



-- BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Herb Hollinger, Vice President
Fax (615) 742-8919
CompuServe ID# 70420.17

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 338 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232
NASHVILLE Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

September 19, 1991

91-142

Tal D. Bonham, 57,
Ohio executive, dies

By Theo Sommerkamp

COLUMBUS, Ohio (BP)--Tal D. Bonham, executive director of State Convention of Baptists in Ohio the past 11 years, died Sept. 18 in a health care center in Columbus. He was 57.

Bonham was in the center to recuperate from a stroke suffered in May which followed open heart surgery in April. He died, apparently, while asleep in the afternoon.

Funeral services will be held Sept. 21 at Dublin Baptist Church in Metro Columbus, where he and his family were members. Another memorial service will be conducted in Oklahoma City Sept. 23 with burial in Clinton, in western Oklahoma, later that day.

Bonham, born July 20, 1934 at Cordell, Okla., grew up in Clinton. He is survived by his wife, Faye, whom he married in July 1958. They have four children: Marilyn, Randy, Daniel and Tal David.

The family asked, in lieu of flowers, that gifts be made to the Ohio state missions offering. Coincidentally, the 1991 week of prayer and offering for state mission was scheduled the week of Bonham's death.

Bonham had been a Southern Baptist Convention leader in three states. He was president of the Arkansas convention, 1970-71; director of evangelism, Oklahoma state convention, 1973-80; and in Ohio since April 1980.

He graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University in 1957 and was awarded the doctor of theology degree in 1963 from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

He was a pastor of several Oklahoma churches and in Pine Bluff, Ark. He wrote several books on discipleship, evangelism and stewardship. In recent years, he compiled books on jokes.

Bonham was known for his preaching and sermons. He maintained a vigorous schedule of revival and pulpit supply preaching until a series of health complications necessitated a curtailment of the schedule.

During his recovery from the stroke, his associate, Orville H. Griffin, was appointed as acting executive director.

Less than week before his death, Bonham's personally-written letter of disability resignation was sent to the state executive board. Action would have been taken at the November annual meeting.

One of his first actions as executive director in Ohio was to launch an evangelism/church planting project called "104 Miracles." This was an effort to begin 104 new missions within a two-year span.

Thomas mum on abortion,
confirmation appears likely

By Tom Strode

WASHINGTON (BP)--Clarence Thomas survived five days of hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee without committing himself on abortion, among other issues, and appeared likely to be approved as the new associate justice on the United States Supreme Court.

The 14-member committee began hearings Sept. 10 on President Bush's nominee to replace retiring justice Thurgood Marshall. Thomas concluded his appearance before the committee late in the afternoon of Sept. 16.

His most fervent supporter in the Senate saw no reason for him not to be promoted from the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

"I must say that it is difficult for me to understand how, on the basis of the five days of hearings, anybody who had not previously decided to oppose Judge Thomas would oppose him," Sen. John Danforth, R.-Mo., said on the floor of the Senate Sept. 17. Danforth, for whom Thomas has worked twice, noted none of the committee members announced opposition to him before the hearings.

"It was in my view--admittedly a biased view--a remarkable performance," said Danforth. Outside witnesses began testifying before the committee after Thomas concluded his appearance Sept. 16. Their testimonies were expected to continue through Sept. 20. Chairman Joseph Biden, D.-Del., told Thomas at the close of his testimony he hoped the committee would vote within two weeks.

While Danforth and most observers believe Thomas' chances for approval are good, others were not sure.

"I think it will be close," said Herb Kohl, D.-Wis., a member of the committee. Kohl said he was not leaning in either direction.

During the hearings, Thomas was described by opponents of his nomination as "stonewalling" or undergoing a "confirmation conversion" on some issues, especially the right of privacy and natural law. Several of the eight Democratic members expressed frustration.

On the final day of Thomas' testimony, Sen. Patrick Leahy, D.-Vt., said he had "wanted to kinda look into the window of your soul if I could, although I find the shade pulled down quite a ways."

An "unartful dodge" was the way Biden described an answer.

One Republican, Sen. Arlin Specter of Pennsylvania, even said he was "not so sure but what your roots are not more important in trying to predict what you will do if confirmed than your writings. Your writings and your answers are at loggerheads."

