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March 3, 1988

88-36

Powell To Be Nominated  
At Pastors' Conference

By Toby Druin

N-CO  
(Texas Std.)

DALLAS (BP)--Phil Lineberger, pastor of Richardson Heights Baptist Church in Richardson, Texas, has announced he will nominate fellow Texas pastor Paul Powell of Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler for president of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference in San Antonio, Texas, in June.

"I have prayed about it and asked Paul for his permission to do it," Lineberger said.

"Paul Powell is a preacher's preacher. He has demonstrated it in preaching and writing. Conservative in belief in the Bible as the word of God, Paul has the ability to unite and encourage pastors. His strong belief in missions and evangelism would make him a good choice."

Lineberger said he was announcing his intentions to make the nomination "in order to encourage other pastors to pray about and consider the matter prior to the meeting."

The Pastors' Conference will meet at the Henry Gonzales Convention Center in San Antonio, June 12-13, immediately prior to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, June 14-16.

Powell confirmed in a telephone interview with the Baptist Standard, Texas Baptists' weekly newsjournal, that Lineberger had contacted him and asked permission to nominate him for the Pastors' Conference position.

"I did not seek it and will not promote myself," Powell said. "I don't have any political ambitions. I am willing to do whatever I can to help our convention."

If he is elected, Powell said, he will do everything he can to bring pastors back under one roof for their pre-convention annual meeting. For the past several years a growing number have attended the Southern Baptist Forum.

"I would like to have the kind of Pastors' Conference everyone would like to be a part of," said Powell.

Powell is the immediate past president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. A graduate of Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, he has been pastor of the Green Acres Church since 1972.

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Smith, Vines, Draper, Patterson  
Headline Soul-Winning Conference

By Trennis Henderson

N-CO  
(Mo.)

Baptist Press  
3/3/88

ARNOLD, Mo. (BP)--Former Southern Baptist Convention President Bailey Smith brought a three-day conference on soul-winning to the St. Louis area in late February.

One of five "Nationwide Conferences on Soul Winning" scheduled around the country this year by Bailey Smith Ministries, the meeting was hosted by First Baptist Church of Arnold, Mo., for the second straight year.

The conference program was loaded with preachers identified with conservative views in the Southern Baptist Convention. But Smith assured the conference crowd, "We don't want any hint of politics on one side or the other" during the conference.

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In addition to Smith, a full-time evangelist based in Atlanta, other nationally-known conservatives on the program included Jerry Vines, co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., who has been announced as a possible conservative candidate for SBC president this year; former SBC President James T. Draper Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas; and Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College in Dallas.

While the conference's 17 preachers generally steered clear of convention politics in their sermons, the topic came up during announcements and sermon introductions.

Patterson, who preached immediately prior to Vines during the conference's final session, insisted "it is a crucial time to stand. One of the best places I know to stand in June is in San Antonio, Texas" at the 1988 SBC annual meeting. He then called on fellow Baptists to attend the annual meeting "to see to it that Jerry Vines is the next president of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Following that endorsement, he announced, "If you need a room (in San Antonio), I'm fixing to tell you how to get one." He told them to call Oz Bray in San Antonio at phone number (512) 649-2153 to secure lodging for the annual meeting.

Earlier in the conference, Smith announced the availability of subscription forms for The SBC Cause, which he described as "a new, positive magazine" that "I think will be a blessing to you."

The magazine, scheduled to begin publication this spring, will feature a "National Directory of Conservative Southern Baptist Churches" in each edition. Printed material available at Smith's conference said the directory will allow readers "to identify and locate strong, conservative, Bible-believing churches all across America."

Among requirements for churches to be listed in the directory are that the pastor "must believe in the inerrancy of Holy Scripture" and that churches must contribute \$25 or more monthly to The SBC Cause "to help advance God's Kingdom through the conservative movement."

During an interview with Word & Way, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention, Smith said his comments about The SBC Cause were an announcement, not an endorsement. Acknowledging the overall perspective of the conference, however, he added: "By our nature, it's going to be fundamental-conservative. ... I'm going to knock the whole philosophy of liberalism."

