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Draper, others discuss
'cure' for denomination

By Toby Druin

N-CO (Texas)

DALLAS (BP)--Former Southern Baptist Convention President James T. Draper Jr. and eight other SBC leaders met for six hours at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, Sept. 7, to discuss a cure for what Draper diagnosed as a "sick" denomination.

No solutions were immediately forthcoming, he said last week. Instead, each of those in on the conference was asked to write down his impressions of what was discussed and suggestions on what could be done. Draper will compile the impressions and suggestions, send the compilation to the others, "and we will see what we do from there," he said.

Among things discussed, he said, were ways those who have been placed in SBC leadership positions can "broaden the tent" to include more people "without compromise to our convictions."

Besides Draper, who served two terms as SBC president, 1982-84, and who is pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, others attending the meeting were current SBC President Morris Chapman, pastor of First Church, Wichita Falls, Texas; former President Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Church, suburban Memphis, Tenn.; former Peace Committee Chairman Charles Fuller, pastor of First Church, Roanoke, Va.; John Bisagno, pastor of First Church, Houston; Joel Gregory, pastor of Travis Avenue Church, Fort Worth, Texas; Russell H. Dilday Jr., president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth; R. Keith Parks, president of the Foreign Mission Board; and Harold C. Bennett, president of the SBC Executive Committee.

Draper said he initiated the meeting, "because I just really sensed that somebody had to try to do something, and it was obvious nobody else was going to do it."

He said he talked to both Dilday and Rogers about getting the others together and they concurred it would be a good idea.

The nine men all have known each other for about 30 years, he said, and though they have differences, all know what the differences are and didn't need to debate them.

"We were able to make very strong statements about how we felt and what needed to be done without arguing about it," he said. "It was one of the most fruitful times that I think I have ever seen. I don't know whether any good has come out of it, but I know no harm came out of it and there is a lot of potential for good."

Draper emphasized the group has no authority -- "no power to do anything; just guys who have known each other and in one way or another have had some sphere of influence and responsibility we are concerned about."

It wasn't a secret meeting, Draper said, but was held without notifying the media because too often in public meetings "when we all get into print or in the media we come across differently, maybe, than we feel and our motives or the things we are trying to do are not often understood."

"There will be a time, certainly, when and if we are successful," that they will go public with their recommendations, he said, "And the potential is it could be very soon, because I see some things that could develop that might be tremendously helpful."

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In not being specific about what was even discussed, Draper said he was not trying to be evasive.

"It's just that we have a denomination that is sick and we have to be able to do some things that are not prejudiced in people's minds before they happen.

"We talked and prayed and had a good meeting that affirmed all of us. Our desire is to encourage churches to participate more strongly in the Cooperative Program and not pursue alternate funding procedures or plans. And we felt certainly that conservative churches across the convention need to increase Cooperative Program gifts; in fact all churches need to do that."

The meeting, Draper said, was not in response to the meeting in Atlanta, Aug. 23-25, where moderates approved an alternative to the Cooperative Program for funding Southern Baptist causes.

"Believe it or not, the Atlanta meeting was not a big factor for me," Draper said. "I do have some strong feelings about the Atlanta meeting and feel they have set in motion the mechanism for a new denomination. But I don't feel we need to bribe them not to do that.

"What I was concerned about was that it didn't seem we were moving very quickly to pull together those who could be pulled together. We were just making no strides (in that direction). I just felt somebody needed to say let's sit down and talk."

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'Battle will be over' if
educators admit problems exist

By Toby Druin

N.C.O.
(Druin)

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HOUSTON (BP)--Conservatives will "back off immediately" and the "battle will be over" in the Southern Baptist Convention if educators in the denomination admit theological problems exist in some things being taught at SBC institutions and "publicly commit to change it," Houston pastor John Bisagno said Sept. 20.

Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church of Houston, made the comments in follow-up to a Sept. 17 letter to Baptist Standard Editor Presnall H. Wood in which he suggested a four-point plan for "reform and renewal" in the SBC, including a call for a nationwide "solemn assembly" to be held in Dallas or Atlanta before the 1991 annual meeting in Atlanta.