Danforth described talk of a "confirmation conversion" as a "bum rap." Groups opposing Thomas had pulled his comments out of context and presented a caricature of the nominee, the Missouri senator said.

There was a great difference for him in how he approached issues as chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the 1980s and in how he has approached them as a federal judge since early 1990, Thomas said. "I advocated as an advocate," he said. "Now I rule as a judge."

The nomination of the 43-year-old black judge was opposed by a large number of groups, including the NAACP and three predominately black Baptist denominations, based on his variant approach from the current civil rights movement. Two other issues, abortion and natural law, however, received the most ardent attention from the committee.

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It was quickly evident some of the Democrats, especially Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D.-Ohio., and Leahy were most interested in discovering the judge's views on the right to abortion the Court found in the Roe v. Wade decision. It also became clear Thomas was not willing to disclose any opinion on the issue.

When first asked about a woman's right to an abortion by Biden, Thomas said, "I do not think that at this time I could maintain my impartiality as a member of the judiciary and comment on that specific case."

His responses to other questions on abortion followed this pattern. Near the end of a lengthy series of questions on abortion, Leahy asked Thomas to declare if he had decided about the issue without disclosing his opinion. The federal judge said he had not made "a decision one way or the other." Leahy said he had problems with such a response, considering speeches and articles in which Thomas had mentioned the right to life.

By early afternoon of the third day, Sen. Orrin Hatch, R.-Utah, said Thomas already had been asked more than 70 questions about abortion. David Souter, who was approved to the Court the year before by the committee, was asked only 36 times about abortion, Hatch said.

"One year ago this week, Judge Souter declined to say anything about abortion," Hatch said. "He was approved 13 to 1 in this committee . . . I think the burden is on those who would condition your confirmation on answering questions about abortion to tell the American people why you're being treated any differently from Souter."

Sen. Alan Simpson, R.-Wyo., who is pro-choice, quoted statements by Metzenbaum and Sen. Ted Kennedy, D.-Mass., at hearings in the early '80s in which they criticized any attempt to base confirmation of nominees on their philosophy on specific issues. It was obvious Thomas was being held to a different standard "because Sandra Day O'Connor winged through here without that, and so did [associate justice Anthony] Kennedy, and so did [associate justice Antonin] Scalia, and so did Souter," Simpson told the press.

Groups supporting abortion rights did not accept Thomas' promise to Simpson to approach abortion cases with an "open mind." Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which had withheld a position until the hearings, announced its opposition to Thomas on the second day.

"I do not have any hope that Judge Thomas' mind is not made up," said Kate Michelman, executive director of the National Abortion Rights Action League, after Thomas' final day of testimony. ". . . in these hearings, he has not done anything to allay those fears. . . . I think Judge Thomas will be the final nail in the coffin to our right to choose."

Thomas agreed there is a right to privacy in the Constitution, the reasoning the Court used in Roe v. Wade in legalizing a right to abortion.

The committee, led by Biden, questioned Thomas extensively on natural law, a view basically asserting all persons have rights that are derived from outside any man-made document.

Thomas, whose writings and speeches frequently had mentioned natural law, said his interest in this area began while grappling with the coexistence of slavery alongside the Declaration of Independence. While America's founding fathers believed in natural law, and it was the background for the Declaration, Thomas said, "I don't think that there is a direct role for natural law in constitutional adjudication.

"My job is to uphold the Constitution of the United States, not personal philosophy or political theories," he said.

While some observers called his response to natural law questions a switch from previous statements, Thomas and some of his supporters pointed to his February 1990 testimony before the committee upon his nomination to the federal bench. Then, the judge said he would apply the Constitution, not natural law, to cases before the Court.

On church-state issues, Thomas' responses seemed somewhat noncommittal. He indicated he had no problem with the Court's three-part Lemon test for determining establishment of religion cases, although he said the Court had "applied it with some difficulty."

Thomas expressed concern over the Court's opinion in last year's Oregon Employment Division v. Smith, which overturned the compelling state interest test in free exercise of religion cases, but did not say for sure he favored a return to the compelling state interest approach.

In his initial statement, Thomas referred to his childhood of poverty and segregation in Pin Point, Ga., as well as the grandparents who reared him because of his mother's economic hardship. He referred frequently during the hearings to his grandfather and the values he learned from him.