Immediately prior to Smith's announcement that "we don't want any hint of politics," music evangelist John McKay said the conferences featured "men of God of the conservative persuasion who believe the word of God" and who have been "shut out" and "blackballed" from other programs.

Declaring "we were not trying to be uncooperative," McKay continued: "We just believe what Baptists used to be is what they ought to be. ... God knows we love the Cooperative Program (unified budget), but we don't worship nothing except Jesus Christ."

He then added: "This denomination didn't die on that old rugged cross for this gospel singer here. Jesus Christ did."

Smith told the crowd the overall goal of the conference was "to make an impact for the sake of Christ." He later told Word & Way the gathering was specifically designed "to inspire, enrich and bless the pastors and laymen who come, to get them excited about the Lord."

Smith was one of two speakers to preach twice during the conference. In his first sermon, titled "Leaving Church Disappointed," he read the account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch from Acts 8.

"There are millions of people who go to church every Sunday to get fed and go away hungry," Smith declared. "It ought to be fun to go to church. I know churches Jesus wouldn't go to."

He shared four ways people will never leave church disappointed: if the people and the preacher have a mission and not a position; if Jesus is revered and not ignored; if there's a grand submission to the Great Commission; and if the Holy Spirit is honored and not cheapened.

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"Preacher, if you can't preach Jesus, quit and get a job at J.C. Penney's," Smith remarked. "There isn't anything better than seeing someone come to Jesus."

In his second message, taken from II Samuel 23, Smith pointed to the need for Christians to stand strong just as Shammah stood against the Philistines. Calling his message, "There's Victory in the Pea Patch," Smith said Christians in America need to stand against apathy, formalism and liberalism.

"The thing that amazes me is why anybody is interested in liberalism in the first place," he said. "I don't like the taste of anything that puts a question mark over the word of God. Watered-down penicillin never cured anybody."

Smith reminded his listeners: "God never called you to live comfortably. He called you to be faithful. ... If Jesus can stand for you in heaven, I challenge you to stand for him on earth."

Draper brought a message from the book of Job. Noting that Job was bewildered, depressed and discouraged when he "lost it all," Draper said Job responded by worshiping God, declaring his faith, refusing to accuse God and declaring his confidence in the purpose of God.

"You cannot accuse God and trust God at the same time," he warned. He said practical applications from Job's life are that religious experiences which cause a person to feel superior to someone else are artificial experiences; God's purpose does not always result in human success; God does not condemn doubts and questions; fulfillment is based on obedience and faith; and victory can come through forgiving and praying for one's enemies.

"We need to be reminded that anything we get is grace," Draper noted. "We don't deserve anything. God is still in control."

In the conference's final sermon, Vines preached from Psalm 51. Using David's life as an example, Vines pointed out: "You cannot cover your sins. There is a God in heaven who knows."

He said David learned the high cost of committing sin, the high cost of confessing sin and the high cost of cleansing sin. "Sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay and cost you more than you want to pay," he warned.

Ending his message on a somber note, Vines commented that evangelist Jimmy Swaggart concluded his recent televised confession of sin by reading Psalm 51. "If you've got unconfessed sin in your life," Vines told the crowd, "let me plead, somewhere you and God alone tonight live through Psalm 51 so you won't have to live through it like Jimmy Swaggart did."

In addition to Smith, Draper, Patterson and Vines, other conference speakers included Southern Baptist pastors Bobby Boyles, Morris Chapman, Stan Coffey, Ronnie Floyd, O.S. Hawkins, Richard Lee and Ike Reighard; evangelists Manley Beasley, Sam Cathey, Junior Hill, David Ring and Bill Stafford; and Liberty University Vice President Sumner Wemp.

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ACTS Reported Fastest  
Growing Religious Network

N-CD  
(RTUC)

Baptist Press  
3/3/88

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The ACTS Satellite Network has been reported by Cablevision Magazine to be the fastest growing religious network in the nation.

