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July 1, 1988

88-103

Bible is to proclaim,
not defend: Pollard

By Jim Lowry

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Southern Baptists must not reduce their faith to any object, even God's Holy word, Frank Pollard warned in a sermon at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center.

"In these pharisaical days when people are looking for liberals more than the lost, I want to say to you I am an inerrantist," proclaimed Pollard, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jackson, Miss.

Biblical inerrancy has been a focus of the 10-year controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention. Whether theology or politics is the basis of disagreement also has been debated as have terms used to describe the two sides.

Pollard, former president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., has not often spoken publicly regarding problems in the denomination.

"I believe the Bible is God's word, but it is not the living Word of God," he explained. "Jesus Christ is the living Word of God. The Bible is God's spoken word.

"We simply must never reduce our faith to a book, not even God's holy book," he said. "When you do that, you begin to become superstitious about the Bible. You begin to try to defend it. The word of God doesn't need defending. It is God's holy word. We're supposed to proclaim it, not defend it."

Pollard said he sat down with a leader of the conservative movement in the convention a few days ago. "The first thing he asked was, 'As a leader of the moderate faction in our denomination, how do you feel about what is happening?'" Pollard reported.

"I said, 'Look, friend, I detest the word moderate,'" he continued. "I am not a moderate. I'm as conservative as you or anyone you know. But I will not be involved in your politics.

"I have never attended a meeting, and I would never take the time God has given me or spend the money of salary or gifts to the kingdom trying to enthrone or dethrone anyone," Pollard said. "I do not believe the issue in our denomination is inerrancy. I think it is integrity. I do not believe the solution is politics. I believe politics is the problem.

"I don't usually talk about things in our denomination," he said. "It doesn't do good things for my spirit."

Concerning biblical authority and pastoral authority, Pollard said: "I think the word of God is the authority, and the preacher speaks with authority when he is speaking the word of God. He does not speak with authority when he is not speaking the word of God.

"I believe the pulpit in our tradition is in the middle of where we worship, not an ark, because God comes alive when his word is preached. The word of God becomes his way to speak to us," he continued.

Pollard also spoke a word of support for the local church as "the best and most effective way to serve our Lord and God."

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In his opinion, people who give money to televangelists or para-church groups instead of the local church are "looking for a cheap and easy way to express their faith. The church is the hardest way to serve the Lord, because they check the roll every Sunday and keep an accounting of stewardship. It's God's way of getting his work done."

Pollard was the preacher for the week at the annual Bible preaching/administration conference sponsored by the church administration department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

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Education Commission elects
Tim Fields assistant director

Baptist Press
7/1/88

GREENVILLE S.C. (BP)--Tim Fields, associate director and director of communications of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, has been named assistant director of the Southern Baptist Education Commission effective July 1.

Fields was elected unanimously by Education Commission members during their annual meeting in Greenville, S.C., June 26.

In his new position, Fields will be responsible for communication functions of the commission, including news and information, production, marketing and distribution of commission products and promotional materials and other public relations and administrative responsibilities. He also will be managing editor of The Southern Baptist Educator.

Fields has been with the Christian Life Commission since 1980 as director of communications, director of product development and most recently as associate director and editor of LIGHT, the CLC's moral concerns publication.

Before joining the Christian Life Commission staff, Fields worked for the Brotherhood Commission for nine years as editor of Royal Ambassador and Baptist Men's materials and as assistant to the program director.

Fields has a B.S. degree in journalism from Kansas State University and an M.R.E. degree from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. He also was news director of Midwestern Theological Seminary, and was a reporter, photographer and editor for newspapers in Kansas and Missouri.

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Baptists still divided,
newspaper editors agree

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
7/1/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists remain divided, the convention's state newspaper editors agree.

They went home from this summer's Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas, and wrote editorials describing division within the SBC after a decade of theological/political controversy.

California's Herb Hollinger set the context: "Ten years ago ... the denomination's conservative conservatives revealed a plan to change the direction of the SBC. Some of the leaders of this group said it would take 10 years, but they were more than willing and, as it has turned out, able to do it. They said much of the SBC (was) ... moving in a 'liberal' direction, away from historic Baptist roots, at least as interpreted by conservatives."

