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March 24, 1988

88-50

Southern Baptist Alliance
Hits Peace Committee Report

N-HMB
By Joe Westbury

MACON, Ga. (BP)--A strongly worded resolution assailing the report of the Southern Baptist Convention's Peace Committee was adopted by nearly 400 members of the Southern Baptist Alliance during their second national convocation March 21-23 in Macon, Ga.

The Alliance also adopted resolutions affirming the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and its executive director, James M. Dunn, and expressed appreciation to President W. Randall Lolley and other administrators at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

In other business at the meeting on the campus of Mercer University, Alliance members elected a new slate of officers, heard a variety of speakers on Baptist freedom, adopted a \$158,000 budget, and released their first book to the public.

John Thomason, pastor of Northminster Baptist Church in Jackson, Miss., was elected president while Anne Neil, a layperson and former foreign missionary from Wake Forest, N.C., was named first vice president.

Harry Carpenter, a medical doctor from Cocoa, Fla., was chosen second vice president. Dan Ivins, pastor of Baptist Church of the Covenant in Birmingham, Ala., was elected secretary and Walter Coleman, business manager for First Baptist Church in Asheville, N.C., was named treasurer.

The officers are eligible to serve up to two one-year terms.

Earlier in the week the Alliance's 30-member board of directors elected Alan Neely, professor of missiology at Southeastern Seminary to a five-month term as non-salaried part-time executive director. The board members are expected to name a full-time salaried staff person during their Aug. 1 meeting.

During the business session, members adopted a \$158,000 budget, an increase of \$43,200 from last year's founding budget. The budget is raised primarily by membership dues and gifts.

In the resolution affirming the BJCPA, the Alliance was authorized to be a channel through which churches could send designated gifts to the Washington agency.

Outgoing Alliance President Henry Crouch said the time has come for the organization to play a larger role in the BJCPA's fund-raising efforts. He predicted the possibility the Alliance eventually might have representatives on the BJCPA board.

Even though they adopted two resolutions relating to theological education, Alliance members side-stepped any discussion on beginning a new seminary.

In one resolution, the Alliance assailed the Peace Committee Report as seriously threatening theological education at the denomination's seminaries.

The resolution maintained that "making a literalistic, 'inerrant' understanding of Scripture the test of orthodoxy undermines free inquiry and diversity of opinion which have been a hallmark of Baptist life." The resolution further alleged that "imposing strict and narrow creedal norms upon our theological faculties denies the priesthood of the believers."

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A second resolution expressed appreciation to Lolley, president of Southeastern Seminary, and other administrators who resigned "rather than acquiesce to trustee pressure to compromise significant Baptist principles of personal and theological freedom."

In a related fund-raising matter, Alliance members pledged nearly \$40,000 toward a \$250,000 goal to upgrade SBC Today, an autonomous Baptist newsmagazine published monthly in Decatur, Ga. Of the total, \$18,000 was raised earlier in the week through board members who offered to pledge or personally raise \$1,000 each, and about \$17,000 was pledged by members.

The directors also voted to donate half the proceeds from sale of the Alliance's first book, "Being Baptist Means Freedom," to SBC Today. The contribution from the book, which was released during the meeting, could be as much as \$5,000, Crouch said.

SBC Today Editor Walker Knight said the campaign, only a few days old, already had received \$10,000 from other sources and with Alliance pledges was at the \$50,000 level.

James Strickland of Cartersville, Ga., outgoing board member of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and one of five speakers at the meeting, decried changes he has observed during the past eight years of what he called a conservative takeover of the Atlanta-based agency.

Strickland, pastor of Heritage Baptist Church, said the changes have resulted in the agency evolving from "a mission institution with a broad vision for ministry and an inclusive evangelistic approach" to one with "an ever-increasing narrowness of thought and a myopic view of evangelism."

The Georgian said he has seen ordained women, divorced persons, charismatics, "and anyone not adopting the new 'party line' of fundamentalism declared unfit for ministry."

Interspersed between a variety of speakers, Alliance members divided into workgroups to discuss topics ranging from evangelism and mission, ecumenicity, inclusive language, the moderate movement in the SBC and ministry in the meantime -- women in ministry.

