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Priesthood doctrine attracts
most Southern Baptist attention

By Marv Knox

NASHVILLE (BP)--Baptists' doctrine of the priesthood of the believer topped the list of concerns -- aside from mandatory officer elections and budget approvals -- expressed at Southern Baptist state conventions this year.

Thirty-eight state conventions or fellowships, involving Southern Baptists from all 50 states, held their annual meetings this fall, beginning with Alaska Aug. 9 and concluding with five conventions Nov. 17. Thirty-seven of the conventions had reported on their meetings through Baptist Press, the denomination's news agency, by Thanksgiving.

A dozen conventions adopted resolutions on the priesthood of the believer. Race relations and gambling were the next-most-discussed issues, with seven resolutions each. Top 10 resolutions also included abortion, six; the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the Cooperative Program unified budget and alcohol/drugs, four; and pornography, "The Last Temptation of Christ" and the Baptist Faith and Message Statement, three.

Resolutions are not binding upon Southern Baptists, but they reflect the prevailing belief of messengers present and voting at an annual meeting.

The spate of resolutions on the priesthood of the believer was prompted by a resolution on the doctrine approved during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting this summer. The SBC resolution noted 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" and that it "can be used to justify the undermining of pastoral authority in the local church."

In the following months, some Southern Baptists claimed the SBC resolution undermined the long-standing benefits of the doctrine and over-emphasized the authority of pastors.

All 12 state resolutions affirmed the doctrine, although most did not mention the SBC resolution. Missouri's expressed regret for "any unintentional offense or affront to our lay members" caused by the SBC resolution. Virginia's noted no person or creed stands between an individual believer and God. Louisiana messengers defeated an amendment that would have made their resolution conform to the SBC's.

The resolutions on race relations also had an antecedent in an SBC event. During the SBC Christian Life Commission's September meeting, commissioner Curtis W. Caine Sr. of Jackson, Miss., called the late Martin Luther King Jr. a fraud and said apartheid in South Africa "doesn't exist anymore and was beneficial when it did."

Tennessee's resolution named Caine and said messengers disassociate themselves from his remarks and reaffirm their commitment to the biblical teaching that God "is no respecter of persons." Mississippi's said Baptists in the state "desire to make it known that we in no way endorse these positions espoused by the trustee from Mississippi" on the CLC. Maryland/Delaware's called on the CLC to repudiate "the repressive system of institutionalized racism called apartheid." New York's urged the SBC calendar committee to set Race Relations Sunday on the date nearest King's birthday.

Actual threats of legalized gambling initiated the resolutions on that subject. Alabama, Georgia and Texas opposed lotteries. South Carolina spoke against gambling in general, as did Louisiana, which also decried off-track betting. Ohio spoke against casinos, and Tennessee opposed parimutuel horserace betting.

Arkansas' resolution on abortion reaffirmed the sanctity of "both born and pre-born" human life, which it said begins at conception, and it stated abhorrence for public money to finance abortions. Colorado, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina also passed anti-abortion resolutions. Alabama expressed concern that a prominent attorney affiliated with the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court case spoke at Samford University's Cumberland School of Law.

South Carolina took the strongest stand in support of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, the Washington-based religious liberty organization that has been criticized by SBC conservatives and received a budget reduction from the SBC this year. South Carolinians voted to budget funds in 1990 to support the BJCPA but did not set an amount. Kentuckians referred to committee a motion to budget \$2,500 for the BJCPA. Resolutions in Maryland/Delaware, Missouri and Tennessee expressed support for the agency.

Arizona and Louisiana decried the use/abuse of drugs. Colorado opposed the use and sale of alcoholic beverages and the legalization of illicit drugs. South Carolina spoke against the use of alcohol.

Louisiana, Michigan, New York and Texas all supported the Cooperative Program -- Southern Baptist's unified budget that supports missions, evangelism, church starting and educational endeavors around the world -- and/or praised their churches for support of the budget. Louisiana's resolution called for commitment to the program as a "manifestation of our denominational unity and vision for the future under the lordship of Christ."

Three conventions addressed the Baptist Faith and Message, the SBC's 1963 doctrinal statement. Hawaii affirmed the document. Oklahoma affirmed its preamble, which emphasizes the soul's competency before God, as part of its priesthood of the believer resolution. Maryland/Delaware turned back a recommendation to add the statement to its constitution and bylaws.

Colorado, Florida and Georgia passed resolutions opposing pornography. Alaska and Colorado expressed outrage at the movie "The Last Temptation of Christ." And in a related move, Louisiana addressed the media's representation of Christianity.

Aside from resolutions, several states took actions unique to them:

-- Virginians responded to the SBC "denominational crisis." They asked messengers to next year's SBC annual meeting to: continue to fund the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs; permit churches to "negatively designate" their Cooperative Program contributions; support theological education that is serious, open, balanced and responsible; accept the state's elected nominees for the SBC Committee on Committees; and develop "a new style of relating" so that "genuine healing may take place."

