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March 25, 1994

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**Blackaby: Christlike responses  
needed in wake of Dilday firing**      **By John Loudat**

**Baptist Press  
3/25/94**

**ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (BP)--**Many Southern Baptists are responding to the firing of Russell H. Dilday Jr. as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary the same way the world would respond, said Henry Blackaby in a telephone interview with the Baptist New Mexican March 23.

Blackaby is the director of the office of prayer and spiritual awakening for the Home Mission Board, as well as prayer consultant to the Foreign Mission Board and Baptist Sunday School Board.

Blackaby said he was not speaking for the agencies, but only for himself, "out of my own sense of personal responsibility and obligation to my (Southern Baptist) family."

"We're not consulting with our brothers, we're just reacting," Blackaby said of the situation. "The knee-jerk reaction can be worse than the action (of the trustees)," he warned.

Our society doesn't believe in using due process anymore, he observed. People would rather try those they disagree with in the media, because they feel they have a corner on the truth -- much like the lynch parties of old, he said.

"Many Southern Baptists have been caught up in that spirit and have the attitude, 'We have the right to do what is right in our own eyes. Because my brother does something that I believe is wrong, I am free to continue the destructive process.'

"Many of the things I'm hearing are not of God," he said.

Citing pastors who are telling their churches to withhold money from convention causes, he said they are giving their churches an example and encouraging them to follow it whenever the body makes a decision they don't agree with. Those pastors should not be surprised when members of their churches withhold money whenever a decision is made they don't agree with.

"Right now, the response to the crisis is just as important as the crisis itself," Blackaby said, noting this is an opportunity for Southern Baptists to demonstrate that Christians resolve their differences differently than society does -- with love and mercy.

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"I deeply regret that the trustees have taken such a precipitous action and regret that they did not work it out in a Christlike way, but did it in the world's way. I would hope the friends of Dr. Dilday will respond in as Christlike a way as he (Dilday) has done thus far."

Blackaby admitted, "I don't know everything there is to know about this situation." But neither do most Southern Baptists, he added. People must listen to both sides, instead of reacting to the first thing heard, which is usually incomplete. It is wrong to assume that everything one side says is wrong, Blackaby said. Most people do not have enough information to pass judgment on the action of the seminary trustees, he said, and thus conclude the trustees didn't seek the will of God in this matter.

Many are speaking without any sense that they will have to give an account to God for what they are saying, Blackaby said. He cited Jesus' words in Matt. 12:36: "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken."

"We don't have unlimited opportunity to speak with being accountable," Blackaby said. "Those who are spiritual leaders should be very careful about what they say and how they say it -- that it's a word of encouragement that won't be divisive, but will bring unity to the body."

Concerning those who are threatening to withdraw from the SBC, Blackaby said, "Your heart is wrong, my brother; that will hurt the entire body of believers and hold hostage those involved in missions whom you have covenanted with to support." It is wrong to break covenant with our missionaries because of a disagreement, he said.

When asked how Southern Baptists should respond to the crisis, Blackaby referred to Luke 6:27-28 where Jesus told his disciples to love their enemies -- to do good to them, bless them and pray for them. In this case, the disagreement involves those who are brothers in faith, not enemies, he said. Certainly, if that is how enemies should be treated, that is how brothers should be treated, he said. This would apply even to those who so dislike their brothers' actions that they no longer view them as brothers, but as enemies, he said.

Blackaby said Baptists must believe the process in place in the SBC is adequate to resolve the problem. "We have a democratic process that has worked well in the past." It recognizes trustees are accountable to the SBC and they have to report their actions to the messengers every year during the annual meeting. The messengers can then ask the trustees to rescind any actions they don't believe are right and, if the trustees refuse, the convention can remove the trustees.

Southern Baptists must ask themselves, "What kind of response would be most honoring to our Lord? What kind of response will contribute to the unity God desires?" Blackaby said both sides have done things that have disrupted unity. All Southern Baptists must ask God, "How can I be a peacemaker during this time?"

