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Unpublished BSSB history emerges
as issue at Baptist conference By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
4/30/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--A disputed book on the history of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's first 100 years remains unpublished. But a former TV reporter's reference to its 13th chapter has rekindled interest in the board's 1990 decision against publishing the book.

Former Nashville TV reporter Tom Lee referred to the book by Baptist historian Leon McBeth, its 13th chapter and the Sunday School Board's then-controversial decision during the April 27-28 "Baptists & the News Media" Historical Commission conference in Nashville.

Lee requested at the conclusion of his presentation in a panel of news media April 28 that "chapter 13" of McBeth's book be included as an attachment to his text in the Historical Commission's written record of the meeting. A manuscript of an apparent portion of chapter 13 was included as one of four "attachments" to the written text he gave to the Historical Commission.

Lee shared a copy of the chapter 13 manuscript with Baptist Press, along with an apparent portion of chapter 14. He said the manuscripts had been given to him by a confidential source.

Because of uncertainties over contracts and copyright of the manuscript, Baptist Press has chosen not to print direct quotes from the text or attempt to summarize McBeth's portrayal of various events in the Sunday School Board's recent history.

Additionally, the manuscripts are not the final version of the text, McBeth said after Baptist Press faxed them to him for comment. McBeth is professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Lynn E. May Jr., executive director of the Historical Commission, said the commission has no plans to publish "any part" of McBeth's manuscript. "It doesn't belong to us to publish," May said. "That is a matter between the author and the Sunday School Board."

McBeth was contracted by the board to write the history for a fee of \$18,000.

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May said various papers from the conference, including Lee's, will be published in the July issue of the commission's magazine, Baptist History and Heritage. He said the commission has not decided what reference, if any, will be made to the attachments Lee included with his text.

McBeth, in an April 29 interview with Baptist Press, maintained "there is no agreement" over ownership of the copyright of the manuscript, although he acknowledged receiving a fee for writing it. He declined to say whether he will seek another publisher for the book.

But, according to Michael Arrington, Sunday School Board vice president for corporate services, "Dr. McBeth was paid for the manuscript. The board copyrighted the manuscript. We have no plans to change our earlier decision not to publish."

Lee, in his presentation at the Historical Commission meeting, recounted some of the controversy surrounding the Sunday School Board's decision in 1990 against publishing McBeth's 100-year history of the board, "Celebrating Heritage and Hope."

Lee, now a law student at Vanderbilt University, stated McBeth's manuscript "included less-than-complimentary references to many of those who rose to denominational power during the political and ecclesiastical struggle of the 1980s, including those who came to the Sunday School Board."

Lee quoted a 1989 letter from the board's Nashville attorney, Robert P. Thomas, to a Sunday School Board official admitting he was expressing a non-legal opinion but stating: "(I am) most concerned about what I consider to be a noticeable bias on the part of the author against the conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention."

A BSSB trustee committee voted to recommend against publication of the book during an August 1990 meeting in Nashville and the board's administration subsequently made a decision to stop publication. Baptist Press quoted Indiana pastor Donald Moore, then-chairman of the board's general publishing committee, as explaining the board did not want "to fan the flames of controversy" in the Southern Baptist Convention. "The book was unbalanced."

Lee, in his presentation, stated his conclusion that the history book incident, particularly after trustees became aware of Thomas's letter urging caution, was a key factor in Sunday School Board President Lloyd Elder seeking early retirement in 1991.

McBeth objected to Lee's presentation during a subsequent conference dialogue time.

"I deny the charge that the (book) is slanted," McBeth said. "I affirm to my colleagues that the work will stand the scrutiny of fair-minded people, that it tells the story and tells the story honestly."

McBeth charged Lee with making an "inaccurate, incomplete and incredibly biased" presentation. "If you would have opportunity to see the material that was written in context, you would revise your presentation."

McBeth also voiced concern over his work being critiqued before a group of fellow Baptist historians "when I have no opportunity for them to see the writing I did and make their own conclusions."

McBeth said he "tried to be fair and even-handed in my evaluation of all of the leaders of the Baptist Sunday School Board, all the way from (founder) J.M. Frost in 1891 up to the present."

Concerning Elder, McBeth stated that at one point in the editing process every reference to Elder that was "not extremely complimentary" in his manuscript "had been edited out, much to my surprise," by BSSB staff.

