetter, evangelism director for the Nevada Baptist Convention, was elected president of the Southern Baptist Fellowship of State Evangelism Directors during the groups' annual meeting in Honolulu.

Other officers are Jack Parrott, director of evangelism for New York Baptists, vice president, and Dan Agee, evangelism director for Virginia Baptists, secretary-treasurer.

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