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June 27, 1989

89-100

Mississippians angered
over committee action

By Tim Nicholas

N - C O
(Miss.)

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--Mississippi's two representatives on the 1989 Southern Baptist Convention Committee on Nominations are angered over the committee action which they said ignored a recommendation they made.

Both men -- Eugene Simmons of Jackson and Dean Register of Gulfport -- claim convention politics was involved when their recommendation of a trustee to serve on the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board was ignored and another man -- recommended by a leading conservative pastor -- was named.

"It stinks," said Simmons, an attorney and member of First Baptist Church of Jackson. "It's just not right."

"I don't like that kind of politics," said Register, pastor of First Baptist Church of Gulfport. "I am deeply grieved over the whole matter. It's a sad, sad time when Southern Baptists have to politic instead of pray and have to jockey for positions instead of trusting their brothers and sisters in Christ."

The two Mississippians attended the March 1989 meeting of the Committee on Nominations in Nashville. During the meeting, they dealt with eight nominations, including four people eligible for nomination to second terms.

They nominated replacements for two other people, one a trustee who resigned and another a trustee who had served two terms and was ineligible for nomination. A third vacancy was an at-large position that went to another state.

During the meeting, committee Chairman Joe Reynolds, an attorney from Houston, said the committee followed the recommendations of the state representatives in preparing its report for presentation at the 1989 annual meeting, June 13-15 in Las Vegas, Nev.

Simmons and Register nominated Tommy Vinson, pastor of Crossgate Baptist Church of Brandon, to fill a vacancy on the Home Mission Board. Register told the Baptist Record, newsjournal of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, Reynolds told them they needed to nominate a layman instead of a pastor in order to keep the board of trustees in balance between laity and clergy.

The position was left vacant, to be filled by a seven-member subcommittee of the Committee on Nominations at a pre-convention meeting June 12 in Las Vegas. Simmons and Register were asked to submit a recommendation to be acted on.

In late March, the two Mississippians agreed on Jerry Caffey, a layman from First Baptist Church of Gulfport, who agreed to serve, as their nominee and informed Reynolds of their choice.

Simmons and Register both said they thought their recommendation would be accepted. Neither was on the subcommittee, and Register did not attend the annual meeting. Simmons was a messenger from First Baptist Church of Jackson.

Simmons was surprised when the nominees were named in the Convention Bulletin June 13, which listed not Caffey as the nominee to the Home Mission Board, but instead listed Greg Martin, pastor of Commission Road Baptist Church of Long Beach.

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The Mississippians told the Baptist Record the written policy of the Committee on Nominations states that when a person declines to serve or is otherwise ineligible, "the subcommittee is responsible to nominate a person to fill each vacancy, seeking first to obtain the suggested nomination of both state members from the state in which the vacancy occurs, but in no case shall the subcommittee nominate a person to fill the vacancy without the knowledge of at least one state member."

Register and Simmons said they were not informed of a change.

Simmons said he confronted Reynolds as the chairman went to the platform to present the report during the Tuesday afternoon session June 13. Simmons said Reynolds told him a group lobbied the subcommittee, and a Jackson pastor had lobbied for Martin, and the subcommittee gave in and made the change from Caffey to Martin.

Both the Baptist Record and Baptist Press attempted to contact Reynolds for comment, but the Houston attorney did not return the telephone calls.

The Baptist Record contacted the Jackson pastor, Gerald Harris, of Colonial Heights Baptist Church and a leading conservative.

Harris said he had heard of an opening on the Home Mission Board and that he wanted a conservative named to the board. He also noted he did not want a member of First Baptist Church of Jackson named because the church already has four members on SBC boards or committees.

The responsibilities should be spread around and not be concentrated in one church, he said.

Harris said he mailed to Reynolds a few days before the convention a list of several suggestions for the post, including Martin. He also left a copy of the list at Reynolds' hotel in Las Vegas.

"I have never met Joe Reynolds, I never talked to him on the phone. I did not know that we were not going to have any representatives at that meeting from Mississippi," said Harris. "The first time Jerry Caffey's name was mentioned in my presence was after I got back to Jackson."

He added, "The truth of the matter is ... with the way the convention has been in recent years, the Committee on Nominations people need to be there to defend their candidates. I was not making an attempt to challenge any nominations I knew about."

Martin told the Baptist Record he was surprised to hear he had been named to replace another nominee. "I had nothing to do with it," he said. He said Harris had told him of the plan, but he did not know the Mississippi representatives had already nominated Caffey.

Martin, 25, said he was upset that an article in a Mississippi Gulf Coast newspaper, the Biloxi-Gulfport Sun-Herald, made connection between Martin's involvement with conservative denominational politics and the nomination. Martin and Harris are both active in the Mississippi Conservative Baptist Fellowship.

Martin said: "I am not a fundamentalist ... yes, I am an inerrantist. Yes, I believe we have some problems in our schools, and they need to be straightened out. But I don't believe until its proven otherwise this was politically motivated."

