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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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March 22, 1988

88-48

Baptist World Alliance  
Leader Dies In Auto Crash

By John Wilkes

N-10  
(BWA)

LODI, Calif. (BP)--Gerhard Claas, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, was killed March 21 in a car-truck crash near Lodi, Calif., about 50 miles east of San Francisco.

Seriously injured in the accident were Mervyn Betts, a retired American Baptist executive minister from San Francisco, and his wife, Nora. Betts was reported to be in critical condition March 22, and Mrs. Betts was in moderate condition in a Stockton hospital.

Claas, 59, who had been chief administrative officer of the Washington-based BWA since 1980, was in California on a series of fund-raising meetings among BWA supporters in both American Baptist and Southern Baptist churches. He had spoken in the San Francisco Bay area during the week, including Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif.

At the time of the crash, Claas and the Bettses were en route to Stockton for a luncheon meeting. Betts was driving when the accident occurred shortly before noon.

Claas, a citizen of the Federal Republic of Germany, was general secretary of the Union of Evangelical Free-Churches (Baptist and Brethren) in the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Baptist Federation, one of the six world BWA regional fellowships, before moving to the United States in 1980 to assume leadership of the BWA, which has 143 member bodies with a membership of more than 35 million.

Earlier, he was pastor of the Baptist church of Dusseldorf and of Johann-Gerhard Oncken Memorial Baptist Church in Hamburg. He also was youth secretary for the Union.

He was born in Wetter, Germany, Aug. 31, 1928. He attended public schools there and graduated from the School of Higher Commercial Studies in Hagen. He took theological studies at the Union's seminary in Hamburg and at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, where he was in the first class admitted when the institution opened in 1949.

Claas also had been on the executive boards of Bread for the World and the Albertinen Baptist Hospital in Hamburg. He had been chairman of the executive boards of the Evangelical Free Churches in the FRG and the Ruschlikon seminary.

Claas was married to the former Irmgard Saffran. They were parents of three children: Regina, a member of the staff of the FRG Union's youth department; Gabriele Claas Gloeckner, whose husband, Volkmar, is a Baptist pastor; and, Martin, who is a church youth director. All live in West Germany.

Funeral services are scheduled in Vollmarstein, FRG, in the Baptist Church, where both Gerhard and Irmgard Claas grew up and were baptized.

A memorial service will be held at the McLean (Virginia) Baptist Church, where Claas and his wife were members, at 2 p.m., Tuesday, April 19.

BWA President Noel Vose of Perth, Australia, asked BWA staffer Denton Lotz to assume responsibilities as acting general secretary until further notice.

Lotz, formerly assigned in Europe with the American Baptist Churches Board of International Ministries, has been deputy general secretary since 1985. He also is director of the BWA division of evangelism and education and the youth...

In a letter to the world family of Baptists, Vose and Lotz said, "Gerhard Claas was an evangelist who practiced daily the presence of God ... (he was) not only a great leader but a spiritual believer with a deep sense of compassion for the oppressed and needy of this world."

Vose and Lotz also announced that remembrance gifts may be made to the Gerhard Claas Memorial Fund for the Baptist World Alliance, 6733 Curran St., McLean, Va. 22101.

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PAC Asks Congress To Sustain  
Reagan Veto Of Rights Bill

By Stan Hastey

N- BJC

Baptist Press  
3/22/88

WASHINGTON (BP)--In a last-minute effort to defeat a controversial civil rights bill, the Southern Baptist Public Affairs Committee asked Congress to sustain President Reagan's veto of the measure on grounds it violates First Amendment guarantees of religious freedom.

In a statement drafted by several members of the PAC and hand delivered March 21 and 22 to all 535 members of the Senate and House of Representatives, the panel stated its opposition to S. 557, the Civil Rights Restoration Act, because "religious liberty must be protected."

PAC Vice Chairman Albert Lee Smith, an insurance executive from Birmingham, Ala., said he took the initiative in drafting the original version of the document because of reports from congressional offices that Baptists were supporting the bill. "I felt the Public Affairs Committee needed to clarify its position," Smith told Baptist Press.

Smith said he learned some members of Congress were saying Baptist support for the measure -- which Reagan vetoed March 16 -- was based on a "fact sheet" they had obtained from the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. That document, written by BJCPA General Counsel Oliver S. Thomas, was prepared to help members of the Washington agency's staff answer telephone inquiries about the bill.

According to the BJCPA, it handled a large volume of calls from concerned Baptists about the bill's contents and perceived threats to churches and church-related institutions. The fact sheet took no position for or against the bill but sought to answer the most frequently asked questions of callers, Thomas said.

Copies of the fact sheet were sent to persons requesting it, including some members of Congress, a few of whom reportedly sent out copies to Baptist constituents who called their offices. Congressional staffs have been deluged with calls regarding the potential impact of the bill.