-- North Carolinians reduced the powers of their president. As opposed to appointing members to the convention's committees on enrollment and committees, the president and two vice presidents now comprise a committee to nominate members to the two committees, and those nominations go before the convention's general board, which can ratify or substitute the nominations before presenting them to the convention for election.

-- Colorado eliminated five staff positions -- the state Woman's Missionary Union director, a religious education leader and three support staffers -- in an effort to save \$70,000 annually. The WMU voted to become an auxiliary of the convention and raise its own support.

-- Alabama, a predominantly white convention, met with four predominantly black Baptist conventions for a joint worship session.

-- California changed its name, from the Southern Baptist General Convention of California to the California Southern Baptist Convention.

-- Kansas/Nebraska evacuated to the basement while tornadoes skipped about and later heard two sermons by flashlight.

-- Louisiana heard from Gov. Buddy Roemer, who told messengers, "You should not try to control government, but to influence it."

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-- Northern Plains dissolved its 21-year-old convention and divided into the Montana Southern Baptist Fellowship and the Dakota Southern Baptist Fellowship.

-- Northwest voted to move its offices, from downtown Portland, Ore., to a suburban area on the Washington side of the city.

-- Maryland/Delaware also voted to move its offices, from Lutherville, Md., to a more centrally located site in Columbia, Md.

-- South Carolina amended its nominating committee's report, reinstating eight convention committee members who had filled unexpired terms.

-- Tennessee approved a residential care ministry for developmentally disabled adults.

Several states took measures to finance the new expanded annuity plan for retired ministers. At least five conventions wrote the cost into their budgets as a "preferred item," which is to be paid off the top of undesignated receipts. Four others incorporated the cost into their budgets but cut the percentage they will send to fund SBC causes.

Of 35 states that reported new budgets, 18 voted to increase the percentage they send to the SBC, 13 held the same and four decreased the percentage.

Three conventions -- the District of Columbia, Hawaii and Virginia -- elected women presidents. Five promoted vice presidents to the presidency, and 12 re-elected incumbents.

Only in Georgia did an incumbent lose re-election. And only four conventions reported presidential contests where aspirants were affiliated in some form with elements of the SBC theological/political controversy. Conservatives won in Georgia, and moderates won in North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

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More pastors facing
forced termination

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press
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NASHVILLE (BP)--The issue of fired preachers rattled the foundations of more than 2,100 churches and ministerial careers in the last 18 months, according to a new survey of Southern Baptist directors of missions.

Norris Smith, forced termination consultant in the church administration department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, released results of the new survey to state consultants of church administration during their annual meeting in Nashville Nov. 17-19.

Smith also shared a series of strategies that are planned to help the denomination prevent the growing problem. Reaction, he said, is not stemming the tide of terminations in local churches.

Every month, 116 Southern Baptist churches and pastors sever relationships through involuntary termination, Smith said. That represents a 31 percent increase over results of a 1984 survey, which reported 88 forced terminations per month.

Respondents to the survey gave reasons for terminations, size of churches most frequently terminating pastors, available resources, and where pastors and churches turned when they were involved in a termination process.

The top reason directors of missions listed for forced terminations was a lack of communication between the pastor and church leaders. That accounted for 13.4 percent of the terminations. Negative communication usually was mentioned on both sides of the controversy, Smith said.

Second on the list was immorality, which was the primary cause in 12.9 percent of forced terminations. This included sexual immorality, theft of money, mismanagement of church money and problems with personal integrity.

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The next four reasons were subjective, Smith said, yet together they accounted for 44.6 percent of all terminations. Included are performance dissatisfaction, 12.4 percent; authoritarian leadership style, 11.4 percent; power struggles, 10.9 percent; and personality conflicts, 9.9 percent.

Other reasons mentioned by a significant number of directors of missions included leadership style, 5.9; incompetence, 5.9; doctrine, 5.4; mismatch between pastor and church, 5.4; family problems, 3.5; and tenure, 3.0 .

The highest number of terminations in the convention were reported in churches with fewer than 300 members, Smith said. Many times the pastor and the church repeat the involuntary process because they don't understand how the failure occurred in the previous experience, he added.

In the random survey, 220 directors of missions reported 40 percent of the churches had terminated more than one pastor, and almost 25 percent of the pastors had suffered a previous termination.

"Not all pastors and not all churches are at fault in forced terminations," Smith said. "Some churches do not have clear procedures for handling internal conflict, for instance. They won't address a problem until it festers.

"There needs to be a purposeful focus on biblical directions for managing conflict within the church family. Learning how to handle conflict is one of the biggest preventative measures. Up to this point, we've only been reacting."

To seek a solution to the problem, five strategies have been proposed by the church administration department to begin a preventative effort related to the termination issue.