Believing God is able to give us wisdom and there are ways to come to know his will, Baptists should come together with those with whom they differ and seek the will of God in this matter, he said.

"We still don't pray like we ought to. We don't believe that prayer can keep us together." There is no question God wants and is able to bring unity, Blackaby said. Jesus warned, if you aren't actively gathering, you're scattering, and you'll have to answer to God, Blackaby continued.

"Are we willing to destroy the entire convention over a decision that affects only part of the entire work? ... There's too much at stake. ... We must not allow the enemy of the souls of men to destroy that which God has built. ... We must pray together with and not against our brothers. ... We ought not to assume we're going to lose our brothers."

Blackaby concluded, "God is bigger than this problem and he can work it through for us, as he has in the past. Romans 8:28 is just as true for us as for any other time of crisis in history. We need to believe him and obey him, as he leads us to bring glory to himself and good for his people."

**Killing leaves Mexico 'in shock,'  
Southern Baptist worker says      By Mary E. Speidel**

MEXICO CITY (BP)--Southern Baptist representatives in Mexico felt the nation's shock March 24 in the wake of Mexico's first political assassination since 1928.

Luis Donald Colosio, expected to become Mexico's next president, was shot in the head and abdomen March 23 while campaigning in Tijuana, just across the U.S.-Mexico border from San Diego. Colosio, presidential candidate of the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party, died three hours later while undergoing emergency surgery. A 23-year-old Mexican confessed to the killing.

Mexico's President Carlos Salinas de Gortari declared a national day of mourning March 24, urging Mexicans to maintain unity and calm. Salinas had chosen Colosio as his party's presidential candidate for the Aug. 21 election.

"We're seeing people in shock," said Larry Gay, Southern Baptist representative in Mexico City, in a phone interview March 24. "As two (Mexicans) said to me this morning, 'My whole world seems to be crumbling down around me right now.'"

No Southern Baptist workers feel directly threatened by the violence, but "as me people will look over their shoulder a little more than they did in the past," said Gay, of Birmingham, Ala. "They'll feel disoriented because things just aren't the same.

"We're affected, not to the same degree, but in the same way any Mexican is affected," he said. "It's a direct violation of our stability and security, the political process, everything that goes into the well-being of the country."

The last time a political figure was assassinated in Mexico was 1928, when Alvaro Obregon was murdered shortly after he was re-elected president.

The Colosio assassination came on the heels of a January uprising in Mexico's Chiapas state. That violence -- led by guerrillas of the self-proclaimed Zapatista National Liberation Army -- marked the country's first armed conflict since the 1970s.

Despite the latest violence, Gay doesn't think Mexico is plunging into political and social anarchy. "Granted, that always can happen. But I don't think that's where we're headed," he said.

Some of Mexico's unrest stems from economic conditions, Gay explained. "We're in declining inflation now, but we still have a very high cost of living here. And the standard of living for the masses is not increasing," he said, noting that about 60 percent of the population is considered poor by "Mexican standards."

Gay called on Southern Baptists to pray for peace in Mexico.

"Colosio himself said that peace is not simply the cessation of violent acts. Peace has to be sought actively. We must make peace," he said. "Pray for peace on a national scale in Mexico but also pray for peace on a personal basis. The message of hope and peace that Christ can give is what we have been trying to communicate in our ministries in Mexico. Pray that we and our Mexican Baptist brothers will be instruments of that peace."

Baptists in Mexico are trying to help do that through relief work among Indians who fled their homes after recent rebel violence in Chiapas. More than 200 Mexican Baptist volunteers have helped feed hundreds of refugees in relief kitchens near the combat zone.

Refugees see "here's a Mexican who is paying his own way and taking off work just to go down there and say, 'I love you and I want peace for you,'" Gay said.