Lee responded by denying he had "an axe to grind against the manuscript or you, sir."

"I attempted to cite the concerns, at least the quotes, raised by individuals involved in this struggle," Lee said, admitting he does not know "the veracity of each and every statement" various individuals made.

But, Lee said, "I believe I have told that story fairly."

Lee also said it "is a tragedy" that Southern Baptists at large have not had opportunity to examine the book for themselves.

McBeth, in a subsequent interview with Baptist Press, said, "I still stand by the text. I went over the text again entirely last month and I still regard it as an honest, accurate and fair presentation of 100 years of ministry of this great Bible-teaching agency. I love the Sunday School Board. I would never do anything knowingly to hurt it."

McBeth added, "As long as these public accusations are repeated against me, I have no means of defense until the reading public can examine the document for themselves."

Concerning his comment during the Historical Commission meeting that negative references to Elder were removed at one point in the editing process, McBeth also said, "I stand behind the work as it was finally agreed upon. I was a part of that editorial process."

Meanwhile, Baptist Press, from a confidential source other than Lee, secured a copy of attorney Thomas's letter. The letter affirms the attorney's concern about a bias.

Thomas is not a Southern Baptist but was representing Boulton, Cummings, Conners and Berry law offices, the board's general counsel, at the time of the manuscript dispute.

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Houston SBC June meeting
forecast: 23,500-25,000

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
4/30/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists will return to Houston for an annual convention meeting for the first time since 1979 with as many as 25,000 messengers expected June 15-17 at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

Lee Porter, SBC registration secretary, told Baptist Press he expects between 23,500 and 25,000 messengers to register for the 136th session. There were 17,956 registered for the convention's first-ever meeting in Indianapolis last year and 15,760 in Houston in 1979, generally regarded as the start of the "conservative resurgence" and more than a decade of turbulence for the nation's largest evangelical denomination.

Porter has had an impressive record in predicting messenger registration since 1978, including a prediction of 18,000 in Indianapolis last year.

Houston has hosted the SBC annual meeting six previous times: 1915, 1926, 1953, 1958, 1968 and 1979.

With spouses, visitors and guests, total attendance at the 1993 annual meeting could approach 28,000-30,000, SBC officials said. Most of the hotels in the downtown area, closest to the convention center, have been filled but there are still rooms available in the outlying areas, like the Galleria area west of the downtown and the Astrodome area southwest of the convention center.

Although Porter's registration prediction is considerably higher for Houston than Indianapolis, the largest SBC registration total of 45,519 in Dallas in 1985 apparently will remain unchallenged.

An unknown is how much the "Masonic issue" will swell the registration figure, Porter said. The SBC Home Mission Board will bring a report and recommendation on Freemasonry membership in SBC churches that the matter primarily be decided by local churches and by individual church members. Although it is generally felt that the HMB's recommendation has diffused the issue, Porter said nobody knows for sure.

Porter said registration would open at 4 p.m. Sunday, June 13, and 8 a.m. Monday and Tuesday, June 14-15. Messengers should take the escalators up to the ballroom area upon entering the convention center, Porter said. There will be signs directions people to the registration area upon entering the building.

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Messengers qualify based on either membership or contributions by their churches, Porter said, although no church can send more than 10 messengers to the meeting. Article III of the SBC constitution notes one messenger can be sent by a church "which is in friendly cooperation with this Convention and sympathetic with its purposes and work and has during the fiscal year preceding been a bona fide contributor to the Convention's work."

One additional messenger from each church is allotted for every 250 members or for each \$250 paid to the work of the convention during the fiscal year preceding the annual meeting, according to Article III.

Porter emphasized that messengers have their cards completely filled out and that messengers be elected by their churches, even though they may be the pastor or a denominational worker. "They must be elected by their churches," Porter said. Messenger cards are available at state convention offices.

"Churches should elect only their required messengers; alternate messengers do not register," Porter said. If messengers do not have cards, they will have to secure a statement from the church and will have to go before the credentials committee, Porter said, which takes considerable time.

Porter said, except at the beginning of the registration process, messengers can expect to be processed within five minutes.

When registered, messengers will receive a badge, ballots and may purchase a Book of Reports for \$4, Porter said. The Book of Reports provides reports from all the SBC agencies and institutions as well as copies of their recommendations to the convention.