Wrote Lynn Clayton of Louisiana: "The outsiders are in, and the insiders are out. ... Fifteen years ago, some more conservative constituents of the convention belonged to the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship and published the Southern Baptist Journal because they felt disenfranchised and unheard. Now, some moderates belong to the Southern Baptist Alliance and publish SBC Today because they feel disenfranchised and unheard.

"It is a classic case of those on the outside, or at least perceiving themselves to be on the outside, rising up and putting the insiders out."

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Editors noted several factors that, they said, confirm division within the Baptist house:

-- Conservative candidate Jerry Vines' "razor thin" presidential victory over the moderates' candidate, Richard Jackson. This 10th consecutive victory for the conservatives ensures control of the SBC trustee nomination process.

-- Election of trustees for SBC agencies, all of whom -- according to the policies and guidelines followed by outgoing President Adrian P. Rogers -- must be biblical inerrantists.

-- Dissolution of the Peace Committee, which labored for three years without bringing peace.

-- Passage of a resolution that downplayed moderate emphases within Baptists' doctrine of the priesthood of the believer and emphasized conservatives' favored views enhancing the authority of the pastor.

Editorials sought to describe and define the division and its ramifications.

"Among Southern Baptists in San Antonio, there were no winners, only losers," wrote North Carolina's R.G. Puckett. "The election of Jerry Vines as president by a mere 692 votes out of a total of 31,291 cast confirms how close and hopelessly divided we are. There was no landslide; there is a deadlock."

"No pastor in his -- or her, for that matter -- right mind would accept a call to a church with such a narrow majority," added Bob Allen of Maryland/Delaware. "The vote represents a convention still bitterly divided, and until harmony is restored, there will be no winners in Southern Baptist life."

In addition to the division among themselves, Southern Baptists are party to another division -- between where they are and where they ought to be, editors said.

Missouri's Bob Terry wrote of two meetings -- one of missionary reports, pageantry and inspiration and one of political infighting and intrigue: "Two conventions. That is what San Antonio was like. One convention a dream marked by unity, prayer, missions, evangelism and reconciliation. The other convention a nightmare, with strife, suspicion, manipulation, name-calling and the rest."

"SBC San Antonio revealed there is a credibility gap between the bickering of the annual session and where Baptists live," said Presnall Wood of Texas. "Increasingly, as Southern Baptists in the pews are embarrassed by headlines about Baptists arguing, the cooperative work of Baptists will be hurt."

"The negative effects of the controversy are self-evident," wrote Everett Sneed of Arkansas. "Already baptisms are down. Mission offerings also are down." Added Virginia's Julian Pentecost: "Democratic polity has been compromised. ... Messengers (to the annual meetings) now are essentially excluded from participating in discussion of concerns vital to the denomination's witness and ministry."

Sneed joined several of his colleagues in looking to the future. "By far the most important question is, 'How do Southern Baptists bring the controversy to an end?'" he said.

"The same two options are available to both sides in the controversy," suggested Jack Sanford of Kentucky. "Namely, continue the fight by trying harder next year, or admit the war is over, try to find ways of working together and stop the bloodletting."

Some editors declared the solution is in the hands of conservatives, who now control the SBC presidency and trusteeships.

"Leaders of the more conservative segment of the convention must now decide if they will seek the peace of total surrender from the moderates, or will they seek the peace of mutual purposes, joint goals, common beliefs and shared respect?" wrote Louisiana's Clayton. Echoed Oklahoma's Glenn Brown: "Elected leaders must demonstrate their professed belief in God's word. ... To abuse their new-found power or to deal in petty issues would be a denial of the word they profess."

Added Jack Brymer of Florida: "No longer can the new leaders say their opinions are ignored or abused. Now they are the establishment. And as such they must endure the complaints of those who feel newly excluded. They now must prove they deserve the leadership they have won. Others will be watching closely, and cooperating cautiously."