Cablevision, which compiles annual statistics on all program services distributed via cable, said ACTS grew by 28.6 percent in 1987. The magazine reported ACTS had contracts with 245 cable systems nationwide with 6.3 million subscribing households. That represents a 1.4 million increase in cable homes during the year. Using the A.C. Nielsen Co. estimate of 2.7 members per household, the potential cable audience for ACTS programs would be more than 17 million people.

The second fastest growing Christian network according to Cablevision was Eternal Word Television Network with a 16.4 percent increase. EWTN is aimed primarily at a Roman Catholic audience.

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ACTS is operated by the SBC Radio and Television Commission. Jimmy R. Allen, president, said, "We are excited at the new potential for reaching American homes with the gospel that this growth represents." Allen added, "Few people imagined that ACTS could, in so short a time, become the fastest growing Christian television network in the nation. I believe the Father has given us this powerful instrument for preaching the gospel at the very time it is needed to help win the battle for the soul of our nation."

Among other Christian networks showing some growth in 1987 were Trinity Broadcasting Network, 10.2 percent, and CBN Cable Network, 9.2 percent. The Inspirational Network, formerly PTL, showed a 30 percent decline in number of cable households during the year. Evangelist Jerry Falwell's Liberty Broadcasting Network, with 1.049 million cable households, fell by 19.3 percent according to the survey.

ACTS began service in June 1984. It features a mixture of family oriented entertainment and religious programs produced by Baptists and other mainline denominations. "Christian programs which do not ask for money for themselves on the air is one answer to some of the excesses surrounding television broadcasters being reported," Allen said.

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Sullivan: Swaggart Scandal  
Is Caution To Ministers

By Mark Wingfield

N-10  
(SWBTS)

Baptist Press  
3/3/88

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The week after television evangelist Jimmy Swaggart left his pulpit because of moral problems, a Southern Baptist pastor cautioned students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to recognize their own weaknesses.

John Sullivan, pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, La., spoke in Southwestern's chapel Feb. 26. He referred to the Swaggart scandal in a sermon on Samson from the 16th chapter of the biblical book, Judges.

Samson was a man who lived close to God but fell away through unguarded actions, Sullivan said. Although he had been a mighty prophet, Samson lost his power when he made himself vulnerable to the enemy.

"You cannot sleep with the enemies of God and go up against them at the same time," Sullivan said. "We cannot afford the luxury of an undisciplined life.

"That unguarded moment in life when we're not careful will shackle us for the rest of our lives. We need to be free in Christ, not enslaved in sin."

Sullivan called on students to recognize their own weaknesses and "not treat them lightly."

"If you imagine your life does not have weaknesses, you have not been keeping abreast of the current scene of religion in America," he said. "Weaknesses are all around us and they are being exposed all around us.

"There is a scandal going on in my state right now. But let me tell you, but for the grace of God, that could be me. And but for the grace of God, that could be you.

"You can stand and raise the flag of your own piety, but you better know the weaknesses of your own life and guard against those weaknesses.

"The thing that will be used against us as ministers, over and over again, is the tactic of division in the unity of our lives with God. Any person that seeks to destroy the relationship that you have with your wife or husband is not a friend."

Like Samson, compromising ministers will lose God's power in ministry, Sullivan said.

Churches do not suffer because of sinful cities, he said, stressing, "Our cities suffer because of the loss of power in the life of our churches."

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Indiana Group Protests FCC  
Inaction On 'Shock Radio'

N-BJC

WASHINGTON (BP)--An Indiana group led by Southern Baptists has turned up the heat on the Federal Communications Commission to revoke the license of an Indianapolis radio station that broadcasts a daily talk show featuring references to sex organs and sexual and excretory activities.

Decency in Broadcasting Inc., described in a Washington news conference as a "media watchdog group," has gone to battle with radio station WFBQ-FM and its parent company, Taft Television and Radio Co., over what it claims are obscene references on the "Bob and Tom Show," aired between 6 and 10 a.m. daily on the Indianapolis station.