Proponents of the measure say it was written to overturn a 1984 Supreme Court decision, *Grove City College v. Bell*, that limited enforcement of four civil rights laws -- Title IX of the 1972 Education Act Amendments, barring discrimination in education programs; Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, barring discrimination by race, color or national origin in all federally assisted programs; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, barring discrimination against the handicapped in federally funded programs; and the 1975 Age Discrimination Act, barring discrimination based on age in programs receiving federal aid.

Opponents say, however, the bill goes far beyond its stated purpose and imposes new regulations on churches, their institutions, and on other entities such as small businesses and family farms.

Much of the opposition to the bill was registered when Moral Majority founder and President Jerry Falwell sent a two-page "Memorandum to Pastors" claiming Congress had "caved in" to pressure from the "homosexual movement" by passing a law that "combined with present court cases would qualify drug addicts, alcoholics, active homosexuals (and) transvestites, among others, for federal protection as handicapped."

The Falwell memorandum called the bill "the greatest threat to religious freedom and traditional moral values ever passed" and warned that if the president's veto is not sustained the new law will force churches "to hire a practicing active homosexual drug addict with AIDS to be a teacher or youth pastor."

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Although the PAC statement did not mention homosexuality as an issue, it took exception with a "religious tenets exemption" in one of the civil rights laws requiring church-related colleges that receive federal funds to apply for an exemption to anti-discrimination requirements.

"The requirements that a church or church-affiliated institution should have to apply for a religious tenets exemption is a basic fundamental violation of the separation of state from church embodied in the First Amendment of the Constitution," the statement said.

"It also places the church or the religiously affiliated institution in the position of having to prove its innocence to the state, instead of the state prosecuting only when it finds evidence of guilt or violation. Thus, such churches or institutions are unconstitutionally presumed guilty until proven innocent."

Such a position is "repugnant" to the PAC, the statement continued, adding, "Information on (this bill) disseminated by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs should not be construed as representing the position of the Public Affairs Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention."

In an interview with Baptist Press, Smith said 14 of the 17 PAC members concurred with the statement, with only three abstaining. There is currently one vacancy on the 18-member panel. Smith said he personally asked each member to join the statement in a round of telephone calls made March 19-20. Both the Senate and House of Representatives were scheduled to vote either to sustain or override the presidential veto March 22.

Smith said PAC members "feel very strongly in the separation of the state from the church." The religious tenets exemption "has got things topsy-turvy," he added. "It is very much contrary to the First Amendment ... (and) to the intentions of the framers of the Constitution."

Asked if he was concerned the PAC action might be interpreted as going beyond the panel's mandate since the Southern Baptist Convention has not adopted a position on the Civil Rights Restoration Act, Smith replied the action was taken because of Southern Baptists' historic commitment to church-state separation.

During last year's annual SBC meeting, the PAC was authorized "to coordinate its work" through the BJCPA and "to take action on motions and resolutions" of the SBC not supported by the BJCPA.

PAC Recording Secretary Les Csorba III of Alexandria, Va., said the panel's action in drafting and distributing the statement opposing the Civil Rights Restoration Act was justified because "the BJC, in my opinion, failed to fulfill its responsibility with respect to religious liberty by not supporting the president's veto. We felt compelled to act due to the lack of leadership on the part of the BJC." Csorba, executive director of the Washington-based organization Accuracy in Academia, coordinated the distribution of the statement to Capitol Hill offices.

J.I. Ginnings, an independent oil producer from Wichita Falls, Texas, said he does not interpret the 1987 SBC action as "restrictive" of the PAC so long as an issue has been taken up with the larger BJCPA. Ginnings, who is also a member of the BJCPA executive committee, pointed out that the full BJCPA voted last October to support the Danforth amendment -- which would ensure that hospitals receiving federal funds would not be obligated to perform abortions. At the same time, he noted, the BJCPA went on record that the endorsement of the amendment not be construed as endorsement of the entire bill.

Emphasizing he does not want to see people's civil rights violated, Ginnings said he supported the PAC statement because "lawmakers refused to include" the religious tenets exemption in the bill. "That causes me to have a great deal of caution," he added. Ginnings said further he was "disturbed" at reports from Smith that BJCPA staff members were supportive of the bill.

SBC Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks -- one of the three PAC members who abstained from endorsing the statement -- also said Smith told him the BJCPA fact sheet amounted to an endorsement of the bill. He abstained, Parks said, because "I didn't have enough facts in hand." Smith began his effort to reach him on Sunday morning, March 20, the Foreign Mission Board president said, when he was preaching in Kentucky.