The Alliance will meet next year, March 1-3, on the campus of Furman University in Greenville, S.C.

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Palmer Warns Against
'Subtle Universalism'

By Jim Newton

Baptist Press
3/24/88

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--A vice president of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board warned that a "subtle universalism" is hampering Baptist efforts in evangelism.

Gerald Palmer, vice president for missions at the Atlanta-based Home Mission Board, said the reason Baptists are not winning more people to faith in Christ is because many Baptists do not really believe other people are "lost and doomed to eternity in hell."

Palmer explained that "universalism" is the belief that all people in the world are "saved from eternity in hell" whether they believe in Jesus Christ or not.

Many Baptists would deny they believe this, Palmer said in an address to the national conference of Baptist state interfaith witness coordinators in Kansas City, Mo. He added, however, that many Baptist churches are inflicted with what he called "subtle universalism."

"They (many Baptists) aren't really theological universalists; they are emotional or practical universalists."

"They say they believe people who do not have a personal faith in Jesus Christ are not 'saved,' but when you pin them down, they don't believe the good people who are their friends and business associates are 'lost' and doomed to an eternity in hell," Palmer said.

"Or they may believe others are lost, but they just don't do anything about it, so they might as well be universalists."

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Palmer insisted Baptists must never be misunderstood about where they stand on the matter of salvation. "We believe," he stated, "that Jesus Christ is not just one way, he is the only way to be saved."

Palmer expressed deep appreciation for the work of the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department in training and equipping Baptist people to share their faith effectively with persons of other religious backgrounds and heritage. The work of this department, he said, cuts across every program of the Home Mission Board, providing resources to every area of the agency's work.

The challenge Baptists face is communicating the gospel in a way that people will want to listen and in a way that they can understand, so they can fully respond if they want to, he said. To do that, Baptists must be loving, sympathetic and understanding of the heritage, culture and beliefs of others.

"If Baptists are not aware of those truths and facts about the religious backgrounds of people, a lot of doors will be slammed in our faces," Palmer said. "God help us if there are only two alternatives when we talk to people of other backgrounds: they reject it (the gospel), or they accept it."

He insisted that Baptists are not trying to convert Catholics or Jews, rather "we are trying to lead lost people to faith in Jesus Christ. Every person without Christ," he added, "is lost, whether he has a Catholic, Jewish or Baptist background. We should be just as concerned about a Baptist person who is lost as we are about a lost person of any other religious background."

To be effective, Baptists need to study and understand the religious beliefs and heritage of others. "But we should not stop with a study of comparative religions; we should go on the proclaim our faith in Christ," he said. The interfaith witness department of the Home Mission Board is trying to train and equip Baptists to do this, he said.

In another address, Gary Leazer, director of the board's interfaith witness department which sponsored the conference, said many Baptists incorrectly perceive that all his department does is conduct dialogues with other religious groups.

In the last 17 years, the interfaith witness department has co-sponsored 15 dialogues with Jews and two on-going dialogues with Catholics, Leazer said.

Dialogue will remain a small, but essential part of the department's work, said Leazer, who became director of interfaith witness last October after nine years as an associate.

Dialogue enables Baptists to communicate their faith when other evangelistic approaches do not seem to be effective, Leazer said. Dialogue also challenges Baptists to more clearly present their beliefs in a religiously-pluralistic society. Dialogue corrects misinformation and misunderstandings Baptists have about other religious groups, and similar misunderstandings other religious groups have about Baptists, he added.

Leazer said the major focus of the board's interfaith witness department continues to be providing training events on local and state-wide levels designed to help Baptists better understand how to share their faith with persons of other religious backgrounds.

Leazer said he constantly gets calls for help from Baptist parents whose children have become involved with the Moonies, or whose daughters are dating Mormons, or whose sons have become involved in Satanism. The department also provides training for Baptist pastors and church members on dealing with such problems.

The department has 412 certified "interfaith witness associates" with expertise in leading training conferences to help Baptists share their faith with people of specific religious backgrounds, and communicate with those with other beliefs. Leazer said the department hopes to have 600 certified leaders by the end of 1989.

About 50 state Baptist interfaith witness coordinators and their spouses attended the three-day conference. As part of the program, the coordinators received briefings on the beliefs of two religious groups with headquarters in Kansas City, and how these groups contrast with Baptists.