Thomas' wife, son, mother and sister sat near him during the hearings, as did Danforth and other advisers. Thomas served with Danforth in the Missouri attorney general's office and later on his Senate staff.

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Black Baptists cite
division over Thomas

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
9/19/91

WASHINGTON (BP)--The division in the black community over Clarence Thomas was manifested in the difference of opinion between two black Baptists attending the hearings on his nomination to the United States Supreme Court.

"Prophetically, National Baptists have to oppose Clarence Thomas," said Amos Brown, who said he represented three predominately black Baptist denominations.

"It doesn't make any difference about his being black. He embraces a political ideology that's diametrically opposed to the aspirations of African-Americans in this country as regards affirmative action, as regards distorting our background, as regards also permitting his colleagues and the press to make a big issue over this thing of his being self-made. There's no such person," Brown said outside the Senate Caucus Room, site of Thomas' testimony for five days between Sept. 10-16.

"The basic point is not just a question of Clarence Thomas the man . . . he's a pawn in the game of a conservative, reactionary, political right that's an elitist group, does not reflect the spirit of Jesus. Jesus was a man for the people of the land . . . morally and on principles, we have to oppose his nomination."

Brown said he represented the National Baptist Convention of America; National Baptist Convention, USA; and Progressive National Baptist Convention. All three groups, which have a total membership of about 14 million, Brown said, voted to oppose Thomas' nomination. The pastor of San Francisco's Third Baptist Church, he also is chairman of the Civil Rights Commission of the NBC, USA.

Willie King, a member of a Washington area church aligned with both the Southern Baptist Convention and American Baptist Churches, gave a different perspective.

"People who oppose him, people who say things about him - that he has forgotten where he came from - they don't know Judge Thomas," she said.

"I don't think, I know" he has the same beliefs as Martin Luther King Jr., said King, who said she worked on the late civil rights leader's executive staff at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

King has worked at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for 26 years, including Thomas' time as chairman of the EEOC in the 1980s. She served as the agency's financial manager for the last four years.

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"He has come to my office many a time and talked to me about the [civil rights] movement, about how the EEOC relates to and was born out of the movement," she said of Thomas. "He used to bring young proteges by my office and say, 'Willie, tell them about the movement. Tell them about Martin Luther King. Tell them what it means to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.' So a person that didn't have an interest or didn't respect those views certainly would not have done what he did."

King is a deacon at Montgomery Hills Baptist Church in Silver Spring, Md., and a member of the executive board of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention. She was one of several Thomas supporters, mostly black, who wore buttons such as "Take a Stand, So Clarence Can Take the Seat" and "If Clarence Can, I Can!" in the halls outside the hearing room.

She defended Thomas' approach at the EEOC of concentrating on individual rather than class-action cases, an approach for which he has been criticized.

"Thomas is concerned about the little people and getting the message to them," she said.

"Class action - a person doesn't know what that means. You can't get that many people to go together in small towns . . . and complain about their employer. There's no place else for them to work. But you may find one or maybe two people that will venture into an EEOC and file a complaint. And they'll do it on an individual basis as opposed to a class basis.

"What Thomas has done is open the doors of EEOC to little, individual people."

Brown rejected the notion opponents did not know Thomas well enough.

"Representatives of NAACP met privately with Judge Thomas before they reached their decision, and I think that they were fair," he said. ". . . they met with him in private to try to get an understanding where he was coming from. They left that meeting saying, 'No, we can't support this man.' And the vote on the part of that board was 49 to 1 to oppose him."

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Seminary presidents, 5 others
study seminary funding formula

By Louis Moore

Baptist Press
9/19/91

NASHVILLE (BP) -- The presidents of the six Southern Baptist theological seminaries and a committee of five Southern Baptists experienced in the field of education met Sept. 18 to study the possibility of revising the formula used to determine the amount of Cooperative Program money flowing annually to each seminary.

No revisions were acted upon at the meeting. Most of the meeting time was spent reviewing the current formula and present situations at two of the six seminaries, Southeastern in North Carolina and Golden Gate in California.

The Nashville meeting was held under Executive Committee subcommittee "background rules," which means the essence of the meeting can be reported but without direct quotations from participants.