The plan is broken down into four areas, summarized as follows:

-- Semantical: both sides in the SBC controversy dislike labels attached to them; let President Morris Chapman appoint an ad hoc committee to recommend mutually satisfying names;

-- Scriptural: "Let every Southern Baptist seminary and university president, agency, institution and board head and president acknowledge the truth of the Bible is not negotiable, that any discrepancies in scripture are discrepancies in appearance only;" that the effort in the SBC over the past 12 years to bring about doctrinal reform was born of valid and sincere theological concern, which was affirmed by the Peace Committee, particularly in four areas -- miracles, stated authorship, historical accuracy and Bible characters; and that these views be upheld, taught and reflected now and in all future hirings of denominational employees and professors;

-- Statistical: call on "every conservative church" to raise its Cooperative Program giving by at least one percent while recognizing the right of individuals or churches to give to mission causes in any way they see fit; and recognize the denomination historically has promoted direct mission giving; and recognize, respect and report all mission gifts for Southern Baptist causes;

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-- Spiritual: messengers to state conventions make every human effort possible to depoliticize and defuse controversy in upcoming state meetings; that each Southern Baptist ask God's forgiveness for mistakes of the past and cease any and all name calling and political organizing; and finally that Chapman join with Daniel Vestal, whom he defeated for the SBC presidency, and Henry Blackaby of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board to plan and lead in a nationwide solemn assembly "in order to seek God's power, healing and blessing."

Bisagno told the Baptist Standard the key to the plan is the admission of theological problems and a commitment to deal with them.

"I truly believe the only concerns conservatives have ever really had are the four theological points. In their frustration they knew that they could not find any way (to deal with it) but the appointment process."

The SBC controversy has focused on the appointive powers of the president, whose committee appointments have paved the way for the placement of conservative majorities over the past 12 years on all SBC boards, commissions and committees.

"All we want is for it (theology) to be acknowledged as a problem," Bisagno said. "The Peace Committee found it to be true."

"All we want from leadership is an acknowledgement of what the committee found is a problem, that it is out of sync with what Baptists believe and they will move to correct it."

"Once it is acknowledged the whole thing will be defused," he added. "Nobody is going to be interested in using the presidential appointment process" when that is done.

In a later statement to the Standard, Bisagno reiterated the requests, adding the "breakup of the Southern Baptist Convention could well be the greatest tragedy in the history of the Christian faith."

"In the name of everything right and holy and good, I implore our educators to acknowledge a matter that clearly exists and publicly commit to change it.

"Conservatives will back off immediately. Everyone can be included and the battle will be over. The issue is critical; the time is short; and the solution so easy."

Bisagno's reference to universities and the state conventions goes a step beyond the Southern Baptist Convention controversy. All colleges and universities are owned by state conventions, not the SBC, which operates only the six seminaries.

The Houston pastor has been mentioned frequently in speculation about a takeover of the Texas convention similar to what has occurred in the SBC the last 12 years.

He told the Baptist Standard, however, that he knows nothing of meetings supposedly being held to plan such a strategy. He said in a previous interview that he expects incumbent President Phil Lineberger, a moderate, to be unopposed for re-election.

In Texas, however, appointments of key committees are not made by the president alone as in the SBC, but by the president and the two vice presidents "acting jointly."

The current vice presidents are Ed Rogers, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dumas, and Billy Ray Farmer, pastor of First Baptist Church of Valley Mills, neither of whom has been identified with either faction in the SBC controversy. Both are eligible for re-election.

Bisagno said he had suggested "to my moderate friends" that one vice president from each side be elected, but "both sides need to agree that instead of trying to address any concerns through the election process that they would rather sit down as Christian brothers and talk about it."

CORRECTION: In the (BP) story released 9/17/90 titled "Grahams realize Gods care during ordeal in Kuwait," please change date in the ninth paragraph to 8/7/90.

The paragraph should read as follows:

He is among a handful of Americans still at the embassy, where the family took refuge Aug. 7. "I don't know what's going to happen," said Mrs. Graham. "I feel good about the diplomatic process, but I really still feel we've got to wait it out."

Thanks,
Baptist Press

Christians need 'fresh glimpse
of God', Fish tells Southwesterners

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*N-CC
(SUBTS)*

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Believers must have a "fresh glimpse of God" before revival can become the "real thing," an evangelism professor told students, faculty and staff at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary during the school's annual revival.

"The meaning of revival is more than a series of services set aside to meet the Lord," Roy Fish, professor of evangelism at the Fort Worth, Texas, seminary said. "Revival comes when there are times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

Fish was the revival preacher for the six meetings held on the seminary campus. Bob Hatfield, minister of music at Dawson Memorial Church in Birmingham, Ala., was the musician for the week.

Using Joel 2:12 as the key Bible verse, the 1990 revival theme was "Return to the Lord With All Your Heart." Students packed Truett Auditorium, with many of them standing along the aisles. During an invitation time in the last service of the revival, more than 225 students made decisions.