Participants toured the worldwide offices and 6,000-seat auditorium of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints at Independence, Mo., and the facilities of Unity School of Christianity at Unity Village near Raytown, Mo.

Officials at the Reorganized Latter Day Saints headquarters emphasized they are not Mormons, although they share a common heritage in the beliefs of their founder, Joseph Smith.

Conference participants also visited the 63-acre "temple lot" site at Independence. Followers of Joseph Smith believe this was the spot of the Garden of Eden given by God to Adam and Eve and where Jesus Christ will return to earth after Latter Day Saints build a temple where God will dwell.

At Unity Village, participants toured facilities on the 1,400-acre site where more than 3 million copies of Unity publications are produced and mailed and where Unity adherents respond to more than 3 million written and telephoned prayer requests each year.

During presentations before the tours, Maurice Smith, assistant director of the interfaith witness department, and Douglas Harrington, an intern and student at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, described the RLDS and Unity movements as examples of theological universalism which Palmer had earlier decried.

Next year the state Baptist interfaith witness coordinators will meet in Orlando, Fla., March 18-29, 1989.

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Court Rejects Church Challenge
To Social Security Coverage

By Stan Haste

N- BIC
Baptist Press
3/24/88

WASHINGTON (BP)--An independent Baptist congregation lost its challenge to provisions in the Social Security law when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to schedule its appeal.

Bethel Baptist Church of Sellersville, Pa., had asked the nation's high court to review unfavorable decisions of two lower federal courts that mandatory participation by church employees in the Social Security system does not deprive churches of their free exercise of religion.

Congress amended the 50-year-old law in 1983 to require churches and their non-ordained employees to participate in Social Security. The amendment took effect Jan. 1, 1984.

Later that year, Congress passed another amendment to the law permitting a church to make a one-time, irrevocable decision for reasons of religious conscience to shift to its employees the employer portion of the Social Security tax, thereby categorizing the employees as self-employed.

(The 1983 and 1984 amendments had no effect on the law's additional exemptions for clergy and members of religious orders who elect on religious grounds not to participate.)

Bethel Baptist Church declined to exercise the option, choosing instead to pay Social Security taxes on its employees for the first quarter of 1984. When the Internal Revenue Service refused a refund, the church took the government to court.

But both a federal district court and the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia rejected the church's free exercise arguments, holding instead that a 1982 Supreme Court decision controlled the case.

In the 1982 case, U.S. v. Lee, the high court ruled unanimously that government has such an overriding interest in preserving the fiscal soundness of the Social Security system that the free exercise claim of an Amish carpenter who refused on religious grounds to pay taxes for his employees must be set aside. The government was justified in denying an exemption for the Amish employer, the court ruled, because allowing "myriad exceptions flowing from a wide variety of religious beliefs" could throw the Social Security system into fiscal chaos.

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Attorney William Bentley Ball of Harrisburg, Pa., who represented Bethel Baptist Church, argued unsuccessfully the 1982 decision should not control the present dispute because of the fundamental difference between church employees and those of a private employer who happened to object to participation in the system on religious grounds.

Both the Amish carpenter and Bethel Baptist Church based their free exercise claims on an interpretation of Scripture that Christian communities are obligated to take care of the financial security needs of their own members.

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New Suriname Missionary
Dies In Florida Hospital

N-FMB

Baptist Press
3/24/88

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--William W. Lawson, 50, a new missionary to Suriname, died March 23 of double pneumonia at Doctors' Hospital in Coral Gables, Fla.

Lawson was flown to Florida from Suriname March 18 in a medical airplane which contained a miniature emergency room with medical personnel, according to Bill Damon, Foreign Mission Board associate area director for Brazil and the Caribbean.

He had been hospitalized in Suriname for several weeks with breathing difficulties, said Dr. William Gaventa, director of the Foreign Mission Board's Missionary Health Department.

Lawson arrived in Suriname Oct. 9, 1987 and had just completed language study when he became ill, Damon said. He would have been involved in starting and developing churches in the South American nation.