The current formula was developed by a consultant named R. Orin Cornett in 1975 and adopted by the SBC Executive Committee that year. Over the years that formula has undergone minor revisions on several occasions. The formula itself is a complicated mathematical exercise that attempts to compute a variety of factors, including average student expenditure in other non-SBC seminaries, the average enrollment in Southern Baptist seminaries, and the wide range in size of student populations in each of the six Southern Baptist seminaries.

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In essence, the formula assigns a percentage to each seminary, and that percentage is then used to determine how much each seminary receives from the amount approved by the Southern Baptist Convention for theological education. Together, the six seminaries receive 100 percent of the allocation.

Calls for revision or at least explanation of the complicated formula have come from a variety of sources, including Executive Committee member Kenneth R. Barnett of Colorado.

The situations at Southeastern and Golden Gate have also put pressure on the formula.

Golden Gate's leaders continue to insist the school faces severe financial hardship because of its location in the San Francisco Bay area, a part of the country which is expensive and where Southern Baptists are few in number. The seminary's leaders say its location and surroundings limit its ability to hire faculty, attract students, receive grants and compete on a level playing field with the other five seminaries. To help offset part of the problem, the SBC is currently giving Golden Gate an extra \$200,000 a year for five years to build up its endowment.

Southeastern's leaders, on the other hand, insist that school faces a unique financial situation because of the turmoil that resulted from its abrupt transition from a moderate to a conservative school. In 1987, the number of students attending the school plummeted from more than 1,000 to about 600 in the wake of a walkout by key moderate administrators of the school. The moderate administration was replaced with conservative leadership, but faculty members did not leave, thus producing a situation where enrollment was down and most faculty and facility expenses remained stable.

According to the formula, the drop in student enrollment should have precipitated a decline in the school's income from the Cooperative Program. To stabilize the situation, the Executive Committee froze that part of the formula which computes the average student enrollment over a three-year period. The freeze is scheduled to end by budget year 1994-95.

Southeastern's leaders say they thought the freeze on student enrollment in the formula would get them through the transition, but they now realize the amount of time needed to solve the crisis is going to be longer than they had expected. They say they need more time because of unexpected financial complications resulting from the old faculty's intransigence and the attacks by some of the former moderate seminary leaders which resulted in a sharp decline in financial support from regional foundations and alumni.

Southeastern has reported 17 of its faculty will be departing the school over the next two to three years, in retirement and early retirement packages worked out recently. The school's leaders say development will eventually provide them the window of opportunity to balance their budget with student enrollments.

Leaders of other seminaries said in the meeting they are suffering financially because money that should be flowing to their institutions is instead being used to undergird Southeastern and Golden Gate. Others in the meeting disagreed about the money going to Golden Gate and said if the extra \$200,000 wasn't going to that school it would not be going to any of the other five.

The group will meet again following the Executive Committee meeting in hville in February.

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Three prominent New Mexico
Baptists killed in plane crash

By J. B. Fowler Jr.

Baptist Press
9/19/91

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (BP)--Three prominent New Mexico Baptists, including the director of the Centrifuge program at Glorieta, were killed in the crash of their single-engine private plane Sept. 16 near Elida, N.M.

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The three -- Claude McAfee, 53; his oldest daughter, Leslie Bennett, 28; and her husband, Derek Bennett, 31 -- were en route from Portales, N.M., to Artesia, N.M.

McAfee, the pilot, lived in Arch, N.M., with his wife, Nadine. The Bennetts were in the process of moving to Artesia.

The plane left the Portales Municipal Airport at about 9:15 a.m. Monday, Sept. 16. When the three did not report in later in the day, the Civil Air Patrol was notified the plane had not arrived in Artesia.

Air and ground rescue crews were prepared to begin a search for the plane early Tuesday morning, Sept. 17, but fog, light rain and overcast skies delayed the search. Later in the morning a rancher saw smoke from an isolated area on his ranch about 18 miles southwest of Elida, N.M., and upon investigation found the charred remains of the plane.

All on board were dead.

Bennett had just been called as pastor of West Main Baptist Church, in Artesia. Sunday, Sept. 22, would have been the couple's first day on the field.

According to Jack Bennett, pastor of First Baptist Church, Elida, and Derek's father, the younger Bennett and his wife were on their way to Artesia to finish painting a home they had just bought. They had spent the summer at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center, Glorieta, N.M.