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**Somali relief continues  
as U.S. military departs**

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press  
3/25/94

NAIROBI, Kenya (BP)--In Somalia, the U.S. military is disappearing over the horizon, a signed peace accord offers slim hopes of stability and people are tensed for a possible renewed civil war.

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But Southern Baptist relief workers continue to work in the country on a regular schedule -- feeding the hungry and tending the sick. The only concession to the late-March U.S. troop withdrawal: standby reservations on United Nations flights if evacuation becomes necessary.

Tension remains high for Southern Baptist workers and for a tiny minority of Somali Christians. They realize the new peace accord will not likely end violent persecution of those who worship outside the Muslim faith.

The need for protection took on a deeper urgency in mid-March when an active Somali Christian was murdered. Since there was no robbery attempt and no other violence in the area, most Christians assume he was executed simply for being a Christian. Another Somali Christian, the object of four death sentences from various Somali mosques, has escaped harm so far.

Religious freedom was not an agenda item for the Nairobi, Kenya, conference that produced the peace accord between Somalia's main faction leaders. But the agreement could save Somalia from a return to anarchy with the downsizing of the U.N. military presence and the loss of U.S. airpower.

The March 24 pact, brokered by the United Nations, calls for repudiation of violence as a means of resolving conflicts, implementation of a cease-fire and voluntary disarmament throughout the country.

Ali Mahdi Mohamed and Mohamed Farah Aideed, the prime antagonists for control of the nation, shook hands and embraced as about 100 members of the various clans cheered. The crowd then sang the Somali national anthem.

The leaders agreed to hold an April 15 meeting in Mogadishu, Somalia's capital, to structure a reconciliation conference and a national legislative assembly. The conference, to be convened May 15, would elect a president and vice presidents and appoint a prime minister.

However, the immediate future promises danger as well as deliverance. As incidents of robbery and random violence directed at foreigners increase, the danger to all relief workers, including Southern Baptists, increases too.

"March 25 was the pullout date for U.S. troops," one Christian observer noted. "Some of us work on different schedules and agendas."

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EDITORS' NOTE: Please substitute the following updated story for one with the same headline in (BP) dated 3/24/94.

WMU board accepts gift,  
reaffirms 1993 board action

By Susan Doyle

Baptist Press  
3/25/94

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union executive board unanimously has reaffirmed its January 1993 decision to accept contributions to be used for WMU and related missions needs and has accepted a one-time gift of \$100,000 from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The coordinating council of the Baptist moderates' CBF approved the no-strings-attached gift at its February meeting in appreciation for WMU's contribution to world evangelization. WMU did not request and was not aware of the donation prior to the decision.

Although some SBC leaders, including Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin, have suggested WMU not accept the gift, WMU joins the ranks of other Southern Baptist entities to receive money through CBF channels.

Rankin, asked for reaction to the WMU decision, voiced gratitude "for all the WMU does as a partner in missions education and promotion of prayer and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering," but said: "At a time when we are seeing record missionary appointments and unprecedented response overseas, we regret that WMU is being put in a position of divided loyalty, rather than continuing their historical position of exclusive support of the Home and Foreign Mission boards and a unified convention missions program."

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Rankin had expressed concern about the gift and asked WMU to refuse it in comments during a February meeting of the SBC Missions Education Council in Nashville.

Dellanna O'Brien, WMU executive director, said, "There is no divided loyalty. We've always been and continue to be loyal to Southern Baptists and to our missions cause.

"I fail to see where we can be accused of being disloyal," she said, "when we have simply accepted a one-time gift of \$100,000 from a group of Southern Baptists who have contributed out of their loyalty to Southern Baptist missionaries to give significant amounts to the Home and Foreign Mission boards. In just this past year alone, they have given almost \$2 million to the two mission boards."

O'Brien reiterated WMU loyalty from the standpoint that it promotes only the off rings of the Home and Foreign mission boards; produces ongoing missions education materials exclusively for the Home and Foreign Mission boards; and seeks to train children and youth to be missions leaders of tomorrow.