He said Caffey, formerly on staff of Athletes in Action, is a friend and would be the speaker at Baptist Men's Day services at the church where Martin is pastor.

Martin said he planned to accept service on the HMB and ask that next year's nominating committee invite Caffey to serve on either the HMB or Foreign Mission Board.

"Before the Lord, my wife, and my church, I haven't done a thing wrong," said Martin. "I hope it's just a big mistake."

Union University prof
Clyde Tilley resigns

By Lonnie Wilkey

N-CD
(Tenn.)

JACKSON, Tenn. (BP)--A Union University religion and philosophy professor has resigned amid disagreement over the doctrine of apostasy with officials of the Tennessee Baptist school in Jackson.

Clyde Tilley, a member of the Union faculty since 1966, resigned effective June 9, ending a conflict which began about four years ago.

Union President Hyran Barefoot told the Baptist and Reflector, weekly newsjournal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, the problem has centered around the doctrine of apostasy, a position which holds a person can lose salvation.

"Dr. Tilley has had some difficulties with the college for a few years over his teaching of apostasy," Barefoot said, noting he wrote Tilley in 1985 suggesting that Tilley "be very sensitive to the issue of eternal security of the believer." At the time, Barefoot was vice president for academic affairs; he became president in 1987.

The traditional Baptist stance is eternal security of the believer or "once saved, always saved," Barefoot said. Tilley, however, espoused the belief that a person can renounce salvation, Barefoot said.

Tilley said he agreed that "all believers are eternally secure." He noted, however, that he affirms "both the eternal security of the believer and the possibility of apostasy."

Apostasy is "not a moral lapse by which one loses his salvation, but is a reversion to unbelief whereby one deliberately renounces his salvation," he said. "This view is compatible with the eternal security of the believer, since the apostate would no longer be a believer."

Tilley's situation at Union has been compared to that of former Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Dale Moody. Tilley said he took some courses under Moody about 30 years ago but that Moody was not one of his major professors.

Moody, who already was past retirement age and was on a year-to-year contract basis, was given a year's leave of absence in 1983 because his teaching related to apostasy was not in accordance with the Louisville, Ky., seminary's Abstract of Principles.

Tilley, however, said: "As far as I can tell, my belief is different from Dale Moody. I'm not saying the same thing he said. We have different views of what apostasy is."

According to Barefoot, concern over Tilley's belief was expressed by both Union students and Southern Baptist pastors. There was "a good bit" of student complaint, Barefoot said, noting it became "a fairly prominent issue" in 1985.

After discussions between Tilley and Barefoot, Tilley took a half-year's leave of absence during the 1987-88 school year "to explore other avenues of ministry." Barefoot recommended the same half-year contract during 1988-89, but Tilley protested the decision.

Because Tilley had academic tenure, he was given a full contract but was restricted to teaching only philosophy classes, Barefoot said. Tilley previously taught Old Testament and New Testament survey courses.

When contracts were issued this year for 1989-90, Tilley was offered a contract for less salary, based on the previous year's teaching load, Barefoot said. The contract offered represented a 25 percent reduction in salary, Tilley said.

Tilley obtained a lawyer recommended by the American Association of University Professors and "threatened legal action at that time," Barefoot said.

"I contested it because I felt my rights were being violeted," Tilley said. His limitation to teach only philosophy attributed to the low number of students he taught, he added.

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Tilley was granted a hearing before Union's faculty affairs committee, which made four recommendations: that all courses be returned to Tilley; full salary be restored; a substantial raise be given; and the school pay all attorney fees.

After the committee's report, Tilley said, "When it became obvious there was no intention (by the administration) to honor the report of the faculty affairs committee, I requested a full hearing before the board of trustees."

The administration did not accept the committee's report "because apparently the faculty affairs committee did not deal with the theological issue, which was the base issue from the beginning," Barefoot said. "They only dealt with his teaching load and salary reduction."

The trustee hearing was granted, and trustees were given a copy of a theological position statement on apostasy that Tilley had written and given to Barefoot in 1988.

Trustees also were given an additional paper which he had written that showed "to my satisfaction that the Baptist Faith and Message can be interpreted in such a way that is consistent with my beliefs," Tilley said.

Tilley and other Union religion professors voluntarily signed the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statement in 1979, Barefoot said, noting the statement is the university's "theological confession statement."

Tilley met with Union trustees June 9 and presented three options: the first to teach religion and philosophy with the board's confidence and full pay; the second to teach philosophy only on the same terms.

Third, "if I could not have their confidence, good will and full salary, I would offer my resignation in exchange for certain considerations that earlier had been promised," Tilley said.

Barefoot said the trustees accepted Tilley's resignation and agreed to pay him a full year's salary and benefits from Sept. 1, 1989, through Aug. 31, 1990. Tilley acknowledged the agreement and added the university also agreed to pay his attorney's fees.