He and his wife had just completed their second summer with the Sunday School Board's Centrifuge Program at Glorieta. Centrifuge, a recreational and Bible study camp for youth in grades 8-12, is sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's recreation department.

This summer Bennett was director of the Glorieta Centrifuge and was Centrifuge pastor in the summer of 1990. In both 1990 and 1991, his wife, Leslie, was assistant director.

The 1991 Centrifuge program, which concluded just a few weeks ago, had 6,056 participants and recorded 91 professions of faith.

Bennett was a 1984 graduate of Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, and had attended Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Texas, from 1978-1981. He was a May 1991 master of divinity graduate from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth.

She was a 1985 marketing and business administration graduate of Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, and took a degree in accounting from Fort Worth's Texas Wesleyan University in 1991.

Her father, Claude McAfee, was a deacon and Sunday School teacher in Emmanuel Baptist Church, Portales. His brother, Wes McAfee, is director of missions for New Mexico's San Juan Association.

Bennett was a former pastor apprentice at Trinity Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas, and both he and his wife had served as journeyman missionaries to Australia from 1986 to 1988. During that time, he was associate pastor and minister of youth at Casino Baptist Church, in Casino, New South Wales.

Funeral services are pending.

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Car thief shoots at,
narrowly misses missionary

By Donald D. Martin

Baptist Press
9/19/91

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (BP)--Car thieves shot at Southern Baptist missionary Glenn Simmons Sept. 14 as he tried to reclaim his stolen van in a suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa.

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Simmons, from Franklinton, La., narrowly escaped injury when a bullet from a handgun, fired by one of the thieves, ripped through his sleeve.

As Simmons was preparing for a walk in the early morning, his neighbor alerted him several men were pushing Simmons' van down a nearby street.

Simmons and his neighbor jumped into another car and chased the thieves. They caught up with them several blocks away where they found the van parked with two men sitting in the front seats. The neighbor began shouting at the men, who then calmly left the van and walked toward a parked truck.

As Simmons approached the van, a third man jumped out and ran toward the truck. But after a few steps, the man spun around and shot at Simmons, piercing the right sleeve of his T-shirt. The armed man then ran to the truck and drove away with the other two thieves followed by another car with two or three men in it, Simmons said.

"I was shaken up," Simmons recalled. "I didn't see it coming. When the man came around the van, I saw him turn and look at me. He was about 25 or 30 feet away. It wasn't until he shot at me that I realized he even had a gun. I thank the Lord that He intervened and made the guy a terrible shot that time."

Simmons believes the men had pushed the van to a side street because the van's security system had prevented them from quickly starting the engine. Car theft is so rampant in the Johannesburg area that security systems are required before insurance companies will insure vehicles, he explained.

As Simmons chased the car thieves, his wife, Sherry, from Jefferson, Texas, called the police. She then began praying with the Simmonses' four children in the living room.

"I'm so thankful to my wife who had the spiritual maturity to call the family together and pray, instead of running out after these guys," he said. "I don't think I'll do that again."

The local police said there is little chance of apprehending the thieves, Simmons said. He is having the van's damaged security system and electrical wiring repaired. "It (the van) will be sort of a statement of how the Lord takes care of His unarmed fools who stupidly chase down armed gangs and win."

Another reminder is the bullet hole in his New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary T-Shirt. Simmons is a graduate of that seminary.

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Alaska increases percent
to SBC Cooperative Program

Baptist Press
9/19/91

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (BP)--Messengers to the Alaska Baptist Convention approved a 1992 budget of more than \$1.6 million with 33 percent, or \$592,915 expected from the Cooperative Program gifts of the state's churches.

A. B. Colyar, a layman at Grandview Baptist Church in Anchorage, was elected to a second term as president. Walter Davidson, pastor of Faith Baptist Church, Anchorage, was elected first vice president, and Paul Brewer, pastor of Solid Rock Baptist Church, Anchorage, was elected to a second term as second vice president.

Messengers voted to increase from 32 to 33 percent the amount of the convention's Cooperative Program budget which would be channeled to World Missions through the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program.

Bob Jones, pastor of Grandview Baptist Church, brought the convention sermon.

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Baptist Press

A total of 166 messengers and 96 visitors registered for the annual meeting at South Anchorage Baptist Church in August.

The 1992 convention will be held at First Baptist Church, Kenai, Aug. 3-4.

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