The news conference at the National Press Club in Washington was called to condemn the FCC for failing to act on a formal protest the group made last July. By going public with its crusade, group leaders said, the organization hopes to force the regulatory agency to take action.

John R. Price, an attorney who heads the group, said the organization has paid an Indianapolis pastor's wife to make daily transcripts of the offending program for the past seven months for submission to the FCC. Thus far, she has documented more than 7,000 instances of objectionable references to sex and excretion, he said. Yet the federal agency, charged by Congress with regulating the nation's broadcast industry, has done nothing, he said.

"If the FCC is serious about (anti-obscenity) standards, what more does it take?" Price asked. On display at the news conference was a table featuring hundreds of tapes and transcripts of the show.

In its formal complaint last July, the group argued the show violated both the federal Communications Act and the FCC's Indecency Enforcement Standards, the latter issued in April 1987. The complaint asked the FCC to conduct a hearing on the matter, impose the maximum allowed penalty of \$2,000 per day and revoke the station's license.

Detailing specific objections to the "Bob and Tom Show," the complaint noted the program's hosts, Bob Kevoian and Tom Griswold, "include within their broadcast material not only references to sex, sexual activity, sexual organs, excretory organs, bestiality, homosexuality and lesbianism, but also sex with minors and an emphasis upon the use of liquor and illegal drugs."

Tommy Cupples, director of missions for the Metropolitan Baptist Association in Indianapolis, told reporters: "The law is being broken. All we are asking is that the FCC follow through on its own regulations."

Also present was John Greever, pastor of Pleasant Heights Baptist Church in Indianapolis, who said the group is "deeply concerned" about what it sees as deteriorating moral standards in its heartland city.

Businessman and Baptist layman Monroe Lee, another of the group's leaders, said he became involved in the dispute after inadvertently hearing the program one morning when his son, who had driven the family car the previous night, left the dial tuned to WFBQ.

Joining the group at the news conference was N. Larry Baker, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, who said the Nashville-based agency supports the Indianapolis organization's effort. "Our concern ... comes within the framework of a longstanding commitment to fighting pornography," Baker said.

Price said he had no way of knowing whether focusing public attention on the group's grievances would yield results with FCC officials. But the organization will "keep on plugging," he promised.

State Presidents Call  
Day Of Prayer For SBC

By Dan Martin

N-CO

NASHVILLE (BP)--Presidents of state Baptist conventions have called for a day of prayer for the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, but they have declined to throw their support behind a consensus candidate for convention president.

The presidents of 18 state conventions and one fellowship, during a late February breakfast meeting in Nashville, adopted a four-part statement "in the hope of promoting unity throughout the (Southern Baptist) convention and creating a prayerful climate for San Antonio," Texas, after hearing a plea from Peace Committee Vice Chairman Charles Pickering of Laurel, Miss., that the presidents take the lead in "getting behind consensus candidates for president and vice presidents" of the 14.7-million-member SBC.

Although no vote was taken, most of the presidents expressed reservations about becoming involved in Pickering's proposal to support a consensus candidate. They did, however, without opposing vote, adopt the four-part statement calling the convention to prayer.

In their statement, the presidents voted to "encourage every Southern Baptist to give priority to the proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ ... (and to) encourage and promote a spirit of peace on all levels of the SBC."

The statement also calls on every church in the convention "to declare the first Sunday in June, 1988 (June 5) as a day of prayer for the San Antonio meeting." The 1988 annual meeting of the SBC will be in the Henry Gonzales Convention Center June 14-16.

The statement also says that on Monday, June 13, at 10 p.m., "the Conference of State Presidents will host a prayer meeting in the spiritual pursuit of unity and of the Lord's guidance during the convention."