For more information about the registration procedure, Porter can be reached at (904) 785-8596.

Porter, 63, asked by Baptist Press, said he would allow his name to be presented for re-election as SBC registration secretary. Porter has been re-elected for 14 years even though he has had opposition the past few years.

He is the assistant to the pastor and administrator at St. Andrew Baptist Church in Panama City, Fla., and was, prior to last year, with the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville for 15 years.

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Key SBC committee
appointments made

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
4/30/93

HOUSTON (BP)--Appointments to two key committees to serve during the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, June 15-17, have been announced by SBC President H. Edwin Young.

Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Houston, announced the appointment of the Committee on Committees and the Committee on Resolutions April 30. The SBC bylaws require the president to announce the appointments "at least 45 days in advance of the meeting."

The credentials and tellers committees must be made public 30 days before the annual meeting, according to the SBC bylaws.

COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEES

The committee has 68 members, 2 from each of the 34 state or regional conventions qualified for representation on SBC entities.

SBC Bylaw 21 says the Committee on Committees "shall nominate all special committees authorized during the sessions of the convention not otherwise provided for." The usual responsibility of the committee is to nominate members of the Committee on Nominations, which, in turn, nominates trustees to serve on the 23 national entities of the SBC.

Young named C. B. (Bill) Hogue, executive director of the California Southern Baptist Convention, as the committee chairman.

The committee includes two-thirds clergy or denominationally-related to one-third laypersons, the tradition which follows the seminary trustees' model. Young identified the nominees as either "minister" or "layperson."

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ALABAMA -- Gary Pearman, layperson, Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville; Henry Lyon, III, minister, First Baptist Church, Montgomery.

ALASKA -- Keith Miles, minister, Muldoon Baptist Church, Denali; Dean Nichols, layperson, First Baptist Church, Kenai.

ARIZONA -- Connie Sweeny, layperson, Mt. View Baptist Church, Tucson; Tim Warren, minister, Lifegate Baptist Church, Glendale.

ARKANSAS -- Mary Scroder, layperson, First Baptist Church, Little Rock; Earl Adams, minister, First Baptist Church, Lincoln.

CALIFORNIA -- Frankie Harvey, layperson, Emmanuel, San Jose; Hogue, Oakview Baptist Church, Auberry.

COLORADO -- Bill Schmidt, layperson, Applewood Baptist Church, Denver; Ron Moore, minister, Rifle Southern Baptist Church, Rifle.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA -- Paul Huber, layperson, Capital Hill Metro Church, Washington; Jack Marcom, minister, Ft. Washington Baptist Church, Ft. Washington, Md.

FLORIDA -- A.F. "Sonny" Myers, layperson, First Baptist Church, Panama City; Ed Johnson, minister, First Baptist Church, Ocala.

GEORGIA -- Bill Gowin, layperson, First Baptist Church, Rocky Face; Wayne Hamrick, minister, New Liberty Baptist Church, Ringgold.

HAWAII -- Warren Stevens, minister, Kihei Baptist Church, Kihei; Paul Oyer, layperson, Olivet Baptist Church, Kaneohe.

ILLINOIS -- Caffy Whitney, layperson, Glenfield Baptist Church, Glen Ellyn; Patrick Stewart, minister, First Baptist Church, St. Charles.

INDIANA -- Jerry Adamson, minister, Chapelwood Baptist Church, Indianapolis; Ellen Marcum, layperson, Graceland Baptist Church, New Albany.

KANSAS-NEBRASKA -- Dick Schmidt, layperson, First Baptist Church, Belle Plaine, Kan.; Don Holt, layperson, First Southern Baptist Church, Topeka, Kan.

KENTUCKY -- Conley Chism, layperson, Shively Baptist Church, Louisville; R. Stephen Ross, layperson, Vine Grove Baptist Church, Vine Grove.

LOUISIANA -- Jimmy Brossette, minister, Calvary Baptist Church, Alexandria; Mark Brister, minister, Broadmoor, Shreveport.

MARYLAND-DELAWARE -- Don Loring, Montrose Baptist Church, Rockville; Jeff Russell, minister, Wildwood Baptist Church, Bethesda.

MICHIGAN -- Jeffrey Kibert, minister, New Prospect Baptist Church, Ypsilanti; Timothy Gibelyou, layperson, Fellowship Baptist Church, Saline.