South Carolina's John Roberts spoke to the moderates: "The biggest question ... is whether the less conservative will go back to their churches and continue vigorous denominational involvement and strong support of the Cooperative Program (convention budget). If so, we will remain a vital denomination with a strong majority-minority relationship. Short of this, the denominational troubles grow greater."

J.B. Fowler of New Mexico wrote to new President Vines, whom he quoted as saying, "I want to do the right thing and do it in the right way." Fowler said: "Doing the right thing in the right way will surely include involving loyal Southern Baptists from the broad spectrum of the SBC in convention activities. ... Brother president, do the right thing in the right way, and we will long remember you and your noble example."

Fowler and others pledged their prayers and urged their fellow Baptists to pray for Vines, other leaders and themselves. "We should, all of us, pray for (Vines)," said Mississippi's Don McGregor. "He has an awesome responsibility. He cannot be expected to handle it alone. If the Lord helps him, everything will be all right anyway."

Texas' Wood cited the annual meeting theme, "Pour Out Revival," as a guide to peace: "Peace among Southern Baptists is just not going to happen apart from a personal revival on the part of all Southern Baptists. ... 'Pour Out Revival'? Yes. But Baptists need to be baptized in revival. A pouring will not be sufficient."

Forgiveness is the answer, insisted Fletcher Allen of Tennessee: "There is ... a way to healing. That way is through forgiveness -- seeking and giving, reconciliation, burying sins in the deepest sea, blotting them out, putting the distance of east and west between them and you."

Editors concluded on notes ranging from despair to optimism.

"There is nothing of God in this sad situation; it is full of evil and human machinations rather than the Spirit of Christ," said North Carolina's Puckett. "If there is a solution, there is only one. Good and decent people from both groups must confront the evil which has taken over the denomination."

"There is hope," countered James Watters of the Northwest. "And Richard Jackson said it best in his press conference immediately following his defeated candidacy for president, 'Don't panic, and don't give up on the Southern Baptist Convention.'"

"Southern Baptists are not hopelessly divided," added Alabama's Hudson Baggett. "We are divided, but hopelessness is a word that should not be used in reference to the church or denomination, for it implies we do not believe in the power of the gospel."

Editors praise Gregory,
pan Resolution No. 5

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
7/1/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--Baptist editors praised Joel Gregory and panned Resolution No. 5 on the pages of their state newspapers following the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

Gregory, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, delivered the annual convention sermon. His message, "The Castle and the Wall," warned Southern Baptists about building a wall of orthodoxy around their convention and in the process tearing down the castle they are trying to protect.

"We are at a flashpoint," he said. "Southern Baptists cannot survive many more months of personal animosity in our midst."

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He preached from Ephesians 4:29, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth," and advised Southern Baptists to consecrate their conversations, change their attitudes toward each other and imitate God's kindness.

"A lifetime of smoldering bitterness will put you on the shelf" as far as service for God is concerned, he said.

"I hold out my hand to you, Brother Adrian (Rogers), Winfred (Moore), Jerry (Vines), Richard (Jackson)," he said, naming leaders on both sides of the convention controversy. "We can build a wall and keep the castle. Be my brother."

Gregory preached "one of the finest sermons ever heard by Southern Baptists," wrote California's Herb Hollinger. Added R.G. Puckett of North Carolina, "Gregory's convention sermon took us to the spiritual mountaintop."

Bob Allen of Maryland/Delaware praised the sermon as a potential "watershed in Southern Baptist life." But he warned, "Since it will in all likelihood not be heeded, however, it will go down as just another sermon."

"Gregory poured out his soul in preaching to all Southern Baptists in calling for a halt to hostile spirits," noted Presnall Wood of Texas. "Southern Baptists must turn a deaf ear to those Southern Baptists who have hostile spirits and agendas."

Calling the sermon "a message that may well go down in history," the Northwest's James Watters wrote, "Gregory drew a clear line on the field of skirmish, demanding honesty, truthfulness and fair play that no local Christian or denominational politician should be able to cross with impunity as long as Gregory's message is remembered."