Steve Tondera, chairman of the Conference of State Presidents and president of the Alabama Baptist Convention, said the group will seek to bring together agency executives, seminary leaders, key people, the news media and people mentioned as potential candidates for the SBC presidency to the prayer meeting. "We want a cross-section of the convention," he said.

The conference is seeking a place where the prayer meeting can be held, and the site will be announced later, he said.

During the breakfast meeting, Pickering told the presidents about the effort in 1985 in which the state presidents met for the first time, concerned that "political activities ... were doing irreparable damage to the cause of Christ among Southern Baptists."

"As a result of that (1985) meeting, the state presidents called upon Southern Baptists to have a day of prayer for our conventions and for the various groups to tone down the destructive politics that were tearing us apart. We also spearheaded an effort to create the Peace Committee," said Pickering, who in 1985 was president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

He noted that in December of 1987, "I began to read reports of meetings by the various groups in our convention. It began to look like San Antonio could be Dallas all over again." Dallas was the site of the 1985 annual meeting and drew the largest number of messengers ever registered for an annual meeting.

He added: "If we go to San Antonio and act the way we did in Dallas, the cause of Christ will suffer greatly and our witness to the world will be damaged. Politics will re-escalate, disharmony will be prolonged and the process of peace and reconciliation will be put off."

Pickering urged the presidents of the state conventions to "again provide leadership for Southern Baptists. Call on the leaders of both sides of the present controversy and call upon all Southern Baptists to get behind consensus candidates for president and vice presidents so that we might continue the process of reconciliation and better serve our Lord and avoid a political donnybrook in San Antonio."

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He said that while the person selected as a consensus candidate is immaterial, the candidate "must be a person willing to reach out in Christian love toward those on both sides ... and also those in the middle. It needs to be a person who will not just say that he is going to be fair, but someone who will make appointments to various committees from both sides and from those in the middle. It should be a leader who will involve all Southern Baptists in the full spectrum of SBC life and activity."

A consensus candidate "must be a person who by the nature of their personality and their previous background can command the respect of all of us and in the process unite us in the cause of Christ," Pickering said.

"We need a healer who can unite our convention, a man whose character is like that of our Lord Jesus Christ. Without question this must be someone who is Christcentered and who has the ability to serve.

"No one has the right to expect a position in the Kingdom's work, and no one has a right to expect to serve as president of our denomination. The position should seek the person, not the person the position."

After Pickering's presentation, several presidents expressed reservations about the plan.

Lawton Searcy, president of the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists; David Wood, president of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana; and Terry Davis, president of the Iowa Southern Baptist Fellowship, all said they fear such action might be perceived as the creation of a third political party in the SBC.

Jim Futral, president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, said that while he hoped the presidents had "heard his (Pickering's) heartbeat," he sensed the consensus of the group was opposed to supporting a consensus candidate.

"While we will not come out of this meeting with a consensus candidate, I do think we can do something to stop some of the polarization. Perhaps we can call our convention to prayer."

E. Leon Smith, president of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, urged that the presidents "call our people to return to the lordship of Jesus Christ, who alone can bring unity to the convention."

Sam Simpson, president of the Baptist Convention of New York, said: "I don't think we can leave this meeting without all of us being burdened. The world is dying while we are fighting over what we want to be.

"How can we bring oneness out of this mess? We have to say to the people who are going to the convention (annual meeting) to go as Christians, not as politicians."

North Carolina's Smith added: "The historic moment we are in gives us as state presidents the responsibility to say to all of the people that we Baptists are calling ourselves to return to the lordship of Jesus Christ and prayer."

Indiana's Wood said: "I propose that we commit ourselves to be obedient to Jesus as Lord. We are his church and his people. He is the only one who can bring us back together."

After the discussion, the presidents adopted the four-point statement drafted by West Virginia's Searcy.

George Sheridan Leaves  
HMB Over Jewish Theology

N-HMB

ATLANTA (BP)--George J. Sheridan, who for 13 years has worked with Jewish people through the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department, is leaving the agency because of theological differences concerning evangelizing Jewish people.