A "lifelong" Baptist, Tilley said he is "saddened" about giving up teaching, noting he has no plans to seek another teaching position. Rather, he plans to continue to reside in Jackson while developing a freelance writing, preaching and teaching ministry, he said.

Circumstances surrounding the resignation were "very unfortunate," Barefoot said. "Dr. Tilley could have stayed at Union had he not made it a public issue and to have pushed this (teaching apostasy) not only in religion classes but also in philosophy classes."

The subject of apostasy came up only once in a philosophy class, Tilley said, noting, it was not part of his teaching plan but an answer to a direct question from a student.

He took exception to the statement that he made the issue public. "The grounds for the conflict were basically theological and is part and parcel of the broader conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention," he said.

He has taught the same thing for 23 years, he said, adding, "Only in recent years did it become an issue; not because I publicized it but because others did."

He "taught in the same quiet way I always did," he said, explaining that he briefly, "about 10 minutes," discussed apostasy when studying Hebrews in New Testament survey.

Barefoot said the matter has little to do with the convention's problems. "This (teaching of apostasy) is out of character with the Southern Baptist Convention's position," he said. "It really did not make any difference whether it came up now or had been brought up 20 years ago. The reaction would have been the same."

Union trustee Chairman John Drinnon also emphasized the matter "is not a moderate-fundamentalist" issue.

"There are situations that develop from time to time that must be dealt with that are not related to the controversy," said Drinnon, a businessman from Germantown, Tenn.

Drinnon, who has been a trustee for six years and chairman for three years, said there "was not a single negative vote" on the part of the trustees to accept Tilley's resignation.

After hearing the facts and evidence presented, the trustees felt accepting Tilley's resignation was "in the best interests of the university and was consistent with the longstanding policy of the university," Drinnon said.

Tilley resigned "because I could not violate my conscience and conform to an interpretation that I did not believe was correct," he said. "One of the most hurtful things about the ordeal has been that people who extolled me as a person of integrity fail to see that this situation has anything to do with my integrity."

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3 Students killed
in Taiwan hotel fire

N- FMB

Baptist Press
6/27/89

HUALIEN, Taiwan (BP)--Three students who attended a Baptist church in Hong Kong were among 10 people killed June 23 in a fire that swept through a hotel in the tourist city of Hualien, Taiwan.

A fourth student related to the church, Ng Yokmui, 18, survived the blaze but was seriously injured in a desperate jump from the eighth floor of the Hua Chi Hotel. She was rushed to a Hualien hospital suffering from a broken hip and smoke inhalation. Her condition has since stabilized.

Ng was among nine people injured in the two-hour fire that sent about 100 guests fleeing from the hotel.

Southern Baptist missionary Larry Harris said the four Chinese students regularly attended worship services at Tsing Yi Community Baptist Church in Hong Kong and also participated in a weekly Bible study in the Harris home.

The dead students included two women, Wong Sauhong and Cheng Maiyi, both 18, and a man, Kwok Leungfei, 19. Their bodies, along with those of two other Hong Kong students in the group and five people from Taiwan, were found on the top floor near an emergency exit. The exit was sealed by iron bars to prevent burglars from entering the hotel from adjacent roofs.

"We had developed a terrific relationship with them," Harris said of the students. "They were all in our home the week before they left."

The students were vacationing in Taiwan after completing university entrance exams. They were to return to Hong Kong July 7, the day before test results are announced.

The day after the fire, friends of the students met in Harris' home to pray and talk about the tragedy. Ten students came to the weekly Bible study for the first time.

"We prayed that their deaths would be a testimony," said Harris.

"None of these students are Christians. This is a case of nonChristians inviting other nonChristians to go to a prayer meeting."

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RTVC wins Emmy
for China show

N-60
(RTVC)

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences has awarded an Emmy Award to a network documentary produced by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

"China: Walls and Bridges," received one of the two Emmys presented to daytime programs aired over the ABC television network. A second Emmy was given for lighting direction on the daytime serial "All My Children."

The China documentary, which told how Christians had weathered the official government policy of suppression during the years since World War II, was aired on ABC in March. Interviews with Chinese Christians and excerpts from a nationwide televised concert by a Southern Baptist music group, the Centurymen, in the fall of 1988 revealed how churches and individuals reacted to the freedom that developed when government regulations were eased.

The award was presented to Richard T. McCartney, the commission's interim president.

"This Emmy has special meaning because the program was produced by our own staff and not by an outside contractor," McCartney said. "The unique sensitivity of our people added a spiritual dimension that no outside producer could have given it."

"China: Walls and Bridges" was nominated in a special class of programs with 12 other nominees in three categories. A second Emmy went to "James Stewart's Wonderful Life," produced for Cinemax.

"The television industry has acknowledged what we have known all along; that the Radio-TV Commission production staff can match quality with the best in the business," McCartney said.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Radio and Television Commission