MISSISSIPPI -- Malcolm Lewis, minister, Northcrest Baptist Church, Meridian; Barbara Williamson, layperson, First Baptist Church, Gulfport.

MISSOURI -- Russell Shinpoch, minister, First Baptist Church, Arnold; Jeff Barnes, minister, First Baptist Church, Blue Springs.

NEVADA -- Kathleen Kelley, layperson, College Park Baptist Church, Las Vegas; Johnny Nance, minister, Spring Valley Baptist Church, Las Vegas.

NEW ENGLAND -- Ken Tanner, minister, Screven Baptist Church, Hampton, N.H.; Joe Blalock, minister, Emmanuel Baptist Church, Chickapee, Mass.

NEW MEXICO -- Harvey Collier, layperson, First Baptist Church, Albuquerque; Harry Pittman, minister, First Baptist Church, Lovington.

NEW YORK -- James Boone, minister, Calvary Baptist Church, Canton; Trish Simmons, layperson, Clifton Park.

NORTH CAROLINA -- Mark Corts, minister, Calvary Baptist Church, Winston-Salem; Ted Stone, layperson, Grace Baptist Church, Durham.

NORTHWEST -- Terry Little, minister, Pines Baptist Church, Spokane, Wash.; Stanley Hughes, minister, Richland Baptist Church, Richland, Wash.

OHIO -- Robert Botts, minister, Orrville Baptist Church, Orrville; Jim Hunt, layperson, Gahanna Baptist Church, Gahanna.

OKLAHOMA -- Max Barnett, minister, Trinity Baptist Church, Norman; Clayton Spriggs, minister, First Baptist Church, Edmond.

PENNSYLVANIA-SOUTH JERSEY -- Bryan Horton, layperson, First Baptist Church, Paoli, Penn.; Melvin Felts, minister, North Park Baptist Church, Wexford, Penn.

SOUTH CAROLINA -- Mary Lou McKee, layperson, Eureka Baptist Church, Anderson; Daniel Hedgepeth, Dutchfork Baptist Church, Ballentine.

TENNESSEE -- Brad Rudge, layperson, Two Rivers Baptist Church, Nashville; Jerry Tidwell, minister, Grace Baptist Church, Tullahoma.

TEXAS -- Bradley Ray, layperson, Prestonwood Baptist Church, Dallas; John Bisagno, minister, First Baptist Church, Houston.

UTAH-IDAHO -- Michael McGuire, minister, Kimberly, Idaho; Ronald D. Smith, minister, First Baptist Church, Provo, Utah.

VIRGINIA -- Jim Bradshaw, minister, Norview Baptist Church, Norfolk; Floyd W. Harris, layperson, Jerusalem Baptist Church, Fairfax Station.

WEST VIRGINIA -- Ed Taylor, Freedom Baptist Church, Nutterfort; James Henderson, Immanuel Baptist Church, Princeton.

RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE

The Resolutions Committee is composed of 10 members, three of whom must be members of the SBC Executive Committee. The committee, according to Bylaw 21, has the "duty ... to prepare and submit to the convention resolutions which the committee deems appropriate for adoption and to report on all matters submitted to it by the convention, with or without recommendation or amendments."

The bylaw also asks that proposed resolutions be sent to the committee 30 days before the annual meeting.

Young named James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Snellville, Ga. as the committee chairman.

Executive Committee members are: Ronnie Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark; Jim Wells, pastor of Oakwood Baptist Church, Kansas City, Mo.; and Merritt.

Other members are: Charles Sullivan, executive director of the Indiana Baptist Convention; Robert Reccord, First Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va.; Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, Ala.; Andrew Cheung, Orange County Chinese Baptist Church, Anaheim, Calif.; Dave Stillie, Seaman Baptist Church, Topeka, Kansas; Ben Rowell, Rogers Baptist Church, Rogers, Ark.; and Joel Gregory, First Baptist Church, Dallas.

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**Allegations of impropriety circulate
as Baptist teacher fired from job**

**Baptist Press
4/30/93**

By Marty Groll

NORTH POLE, Alaska (BP)--A trustee leader for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board is fighting to save his 17-year teaching career as allegations that he is improperly involved with students have rocked this small-town bedroom community outside Fairbanks.