Sheridan, northeast regional director of the interfaith witness department based in Union, N.J., has declined a transfer to the board's Atlanta office.

The decision to transfer Sheridan was made by the Home Mission Board administration because of his theological position with respect to evangelizing Jewish people, HMB President Larry L. Lewis, said, adding, the decision was made after a lengthy and involved administrative process spanning more than a year.

In a letter summarizing his views on the salvation of the Jews, Sheridan wrote to Home Mission Board administrators last July saying he did not believe Jews needed a personal faith in Jesus Christ in order to be saved.

"I believe the Jews of today, as ever, receive salvation through their having been chosen by God in covenant with Abraham, Moses and the prophets," Sheridan wrote. "I find in the entire Christian Bible no hint that God cancels out loving kindness previously dispensed or promised."

Lewis said Sheridan's views are not consistent with the theological position of the board or with the beliefs of the majority of Southern Baptists.

"We believe that salvation is offered by God freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior," Lewis said. "We believe Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for the sins of all mankind, including the Jews. The Bible teaches there is no other way to salvation except through a personal faith in Jesus Christ."

Lewis said Sheridan terminated his services with the board effective Feb. 15. On Feb. 1, Sheridan was reassigned to a new position as editorial assistant in the agency's missions ministries division in Atlanta.

"Mr. Sheridan declined to accept the transfer from Union, N.J., to the Atlanta office," said Lewis. "Instead, he chose to accept the board's subsequent offer of full salary and benefits through July 31, 1988, to allow him time to find another place of employment."

A native of New Jersey, Sheridan is a former reporter for several New Jersey newspapers; former associate editor of the Christian Index in Atlanta; and former editorial assistant at the Home Mission Board in Atlanta. He is a graduate of Eastern Baptist College, St. Davids, Pa.; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.; and Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J.

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Reagans Press National Crusade  
Against Drug Use, Trafficking

By Stan Hastey

N-BJC

Baptist Press  
3/3/88

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan took their crusade against drug use and trafficking to a White House conference in Washington, with Mrs. Reagan saying the message must go out that Americans "will not stand for illicit drug use of any kind, period."

In back-to-back keynote addresses to the White House Conference for a Drug-Free America, President and Mrs. Reagan urged a national battle against drugs on two fronts -- a campaign to intercept drugs imported into the United States and prosecute those responsible for distributing them and an aggressive effort to convince citizens any drug use is unacceptable.

The first lady, whose primary issue-oriented activity during more than seven years in the White House has been a battle against drug use, particularly among the young, told conferees one of the major obstacles in the war against drugs is a widespread belief that casual drug use has no victims.

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Arguing against the notion, she pointed to prominent public officials in Colombia, including Supreme Court justices and the nation's attorney general, all murdered by the drug cartel in the South American country most notorious as a source of illicit drugs. She noted several Drug Enforcement Administration agents killed in the line of duty in recent years. And she introduced members of families whose children were murdered by drug users or who died in accidents caused by drug use.

"The casual user may think when he takes a line of cocaine or smokes a joint in the privacy of his nice condo, listening to his expensive stereo, that he's somehow not bothering anyone," Mrs. Reagan said. "But there is a trail of death and destruction that leads directly to his door. The casual user cannot morally escape responsibility for the action of drug traffickers and dealings. I'm saying that if you're a casual drug user, you're an accomplice to murder."

She urged a tougher outlook on the price drug users should pay, saying: "I want to make it impossible for casual users to escape responsibility for any innocent death due to drugs. I want to make them fully face the brutality of drug use."

She concluded: "We must be absolutely unyielding and inflexible in our opposition to drug use. There's no middle ground. We must be as adamant about the casual user as we are about the addict. ... He must be made to feel the burden of brutality and corruption for which he's ultimately responsible. We must get the message out -- we will not stand for illicit drug use of any kind, period."

For his part, President Reagan outlined progress in the escalating war against drug smuggling and distribution. He pointed to coordination among federal, state and local authorities as an approach conceived and initiated by his administration.