These strategies are part of a continuing response by the Sunday School Board and other denominational agencies to a 1983 Southern Baptist Convention motion requesting help for terminated pastors.

Because directors of missions are listed as the first people to whom pastors and churches turn when conflicts begin, Smith said, the strategies will begin with two national conferences for directors of missions. These meetings, to be held in the next five years, will provide training to equip directors of missions to recognize and deal with problems between churches and pastors.

Second, the cooperating agencies will move to establish an acceptable referral system to coordinate the systems that now operate independently in several state conventions.

Next, Smith said, resources will be developed to help pastors and churches.

Fourth, a certified training course in conflict management will be developed to certify 50 percent of all directors of missions within the next five years.

And fifth, research will be done with churches that have been involved in a forced termination to provide correctly focused leadership materials.

This last step will seek to provide extensive training in churches for search committees, deacons and other church leaders on conflict management.

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Centurymen sing on
national TV in China

By Lounette Templeton

Baptist Press
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BEIJING, China (BP)--The Centurymen, Southern Baptists' best-known male choir, performed Nov. 14 on national television in China.

The prime-time, hour-long program called "Musical Bridges," produced by Chinese Central Television, was one of the highlights of the group's 19-day concert tour. The Chinese network invited the choir to China.

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Accompanied by the Chinese Broadcasting Traditional Orchestra and directed by Southern Baptist composer-conductor Buryl Red, the Centurymen performed both American and Chinese music for the television production.

The choir also premiered a work composed especially for the program by Peng Xiuwen, director of the Chinese orchestra.

"The orchestra was superb, of the highest standard," said choir member Tom Smith of South Carolina. Kentuckian Doyle Searcy was pleased that songs with Christian themes were allowed. "Five years ago when we came, it would have been impossible for us to sing 'Amazing Grace' in China, let alone on Chinese TV," he said. The Centurymen first performed in China in 1983.

Jimmy Allen, president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission and executive producer of the Centurymen, said the opportunity for the choir to appear on Chinese television came because of the "excellence of their music."

"They could have chosen any number of choral groups, but they chose us, a Christian group," added choir member Dennis McIntire of Mississippi.

The purpose of the tour was twofold: for cultural exchange with China's musical community and to encourage the Chinese Christian community, Allen said. Ninety-eight of the choir's 145 members went to China on the tour.

By arrangement with the Radio and Television Commission, a documentary on the Centurymen's tour of China is scheduled to air on ABC television March 5. Broadcast time is to be announced.

Southern Baptists' Cooperative Services International organization, which serves countries where missionaries do not reside, helped schedule Centurymen concerts in Shanghai, Nanjing and in several churches.

The applause of sophisticated audiences in crowded concert halls impressed the singers, they said, adding the warm response of people in packed churches inspired them even more.

Georgian John Kurtz said he saw a reverence and eagerness in the faces of Chinese Christians that he seldom sees in the United States. "They seemed so encouraged," he said. "It was as if they were soaking up the music."

Texan Lowell Rollins echoed Kurtz, "When we sang 'God Be With You,' and the people joined in, it was so touching, I couldn't sing."

Tom Lynn of Florida said: "The church in its purest form must be in China. ... Obviously, a revival is going on."

The Centurymen did not limit their singing to scheduled engagements. They broke into song at schools, factories, hotels, restaurants, parks, department stores, train stations and airports.

The choir gave one impromptu concert at a high school under a welcome banner made by the students. One of the teachers said the school had been run by missionaries before the revolution.

Harlan Hall, president of the Centurymen, and several colleagues sang in a large department store where, during the group's 1983 tour, Hall had sung "Silent Night" at the request of a clerk. The same clerk appeared again during their second visit and asked Hall to sing. "I was afraid it might get him in trouble, but he said it didn't matter. Our music gave him a few minutes of happiness," Hall said.

Kermit Tandberg of Louisiana was asked to sing in Shanghai's huge Exhibition Hall. He sang "Jesus Loves Me" in English and in Chinese, adding sign language for good measure.

Public evangelism is restricted in China, but the choir members found other opportunities to talk about the gospel.

"The tour people told us not to pass out pamphlets indiscriminately, but that didn't bother me," said Bill Gardner of Georgia. "It's not my style anyway. If I establish a relationship, then I speak about Christ."

Doyal Spence of Virginia befriended a young Chinese man who was on his way home from a U.S. business trip. During the 16-hour flight to Beijing, they discussed a wide range of topics, including religion. A week later, after a concert, the young man came to tell Spence he had decided to become a Christian.

The tour was not entirely trouble-free. Taping for the national telecast took 60 hours. "There were times during the last session (which lasted 20 hours) that we just stopped and prayed," said Roy Barnes of South Carolina.

Jack Kay of Tennessee broke his foot in an accident but didn't miss a concert.

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Lounette Templeton, Southern Baptist press representative in Hong Kong, accompanied the Centurymen to China.

(BP) photo available upon request from the Radio and Television Commission