In the last three years, more than \$8.5 million has been given by Southern Baptists through the CBF to agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The board's vote reaffirmed its January 1993 decision to accept contributions to be used for WMU and related missions needs. While WMU has always accepted gifts, the 1993 decision allows WMU to plan for and use gifts from those who want to express their support of WMU and WMU-related missions causes.

According to WMU board policy, the finance committee of the WMU executive board has the authority to receive any undesignated gifts on behalf of the board. However, since several board members have been elected to their positions since January 1993, the committee felt the entire board should be included in the decision.

"Despite our varying backgrounds and viewpoints, the WMU executive board has unusual unity," said Janet Hoffman, board member from Louisiana and chairman of the finance committee. "To us it is important to maintain that unity in order to keep missions as our primary focus.

"Given the significance and amount of the gift, we felt that new board members should have an explanation of the January 1993 board action," Hoffman said, "and that all board members should have the opportunity to discuss the matter."

Small group discussions were held by telephone conference calls prior to the vote. The 36-member board then voted by mail ballot to accept the gift and contribute it to the WMU VISION Fund. According to board policy, undesignated gifts are contributed to the VISION Fund, which was established in 1993 for WMU missions activities and projects not funded through other channels.

Board members also were united in their desire to reaffirm their earlier decision to take a stand for the cause of missions, not a political side within the convention.

"Missions has been and always will be WMU's only purpose for existence," said Dellanna O'Brien, national WMU executive director.

Throughout WMU's 106-year history, the 1.2-million member women's organization has promoted missions education and support in Southern Baptist churches. Since its beginning, the group has led Southern Baptists to raise more than \$2 billion to support Southern Baptist missions causes.

"It is significant to us that the money which has been given to WMU has come from Southern Baptists," said Carolyn Miller, national WMU president.

"WMU does not receive money from Southern Baptists through the Cooperative Program as do Southern Baptist Convention agencies. However, WMU does receive annual gifts of appreciation from the Home and Foreign Mission boards. Anytime we receive a gift in appreciation for our contribution in missions it is especially meaningful."

"We appreciate the gift and the fact that it has no strings attached," O'Brien said. "We appreciate the recognition of the value of missions education programs and materials we offer to Southern Baptists and even other evangelical Christians."

In its January 1993 action, the WMU executive board voted to follow the example of other Southern Baptist entities and work with other evangelical Christian groups by providing them missions education materials.

"The gift will enable us to fund several WMU-initiated projects which we believe will make a difference in God's kingdom," O'Brien said.

The money will be used for projects like:

- funding WMU hunger-related projects which are planned through 1995.
- initiating a Christian women's job corps program which will help women who are caught in poverty to acquire marketable job skills so they can then lead productive lives.
- implementing women's work in developing countries.

Asked whether FMB trustees might take action concerning the WMU stance, trustee second vice chairman Leroy "Skip" Smith, associate pastor of spiritual development at Sagemont Baptist Church in Houston, said March 18, "Individual board members, perhaps, have stated individual opinions on this subject. But, in discussions I've had with other trustees, the feeling is that we should wait for our president to evaluate the situation and make a recommendation and that, additionally, we should take no action until the Executive Committee completes its study on the question of gifts from CBF."

The SBC Executive Committee approved a motion at its February meeting for its officers and staff to study the impact of CBF funds received by SBC entities and recommend "the acceptance or rejection of said funds" at the Executive Committee's June meeting just prior to the annual SBC meeting in Orlando.

Smith added, "Of course, we would have to discuss any motion made by a trustee at a board meeting (of the FMB trustees). But I feel we shouldn't address this until we know all the facts and the ramifications. We don't want simplistic answers."

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Art Toalston contributed to this story.