Fish defined what he called the "three R's" of revival -- repentance, reconciliation and restitution. These three factors are vital in any real revival among God's people, he said.

"Repentance is not a one-time experience in the life of a believer," Fish said. "It is an ongoing process."

Fish compared revival to a "spiritual surgery," explaining that "before it can become heaven on earth, it sometimes has to become a lot like Judgment Day."

In the first service of the revival, Fish told students and faculty Christians must become honest and specific in their confession of sin in order to "obtain restoration of fellowship with God."

Fish said Christians also must become sensitive to the needs of others. "We can't be satisfied with a perfunctory kind of witness," he said.

Speaking on the work of the Holy Spirit, Fish said Christians "are poor because of our lack of acknowledging the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is every believers privilege and responsibility to be filled with the Holy Spirit."

"I don't hesitate to talk with you about the Holy Spirit because my Bible tells me the Spirit points you to Jesus Christ," Fish said.

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He cautioned against quenching the power of the Spirit: "Anything short of being at God's disposal is quenching the Holy Spirit," Fish warned. "The opposite end of this is making yourself totally available to God."

Fish concluded the revival by challenging students to "continue spreading the flame of revival through their lives.

"God is telling us 'give me young men and young women committed to reaching the mountains.' But we'll never reach them with half-hearted dedication," he said.

Nothing short of total commitment to Christ will suffice, Fish added. "When you came to Christ you gave your rights to him. That's not fine print in the Christian contract. Our world will never be attracted to Jesus by an anemic type of commitment."

Fish urged the seminary students to be willing to go wherever God sends them. "You don't have the right to predetermine the bounds for your service," he said. "I don't believe you're ready to preach anywhere until you're ready to preach anywhere.

"Commitment that costs you something gains something," Fish said.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary

UAW chaplain prays for need
to prevail over greed

By Sarah Zimmerman

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Baptist Press
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DETROIT (BP)--As negotiations between General Motors and the United Auto Workers continued past the Sept. 14 contract deadline, J.R. Courtright prayed that need would prevail over greed.

The prayer of Southern Baptists' first endorsed UAW chaplain was answered when UAW members ratified the new three-year contract rather than striking.

Because the workers agreed to the contract, Courtright will stay on his job in the maintenance shop of the General Motors Hydra-matic plant in Canton, Mich. With 25 years experience and training, Courtright's job is to repair equipment in the plant which manufactures automatic transmissions.

"I roam all over the plant from job to job driving a little buggy with a tool bag on it," Courtright said.

As Courtright makes his rounds, he visits workers and asks about people who aren't on the job. If necessary, he plans to meet someone during a break or after hours for more in-depth conversations. One man he counseled several months ago told him recently he would have committed suicide if he hadn't talked with Courtright.

After working the midnight shift, Courtright sleeps from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. In the afternoon, he stays busy performing pastoral ministries to the plant's 8,000 workers and their families. With a congregation that size, Courtright said there is always a hospital visit to make or a funeral to attend.

In the last two months, five workers have asked Courtright to perform their wedding ceremonies.

"They don't know ministers well enough to ask them to marry them," Courtright said. Employees "look at pastors like they're them and we're us. They think I'm part of us -- and I am."

However Courtright knows his ministry is no substitute for the local church. One of his most rewarding experiences was counseling a man who was having family problems, then seeing that man and his family become involved in a local church.

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Financially, Courtright said it's either feast or famine for autoworkers. When business is good, "the guys at the plant have plenty of everything except the love of Jesus."

Currently, the plant where Courtright works employs about 2,000 fewer people than when it is operating at capacity. Morale, he said, is "not good," and job security was a key issue in the contract talks.

Had the workers gone on strike, Courtright said he would worked from the UAW Local 735. He said during a strike employees are concerned about buying food, paying utility bills and making house payments. As chaplain, he would serve as a social worker, referring employees to community services and helping them get sound financial advice.

Courtright's August endorsement by the Southern Baptist Chaplains Commission is the culmination of four years of work by Lowell Lawson, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board chaplaincy ministries development director. In 1986, Lawson became the first UAW chaplain in the nation, though he did not work in the auto industry. He piloted the chaplaincy program with UAW Local 599 in Flint, Mich.

Lawson said 113 UAW locals have expressed interest in a chaplaincy program. He said several other Southern Baptist autoworkers are in the process of being endorsed as chaplains.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press