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"This has been a frustrating thing to me," Parks said, "that the PAC continues to act this way. There is always an emergency, an immediacy in these calls to take a position. I don't think that's the way we ought to be functioning. ... I was not able to express a vote out of conviction and chose to abstain because of that."

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Southern Baptist Alliance  
Elects Executive Director

By Joe Westbury

*N-HMB*  
Baptist Press  
3/22/88

MACON, Ga. (BP)--Alan Neely, professor of missiology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., has been elected to a five-month term as executive director of the Southern Baptist Alliance.

Neely, a member of the Alliance board, will be part-time and non-salaried until Aug. 1, when a permanent executive director is expected to be named. Neely was elected by the Alliance board on the eve of the group's second annual convocation in Macon, Ga. He is a former foreign missionary and pastor of churches in Texas, Virginia and Colorado and has taught at Southeastern seminary since 1976. He has chaired the Alliance literature committee for the past year.

The position was formerly held by founding president and executive director Henry Crouch, pastor of Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., who completed his first term of service. Future presidents will not have to shoulder both responsibilities, Crouch explained, which was necessary during the alliance's first year of operation.

Neely's election reflected directors' belief that the Alliance's growth would soon require a full-time administrator. His appointment as interim executive director will aid the transition from a volunteer status to a permanent role in the fellowship, directors said.

Crouch said the Alliance had no plans to relocate from Charlotte. Consideration of any other locale would be tied to the election of the executive director in the fall, he said.

Crouch reported the fellowship, launched in February 1987 with 22 members, has grown to 25,000 members in 38 states. Of that total, 2,106 are individual members while 40 churches in 11 states also have joined, enrolling their entire congregations to financially support the goals and objectives of the Alliance.

In other business, directors previewed copies of "Being Baptist Means Freedom," the Alliance's first publishing venture, and voted to publish a second book in time for release at next year's convocation.

Directors also voted to earmark half of the proceeds from the sale of the first book, edited by Neely, as a donation to SBC Today, an autonomous monthly news magazine published in Decatur, Ga. The directors said the contribution could be as much as \$5,000 if all 5,000 copies are sold.

The second book, which will deal with the role of women in ministry and the life of the church, will be co-edited by Anne Thomas Neil of Wake Forest, N.C., Fletcher Visiting Professor of Missions at Southeastern Seminary and Alliance board member; and Virginia Neely, a homemaker from Wake Forest, N.C.

Directors also heard a report from Walker Knight, editor of SBC Today, detailing plans to raise \$250,000 to upgrade the national newspaper and to name Jack Harwell as editor. Harwell, former editor of the Christian Index, newsjournal for Georgia Baptists, would assume the position June 1 if early stages of the campaign are a success. Knight will remain as publisher.

As a show of support for the five-year-old publication, 16 board members volunteered to personally pledge or raise \$1,000 each toward the campaign goal.

At an evening banquet Mercer University President R. Kirby Godsey, who last year survived an attempt by conservatives to remove him as president, told directors the denomination is "crippled and dying under the weight of politics, power and personality."

Godsey said the university with 6,000 students would remain a Baptist-affiliated school, although he understood why other schools would want to soften their denominational ties. He pledged, however, that Mercer would continue to uphold "an open mind and an open inquiry."

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Kenneth Chafin Accepts  
Louisville Pastorate

N-CO

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Kenneth L. Chafin has accepted the call as pastor of Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky.

Chafin, 61, has been Carl E. Bates professor of Christian preaching at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary since 1984. Before joining the Louisville seminary's preaching faculty, he was pastor of South Main Baptist Church in Houston for 12 years. He succeeds Jon Stubblefield who resigned the 6,300-member downtown church in February to become pastor of First Baptist Church in Shreveport, La.

Chafin will assume his responsibilities as pastor April 17 while also completing his teaching assignment for the semester at the seminary.

Chafin was director of evangelism for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board from 1969-72. He taught evangelism at Southern Seminary from 1965-69, and he was on the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, from 1957-65.

He is a native of Oklahoma and earned the B.A. degree from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque and the B.D. and Th.D. degrees from Southwestern Seminary.

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Confusion Results  
From Drug Arrest

N-CO  
(Fla.)

Baptist Press  
3/22/88

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--A top-ranking official with the St. Petersburg-based Florida Baptist General Convention was arrested March 17, creating some confusion among Southern Baptists.

John Taylor, executive director, was arrested in Broward County and charged with attempting to buy cocaine from an undercover policeman.

The Florida Baptist General Convention is an association of black Baptist churches and has no relationship to the Southern Baptist Convention or the Florida Baptist Convention in Jacksonville. News reports in several cities around the country led some people to confuse the official's identity with leaders of the Florida Baptist Convention. The confusion led to numerous telephone calls to the state convention office.

Later, Taylor was suspended from his position without pay.

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