Stewardship elects Chandler,  
hears financial downturn stats      By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
3/25/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Ronald E. Chandler became president-elect of the Southern Baptist Stewardship Commission the same afternoon commission members were told the agency could be gripped by financial crisis within three years.

Chandler, 61, director of stewardship for the California Southern Baptist Convention the past 20 years, was elected on a 22-3 secret ballot vote March 24 to succeed A.R. Fagan, who has led the SBC agency the past 20 years.

Commissioners also approved the launch of "a long-range strategic planning process" to involve an outside professional consultant working with a committee of commissioner members and staff and state Baptist convention executives and stewardship leaders.

Chandler, in a question-and-answer session with commissioners prior to the vote, said he was aware of the agency's financial struggle, but not of the specific financial declines presented earlier in the afternoon by commission member Allen Watson of Dickson, Tenn., who also was elected commission chairman March 24.

"I am convinced," Chandler told commissioners, "we can turn this thing around." He noted, "If we do not do a better job, it's not going to get better, but worse for all the (SBC) agencies."

Chandler also said he was aware of SBC "hall talk" of possibly closing the commission and assigning its functions to other SBC entities. He said he hopes that doesn't happen "because I think the Stewardship Commission is needed" and is best equipped to advance the cause of Christian stewardship in the SBC.

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"We are going to have to face the reality we are in competition now," Chandler said in a reference to the Baptist moderates' Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The Stewardship Commission must be active in convincing churches the SBC C operative Program remains "the best way of supporting missions," he said.

Watson, a member of special committee assigned to study the need for long-range planning at the Stewardship Commission, reported on economic trends at the agency, which have involved losses of about \$20,000 a month the last three years, for a total of \$764,790.

At that rate, the agency could be broke in two to three years, Watson said, qualifying, however, that "I'm not an accountant." The insurance agent told Baptist Press his figures are based on a 20-year review of Stewardship Commission reports printed in the SBC Annual.

In the commission's work to promote Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program and Christian stewardship among church members, literature sales have fallen 25 percent in three years, Watson said. The commission has reduced operating costs in that area, meanwhile, by 7 percent.

In the capital fund-raising side of the agency's work, fees for such programs as Together We Build have fallen by 37 percent in the last three years. Operating costs, meanwhile, have been pared by 24 percent.

Stewardship Commission reserves peaked at \$1.22 million in 1990 but are now down to \$765,000, which could be depleted by losses within three years, Watson said.

Decisive action such as the long-range planning process is under way, Watson told Baptist Press, to undergird the future of the Stewardship Commission which he described as "critical to the Cooperative Program as the lifeblood of this convention" and vital to developing Christian stewardship "in order to light the fire of the membership of this convention."

As part of the special committee's work, state Baptist executives and stewardship directors were surveyed.

Among the issues that emerged, according to the committee, were:

-- "The products of the Stewardship Commission need to be reviewed in light of current trends and social changes in the nation and in the churches. Are many of the materials no longer relevant? What about the cost? What about a marketing plan for the materials?"

-- "The Together We Build program seems to be losing popularity with the churches and state conventions."

Such concerns will be aired during the long-range strategic planning process approved March 24.

Commissioners voted to begin the process this fall and, within 18 months, have a planning process that will be the agency's "management tool." No cost figures were discussed for the hiring of an outside consultant.

Commissioners adopted a 1994-95 of \$1.93 million, compared to \$2.19 million for the current year.

In addition to Watson in the election of officers, Charles Sullivan, executive director of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, was elected vice chairman and Levi Parrish, a Burton, Mich., pastor, was re-elected recording secretary.

Chandler, who will join the Stewardship Commission staff July 1 as president-elect, will work alongside Fagan until Fagan's retirement Sept. 30.

Chandler will receive an annual salary of \$81,000. He told commissioners he does not anticipate retiring at age 65.