"Gregory is right," said Lynn Clayton of Louisiana, "the time has passed that we should lay down our weapons, regardless of how high-sounding they are, and shake hands as brothers in Christ."

The editors did not have as fond words for the resolution, "On the Priesthood of the Believer." The resolution had been approved by about a 10 percent margin after attempts failed to substitute, amend and refer it to the convention's Executive Committee.

The resolution's four principles affirm belief in the priesthood of the believer; state the doctrine "in no way gives license to misinterpret, explain away, demythologize or extrapolate out elements of the supernatural from the Bible"; note that the doctrine "in no way contradicts the biblical understanding of the role, responsibility and authority of the pastor"; and affirm that "elders, or pastors, are called of God to lead the local church."

The resolution also states the doctrine "has been used to justify wrongly the attitude that a Christian may believe whatever he so chooses and still be considered a loyal Southern Baptist."

"The most unfortunate action of the convention, from my point of view, was approval of the resolution on the priesthood of the believer," wrote Bill Webb of Illinois. "The resolution claims to affirm the doctrine, but instead virtually undermines it with a series of disclaimers."

Webb was echoed by Virginia's Julian Pentecost, who said the priesthood statement should get "this year's award for most abominable resolution." Puckett called it "nothing short of pure heresy to a genuine Baptist," and South Carolina's John Roberts said it "represents a basic departure and new concept of who we are as Baptists."

Roberts wrote: "A scant 200 years ago, Baptists were publicly whipped and locked in prison for insisting on the right to read the Bible for themselves, for refusing to submit to clergy in any matter of conscience or belief. We became known as a priesthood of believers, a distinction that has been a source of pride and comfort to many Baptists. Resolution Five would change all that."

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Several editors disputed the resolution's claim that the doctrine does not have strong roots in church and Baptist history. Puckett cited Baptist theologians B.H. Carroll and E.Y. Mullins. Pentecost cited Jesus and the Apostle Paul, as well as Mullins and Baptist forebears George W. Truett, Isaac Backus, John Leland, Roger Williams, Thomas Helwys and John Smyth.

"While the group in power for the last 10 years claims to be seeking to get back to Southern Baptist 'roots,' it must be admitted that the concept of the priesthood of the believer as was passed at San Antonio was never a part of Southern Baptist thinking until now. On this doctrine, Southern Baptists generally do not agree with the group now in power," wrote Don McGregor of Mississippi.

Editors also cited Scripture references that, they said, support their positions: I Peter 2:5 and 9; Exodus 9:4-6 and 19:3-6; and Revelation 1:5-6, 5:9-10 and 20:6. "It is beyond our understanding how people who claim to be deeply committed to the Bible and its message could support a resolution so contrary to the spirit and substance of biblical revelation," Pentecost said. "The resolution as adopted is a mockery of the New Testament's repeated emphasis on the equality of all believers in Christ and the right and responsibility of each believer to deal directly with God for himself."

Some editors expressed empathy for the resolution's concern about the abuse of the doctrine. "Any good thing is subject to abuse," said Illinois' Webb. "It can be abused by laypeople, and it can be abused by pastors. To be truly appreciated, the priesthood of the believer requires a high level of trust. The fact that it is a controversial doctrine today is, I believe, a reflection of the distrust within our convention."

"Some churches mistreat their pastors, and that is patently wrong, but the solution to abuse does not rest in a pastor becoming a bishop, cardinal or pope," said Puckett. He charged: "Present denominational leadership want to establish the body of beliefs at the national level and have them implemented through authoritarian pastors at the local church level. Such an approach is vintage Roman Catholicism. You can't be a Baptist and believe that."

Webb affirmed the doctrine: "The great beauty of the priesthood of the believer is that it reminds every believer of his/her responsibility to be faithful to God. It is a reminder that the roles of pastor and laity may be different, but that all are ministers in truly New Testament churches."

The resolution may create more rhetoric than change, concluded Tennessee's Fletcher Allen: "For what it is worth, we believe that the resolution will have little impact on local church life. Those who voted in favor of the new definition probably understand it that way in the local church already."