Rumors of sexual misconduct started circulating in the absence of details after the trustee, Rodney G. Duncan, was suspended with pay March 15 from North Pole High School, where he taught language arts in grades 9-12. He was fired April 7. Although police are investigating the highly publicized situation, no criminal charges have been filed.

Duncan will appeal his firing to the school board during a June 7 public hearing at which he said he wants everything to become public. He has asked for an earlier hearing. Until the hearing, neither he nor the school district will comment on why he was fired.

Duncan is chairman for the Foreign Mission Board's Asia regional committee and the son of Bill Duncan, executive director for the Alaska Baptist Convention. He has been an FMB trustee since 1988.

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Answering numerous student inquiries about Duncan's absence, school officials at first said he was suffering an extended illness, then announced he had been suspended pending investigation of allegations by a student, said Gary Thomas, Duncan's pastor at Cross Roads Baptist Church, in a telephone interview with Baptist Press.

Duncan works with youth and music at Cross Roads in addition to his full-time teaching position.

"It's a witch-hunt," Duncan told Baptist Press. "It would be funny if it wasn't so serious." Duncan believes many of the school officials' objections to him relate to his living out a Christian witness as youth director of his church.

Duncan's dismissal angered many parents who say they know the 39-year-old bachelor as someone they can trust with their children -- either in his modest North Pole home where he maintains an open-door policy for students or on educational and church-related trips to Europe and elsewhere like those he has chaperoned through the years. Duncan is recognized as one of the school's most effective teachers. He won "Teacher of the Year" designation by a student vote in 1992 from among the school's 45 teachers.

"I've known him for 11 years. I know I can go over to his house any time, day or night, and nothing inappropriate is going on," said Jeannie McAlpin, whose teen-age son Jay spent three weeks with Duncan earlier this year while his parents were out of town. "There's nothing for him to hide. My son says Rodney's one of the few people he knows who walks what he talks."

Not only Duncan, but a host of North Pole High School students, parents, teacher colleagues and other friends maintain he is innocent of wrongdoing in about a dozen specific charges made by the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. Students have even picketed district offices en masse and staged sit-outs during class periods in three separate support rallies.

Seniors recently voted for Duncan to be their graduation speaker, as he has been four other times. They also asked him to chaperon their all night non-alcohol graduation party.

"It seems like they've got an awful weak case and have attacked a person with an awful high character," said pastor Thomas. "Rodney's guilty of caring, and some warped minds have misread it." Thomas is among a handful of Duncan's closest friends and relatives who have seen the school district's letter of dismissal.

The situation also involves an investigation by the Fairbanks detachment of the Alaska State Troopers into a complaint filed by the Department of Family and Youth Services.

The complaint emerged from a foster parent's phone call to the school involving a "transaction" between Duncan and a troubled 16-year-old boy during a Saturday school detention period, said Charles Moore, a school district official who investigated the complaint.

Duncan said the transaction in question was nothing more than a scrawled out series of questions and answers passed back and forth on scratch paper between him and the student. He said he was trying to find out what kind of work the student could find to do so he would quit doodling in the detention period. Duncan said he discarded the note paper.

Duncan further alleged the boy is a chronic "problem student" who used him as an alibi when his foster mother approached him about wrongdoing. "I'm not even worried about the criminal investigation because I know they don't have anything," Duncan said. "What I'm worried about is my employment and my reputation."

In a letter to the editor of Fairbanks' only daily newspaper, Deirdre Shipman, the student's foster mother, accused Duncan of making "lewd sexual advances or suggestions" toward current and past male students. Moore said because of state guidelines dealing with child abuse he was forced to report the mother's suspicions to Family and Youth Services.

Moore's only comment about the transaction in question was to say it "was part of the basic problem that determined Mr. Duncan's release."

He said Duncan's dismissal came not on the suspicion of criminal activity, but because a subsequent three-and-a-half week investigation revealed "some issues ... more related to the profession of teaching." These issues involve "teacher standards in Alaska" and "the responsibility of a teacher in teacher-student relationships," he said.

Several people interviewed agree that school district investigators have surely found former students who voiced discomfort with Duncan's open statements that he loved them and wanted the best for them. They also say there have been reports that he favored youth in school who were members of his church.

"Rodney's been the kind of teacher who has counseled school kids against sex, and talked about not having sex, and counseled kids about getting on with their lives and not doing drugs," said McAlpin. "If someone called and said, 'I need to talk, Mr. Duncan,' Rodney's been there for that kid.