Born in Chattanooga, Tenn., he considered Ball Ground, Ga., his hometown. He received an associate of arts degree from Reinhardt College in Waleska, Ga., and a bachelor of science in education degree from Georgia Southern College in Statesboro. He took courses by extension from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Before employment by the Foreign Mission Board in May 1987, he was a teacher in Acworth, Ga., and Smyrna, Ga., and had been associate pastor of Northwoods Baptist Church, Chamblee, Ga. He also had held minister of music and youth positions in several other Georgia churches.

Single all of his life, he is survived by his mother, Blanche Lawson, of Ball Ground and a brother, Lamar Lawson, of Marietta, Ga.

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

Ridgecrest Painter Dies
Following Work Accident

N-SSB

Baptist Press
3/24/88

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Chaney Brown, 53, a painter at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center since 1981, died March 21 in Memorial Mission Hospital, Asheville, N.C., following a scaffolding accident.

Brown and Howard Haney, 51, a regular part-time employee, fell when scaffolding apparently tipped over in the gymnasium at Camp Crestridge for Girls, adjacent to the conference center.

Haney remains hospitalized in serious condition with multiple broken bones.

Funeral services for Brown were conducted in Old Fort, N.C., on March 25.

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First Amendment Special
Scheduled On NBC Network

N-CO
(RTVC)

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The role of Baptists in establishing the unique religious freedoms offered American citizens will be the focus of a one hour special on the NBC television network.

The program, "The First Freedom," was produced by the Southern Baptist Convention Radio and Television Commission and is scheduled on most NBC stations at 1 p.m. EDT, Sunday, April 17.

Narrated by television journalist Jack Reynolds, the special features news footage and interviews with noted historians, religious leaders, politicians and legal experts to examine American's unparalleled system of religious freedom.

Freedom of religion, as guaranteed by the first phrase of the First Amendment to the Constitution, was established at the insistence of Baptists and other religious minorities who faced discrimination at the hands of state churches in the original colonies. Because of it, America has been spared the bitter internal conflicts suffered by citizens in other parts of the world.

"It has been called the 'first freedom' because all others flow from it," Reynolds reports. "It's a liberty that touches the deepest part of man -- freedom of conscience."

Current challenges to the doctrine of religious liberty are examined in the program. New York Gov. Mario Cuomo is heard in his now-famous speech at Notre Dame exploring the potential for divided loyalty between citizenship and religious belief. James T. Draper Jr., former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, comments on how a lack of accountability by some TV evangelists has tested the limits of their freedom. U.S. Sen. John Danforth, (R) Mo., expresses the concern of many about the breakdown of social values.

Although James Madison is credited with authorship of first amendment rights, the impetus for that freedom predated the Constitution. University of Richmond Professor Robert Alley explains that Roger Williams introduced to the world the concept of absolute church-state separation when he founded the Rhode Island colony in the 1630s. It was in sharp contrast to the practices of other colonies such as Virginia and Massachusetts Bay where state churches mandated conformity.

Many believe religious freedoms would be compromised if the Bill of Rights were being written today. Detroit Pastor Charles Adams contends that the religious freedom controversy itself could be celebrated. "Let's hear the challenge," he says, "because if our traditions cannot be challenged, they cannot be upheld."

"First Freedom" is one of four programs produced by U.S. faith groups under the title "The Promise of America."

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(A list of stations airing the broadcast is being mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the RTVC.)

Wife Of Former
Florida Editor Dies

N-CO

Baptist Press
3/24/88

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Berta Mae Cooper, wife of Edgar R. Cooper, editor emeritus of the Florida Baptist Witness, died March 23 in a Jacksonville hospital following cardiac arrest.

A native of Pitts, Ga., she grew up in Florida and graduated from Stetson University in DeLand. She was a member of Southside Baptist Church in Jacksonville.

Active in church, associational and state convention work, she was a member of the State Board of Missions 1964-67 and was currently a member of the state order of business committee.

Survivors include her husband; a son, E. Raydell Cooper of Oakland, Calif.; two daughters, Susan Blasingame of Nashville and Deborah Cooper of Orlando, Fla.; four grandchildren; a sister, Melba Hines of Las Vegas, Nev.; and a brother, Lloyd King of Clearwater, Fla.

The family requests that memorials be made to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions.

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