Reagan also credited increased numbers of federal prosecutors and drug agents with last year's confiscation of more than \$500 million in "drug-related assets," the closure of 682 "clandestine laboratories" and seizure of 92,000 pounds of cocaine, "all records," he said.

Describing efforts to combat smuggling and trafficking as the "supply side of the crusade" against drugs, Reagan stressed, "Ending the demand for drugs is how, in the end, we'll win."

During the four-day conference, participants also heard from members of Congress and representatives of the executive branch.

The White House Conference for a Drug-Free America was established by congressional resolution and executive order of the president and was designed to recruit a battalion of forces to fight the war against drugs. These have included representatives from the ranks of law enforcement, corrections and the judiciary, as well as leaders from the business, religious, educational, entertainment and sports communities.

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Ethnic Barriers Examined  
At Texas CLC Workshop

By Ken Camp

N-Texas

Baptist Press  
3/3/88

HOUSTON (BP)--Both "personal regeneration" and "social transformation" must occur for the body of Christ to overcome racism, participants were told at the annual workshop of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"Out of Many, One" was the theme of the statewide workshop, held Feb. 29-March 2 at Brentwood Baptist Church in Houston. Charles Adams, pastor of Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, presented theme interpretations throughout the conference.

"God is the builder and founder of the human family," said Adams. "God created humankind in the spirit of love and the state of equality."

A significant barrier preventing "oneness" in the body of Christ is "the evil of bibliolatry," he said. Scripture becomes a "tool of domination" that confirms prejudices when readers misinterpret it and refuse to be challenged by its teachings, he charged.

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"Words are subservient to human wills," Adams said, noting how Islamic extremists justify their acts by pointing to the Koran.

"The Bible in the wrong hands can be a dangerous instrument of evil," he said. "The Bible must be interpreted in the spirit and the truth of the living Christ.

"The authentic biblicalist is open to radical transformation," Adams continued. "Knowledge of the written word must lead us into a walk with the living Word. The letter without the spirit makes racism in America, apartheid in South Africa and strife and division in society.

"The letter without the spirit is senseless. We must translate the written word into loving deeds," he said.

Adams warned against profaning God's name by failing to incarnate the gospel, and he challenged his listeners to "hold onto the vision of the inclusive kingdom of our God."

Issues of race, divisiveness and institutional discrimination were addressed in a dialogue with denominational leadership involving William M. Pinson Jr., executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas; Dan Rivera, president of the Hispanic Baptist Theological Seminary in San Antonio, Texas; and John Newport, vice president for academic affairs and provost at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Reflecting on his personal experiences as a student on segregated college and seminary campuses and his own efforts to effect policy changes at those institutions, Pinson said, "We've far, far to go, but we've come far, far from where we were."

Noting "disembodied dreams accomplish nothing," Pinson said conscientious Christians must live with the frustration of seeing their pure visions partially stifled by clothing them "in institutional garments."

Rivera focused on the missions task of his institution, saying, "If we're going to reach the Hispanic population of Texas, we must prepare Hispanic leadership."

Newport stressed Southwestern Seminary's efforts to attract ethnic students and pointed to scholarships available for them.

When asked why Southwestern Seminary has only one Hispanic professor, no blacks on the teaching faculty and no female professors in the school of theology, he noted qualified minority instructors are intensively recruited by high-paying, prestigious Eastern schools.

Newport also pointed to the current controversy within the Southern Baptist Convention as a contributing factor. "In the present environment with the present board of trustees, it's hard to get anyone elected to our faculty," he said.

Worship services at the three-day workshop included a bilingual Hispanic/English service led by Mario Hernandez, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Houston; a Chinese service involving representatives from each of the Houston-area Texas Baptist Chinese churches and including a message by Peter T.S. Leong, pastor of Southwest Chinese Baptist Church in Houston; and a prayer and praise service led by Pastor Joe Ratliff and the men's choir from Brentwood Baptist Church.