"We have a very liberal (school district) superintendent who cannot handle a Christian teacher having this type of relationship with children," McAlpin said. "I think they (school officials) want a more sterile environment where teachers go to school and they just teach. Probably in their eyes he has crossed the lines.

"But you can't say to Rodney, 'You can't have kids in your home,' when he's the head of the church youth group and has Bible study in his home. And also because he is a well-known Christian, he does have kids coming to him all the time asking him spiritual questions."

Christian legal sources say the freedom to respond to such inquiries is becoming more conditional. For instance, in late 1991, U.S. courts upheld the right of a state university to restrict a teacher's religious activities, said John Paff, a spokesman for the National Legal Foundation, an evangelical public interest law firm.

Paff cited a case in which an Alabama University professor was required to stop holding out-of-classroom optional meetings to discuss the evidences of God in human physiology, the subject he taught in the classroom. Federal courts agreed with the university and the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal.

One teacher colleague who asked not to be identified said Duncan has acted in his professional life like all good teachers should. "When you're a teacher who cares about kids, they'll come to you.

"But he always drew a clear line between what he did in school and out of school," said the colleague. "In my very heart of hearts, I know that Rodney did nothing wrong," the teacher said. "I think the more the school district looked at Rodney's commitment to his faith, the more they wanted to get him."

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Historical Commission organizes
forum on Baptists & news media By Carol Woodfin

Baptist Press
4/30/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Trust and freedom of the press remain hot issues for Southern Baptists, according to speakers and participants at the annual meeting of the Historical Commission and Southern Baptist Historical Society, April 27-28. Perceptions of recent events in Southern Baptist life and the role of the press varied widely at the "Baptists and the News Media" conference, attended by about 170 people.

Until 1990, the Southern Baptist Convention's news system was "wholly dependent on trust," claimed Greg Warner, executive editor of Associated Baptist Press. Agencies trusted their journalists, Baptist Press trusted these journalists and state papers trusted Baptist Press.

With the 1990 Executive Committee firings of Baptist Press director Al Shackelford and news editor Dan Martin, apparently because the Executive Committee "felt their cause had been misrepresented by Baptist Press," said Warner, Southern Baptists could no longer claim an "objective news service ... Trust was replaced by intimidation."

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Warner pointed to what he termed a "systemic failure" in SBC news channels, since agency journalists report on the work of their own employers.

"Southern Baptists will never again have an objective news system that is so dependent on the discipline of trust," Warner claimed.

"This is not to suggest that Baptist journalists, including the new crop of movement-endorsed journalists, have lost their commitment to objectivity. Some may even be interested in reform."

But, Warner said, "Reform from outside the system offers more promise. Associated Baptist Press is an attempt to do just that." As an "independent, self-supporting news service," ABP, said Warner, is an experiment which will "test the depth of Baptist commitment to freedom of the press."

Herb Hollinger, vice president for convention news of the SBC's Executive Committee, emphasized the dilemma faced by Baptist Press prior to 1990 when "it was the responsibility of the vice president for public relations of the Executive Committee." Baptist Press faced "the age-old dilemma of news versus public relations."

But, Hollinger said, the separation by the Executive Committee of its public relations and news service functions "may have saved Baptist Press from total collapse."

Hollinger noted the Executive Committee has kept its word "to preserve and protect the journalistic competency and integrity of the news service."

The committee hired trained journalists as director and editor of the news service, "blunting criticism that after the firings in 1990 Baptist Press would be operated by Executive Committee propaganda artists," Hollinger said.

Most state paper editors "continue to use Baptist Press without reservation," he said.

When asked if he could justify a continued need for Associated Baptist Press, given the integrity of Baptist Press's current staff, Greg Warner replied that the BP system was still flawed, since its staff was in the position of reporting on its own employers.

Hollinger, however, commented that ABP could not claim to be free from a similar dilemma since it receives more than \$63,000 annually from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Baptist moderates as well as funds from Virginia, North Carolina and other state Baptist conventions.

Warner countered that CBF funding comprised only 28 percent of ABP's budget and therefore the problem was not the same.

Louis Moore, director of media and product development for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, recounted examples of Southern Baptist limits on freedom of the press during his tenure as editor of Baylor University's student paper, the *Lariat*, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's *The Tie*, long before the current SBC controversy.

Administrators, said Moore, often squelched stories on controversial issues such as civil rights, the expulsion of seminary students and the Vietnam war. Moore said: "I am not as convinced as some ... that Southern Baptists have a long and glorious and unblemished history of telling the truth and trusting the people."

Instead of objectivity, which he felt was impossible, Moore said: "I believe the goal of journalism should be that of fairness. Fairness means that a journalist listens to and reports what is being said from all sides, even when he or she may disagree with one side or the other."

R. Albert Mohler Jr., current editor of Georgia Baptists' *Christian Index* and president-elect of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, speaking on trends in Baptist state paper editing, noted, "The tensions between the paper's critical and promotional roles have framed most of the debates" on the freedom of the denominational press.

"Though most state papers ensure a certain degree of freedom to those assigned editorial responsibilities, this editorial freedom is a delegated privilege, not an inherent right," Mohler said.

"Constitutionally, guarantees of press freedom are extended to the publishers of materials, and not to those under their employ. In the case of the Baptist state papers," Mohler said, "the state convention often functions legally and operatively as publisher."

"As the 1990s unfold, the role and future of state Baptist newspapers are unclear," Mohler said. "The emergence of competing denominational program structures and the likelihood of denominational restructuring loom large on this horizon."

Mohler also noted: "The absence of sustained theological discourse and the radical reduction of doctrinal material in the state papers is both a symptom and a cause of the denomination's theological amnesia. This has left the papers somewhat at a loss to respond to a prolonged theological controversy."

Several speakers dealt with the relationship between Baptists and the secular news media. Tom Lee, formerly a reporter with WSMV-TV in Nashville, described his experiences covering the 1989-91 Sunday School Board controversy surrounding its decision not to publish Leon McBeth's history of the board and events leading up to the early retirement of board President Lloyd Elder.

Lee claimed the secular media have an important role in denominational life "as watchdog and investigator." He noted the difference between the secular media and the denominational press: "In the church, we seek to build and maintain community. In the secular media, we seek to report facts about the community and let people decide whether the community is worth maintaining or not."

The denominational press faces difficulties, he said, when it uncovers "truths that have little to do with building and maintaining community."

W.C. Fields, former vice president for public relations for the Executive Committee, contrasted recent media attention to SBC events with 1845, when one reporter covered the founding of the SBC in Augusta, Ga.

Fields claimed the mass media can be an effective means of reaching people with the gospel, which means "good news." Interest in religious news is high, Fields asserted. Calling Christ's "life, death, resurrection and influence on human affairs" the "greatest news story in world history," Fields said, "It is our mission and our great privilege to proclaim that message of redeeming love to the nation and to the nations."

The 1976 election of Jimmy Carter, a "born-again" Southern Baptist, to the United States presidency created "the biggest wave of positive, constructive, uplifting attention Southern Baptists have ever received from secular sources," said Fields.

"Unfortunately," he continued, the "most devastating, long-lasting cause of media attention for the past decade or so has been the continuing, unseemly political struggle for power in the SBC." Said Fields, "News personnel have flocked to our meetings in droves knowing that wild charges likely would be made and the fur and fire would fly."

Fields said Baptists should not blame the secular media for the negative coverage but rather the "tragically misled zealots within our own ranks." He said: "Thoughtless, hot-headed, careless statements and ill-informed, irresponsible actions within SBC ranks prolong this media feeding frenzy."

Historical Commission trustee William E. Bell of Texas disagreed with Fields' characterization of SBC events of recent years in a dialogue session following the address. Bell's comment that not everyone at the meeting would agree with Fields' statements drew applause from some participants.

Bell said: "I do not regard it as a disaster nor as a tragedy. ... No one would support everything that has happened or everything that was done in a particular way but I, for one, and I believe a majority of Southern Baptists, feel there was a desperate need for a theological correction in our institutions and agencies."

Other speakers helped put the issues of trust and freedom of the press into historical perspective. Carolyn Blevins, associate professor of religion at Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., spoke on "Baptist State Papers: Shapers or Reflectors of Southern Baptist Thought?"

"The editors of early Baptists papers were usually ministers who put together enough money to launch their own newspapers," said Blevins. "Ownership gave them the freedom to publish what they pleased."

As financial pressures led more papers to be acquired by the state conventions, Blevins recounted, "editors had less freedom to use their pages for personal causes and more responsibility to promote Southern Baptist work." Pressures on editors, she said, have been constant from many sides: state conventions, trustees, readers and owners.

Baptist editors in the South "have reflected more often than they shaped," Blevins claimed. Most in the 19th century supported slavery, secession and the Confederacy. Up to the time of the civil rights movement in the mid-20th century, very few editors advocated changes in the status of African-Americans. On other issues such as women's rights, editors were cautious as well. Blevins reported little historical evidence that Southern Baptists want "discussion of issues with which they disagree or which make them uncomfortable."

Bob Terry, editor of Word and Way, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention, traced developments in "The Southern Baptist News Media Since 1945."

"The growing contact between Baptist Press news service and the secular papers, as well as the increasing professionalism of state Baptist papers, resulted in a growing support for the right of the Baptist people to know what was going on in their own denomination," Terry said.

"Advocacy papers" such as The Southern Baptist Journal, the Southern Baptist Advocate and SBC Today (now Baptists Today) arose during the 1970s. The new publications, said Terry, not tied to the status quo, "attacked institutions, personalities, agencies, literature. Nothing was beyond their reach."

By bringing controversial issues such as abortion, art and the arms race before Southern Baptists, "advocacy papers" forced state Baptist papers to begin to deal with these topics, Terry said. He concluded: "Southern Baptists are in a time of transition. So are state Baptist papers and other SBC related news media."

Terry asked participants "What messages will Baptists communicate? Will state papers continue to give as much emphasis to church dedications and denominational offerings as to civil war in Yugoslavia or famine in Somalia?" If their focus continues to be primarily on their own programs, Terry predicted, the denominational news media "will become more and more peripheral to the lives of readers."

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Chaplains, counselors
to meet prior to SBC

Baptist Press
4/30/93

HOUSTON (BP)--Family ties will be the subject of the annual Southern Baptist chaplains and pastoral counselors convocation June 14 in Houston.

C.W. Brister, professor of pastoral ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., will lead the discussion on regaining a sense of inner home and seeing the loss of home as a religious experience.

Larry Martin, Home Mission Board vice president for ministry, will address the group during a noon luncheon.

The meeting is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Memorial Hospital, 7737 Southwest Freeway. To register, contact the HMB chaplaincy division at (404) 898-7445 or 1350 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30367-5601.

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**Church growth, reaching young adults
focus of research fellowship meeting**

HOUSTON (BP)--Studies on church growth and reaching unchurched young adults will be presented during a Southern Baptist Research Fellowship program preceding the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

The research fellowship's meeting will go from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. Saturday, June 12, at Holiday Inn Medical Center in Houston. Clay Price, Home Mission Board director of program research, is the fellowship's president.

There is no charge for attending the afternoon session, which will include reports from Earl Nobles of the Baptist Sunday School Board, Ron Dempsey of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Stephen Parks of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The evening banquet, beginning at 6:30 p.m., will feature William Martin of Houston's Rice University presenting an address titled, "Religious factors in determining values: A middle way in the culture wars?" Cost for the banquet is \$12 per person.

To register for the afternoon session or the banquet, contact Chester Davidson, research fellowship treasurer, at 462 Elkins Lake, Huntsville, TX 77340 or (409) 291-9474.

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**Computer users gather
prior to SBC meeting**

**Baptist Press
4/30/93**

HOUSTON (BP)--The Southern Baptist Computer Users Association will meet in June to share information among computer users employed by Southern Baptist organizations.

The meeting is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Friday, June 11, and from 8:00 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, June 12, at First Baptist Church of Houston.

Cost for attending the conference is \$25. For more information or to register, contact Charles Williamson, director of systems development for the Home Mission Board, at (404) 898-7282 or 1350 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30367-5601.

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**Banquet to honor
church planting leaders**

**Baptist Press
4/30/93**

HOUSTON (BP)--Eight church planting awards and special music by contemporary Christian vocalist Babbie Mason will highlight the Home Mission Board's new work banquet June 14.

Church planting leaders from across the country have been invited to the banquet which will begin at 5:30 p.m. at Houston's Hyatt Regency Hotel.

Two awards will be presented from each of the following HMB departments: associational missions, new church extension, language church extension and black church extension.

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