A native of Shreveport, La., Chandler has spent much of his ministry in California. Prior to 1974 he was director of missions for the Mid-Valley Southern Baptist Association in the Fresno area for five years. He also was pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Lakeside from 1961-69. He was pastor of four churches in Texas in the 1950s prior to moving to California in 1961.

Chandler has been president of the SBC Stewardship Directors Association and written extensively in materials for the SBC Stewardship Commission.

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A graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, Chandler also holds degrees from Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, and California State University in Fresno.

He and his wife, Joyce, have three adult children, two sons and a daughter.

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'Full Gospel' Baptist group  
said to number in 'thousands' By Ferrell Foster

Baptist Press  
3/25/94

CHICAGO (BP)--Bishops, women preachers and speaking in tongues are three things not normally associated with being Baptist. But "thousands" of Baptist churches are said to be making room for those things in a year-old group called the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship.

"There's more to it than being Baptist," said Lester Love, director of the fellowship, in justifying the group's positions. "We want to focus our attention on the Word of God."

Thirteen African-American Baptist pastors, including at least one Southern Baptist, gave birth to the fellowship March 19, 1993, in New Orleans. Those 13 men now are bishops, and Love said "thousands" of churches are associated with the fellowship, though it is "not actually something you join."

The driving force behind the fellowship has been Bishop Paul S. Morton, pastor of Greater St. Stephens Full Gospel Baptist Church in New Orleans. That church is affiliated with the National Baptist Convention, but not the Southern Baptist Convention.

The one known Southern Baptist bishop is Larry Trotter, pastor of Sweet Holy Spirit Baptist Church in Chicago.

The group is "a fellowship of baptized believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who believe the gifts of the Holy Spirit are in operation today," Love said. Those gifts include "miracles, healing, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge."

"These things have not been taught in the traditional Baptist churches," Love said in a telephone interview from his New Orleans office.

Late last year, Morton wrote a document titled, "The Right to Choose," in which he stated, "The Baptist Church has experienced 'spiritual apartheid.'"

"We have always had the right to be born again," Morton writes. "But ... spiritual gifts, heavenly language, the power to cast out demons, laying on of hands, etc. afforded to others in the Body of Christ were denied us because we are Baptist."

Love explained the apartheid language was "actually geared to the black Baptist church. ... We weren't getting any help" from the National Baptist Convention.

There is no way now of knowing how many Southern Baptists are sympathetic with the fellowship's efforts, but at least four churches in the Chicago area have been linked to the group.

In addition to 13 "nation's bishops," the fellowship has 25 "state overseers," Love said.

"A bishop is nothing more than a pastor's pastor," the director explained. "Pastors have different needs" and cannot go to church members for help. Therefore bishops are needed.

Those bishops, however, "are not going to come in and take over your local church," Love said. "We still believe in the autonomy of the local church."

The overseers will help Full Gospel Baptists work with one another a given state, he indicated.

Love affirmed the fellowship believes in women being involved in ministry, including preaching.

The group also has "crossed the color barrier," Love said. Though it was started by African-Americans, the fellowship is "for anybody. It's for the body of Christ, ... anyone who wants to partake in the richness and fullness of the Holy Ghost."

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The fellowship is not a new denomination, he said. "We're not coming to destroy or tear down. ... We're not going to split from Baptists."

Teaching and helping other churches with worship and other aspects of being a church are the fellowship's goals, he added.

In that vein, the fellowship has planned a national conference July 11-15 at Lakefront Arena in New Orleans. It will be designed to "show pastors, teachers and other people how we flow in a service," Love said.

Another effort of the fellowship involves "networking." The concept calls for Full Gospel Baptists to be able to connect with like-minded Baptists around the country, both in regard to ministry and business, he indicated.

Such a network already exists at Greater St. Stephens Church in New Orleans, according to Love.

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HMB speaker: dialogue with  
other Christians, faiths

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
3/25/94

FORT MILL, S.C. (BP)--Southern Baptists should work cooperatively with other Christians and dialogue with people of other faiths to effectively minister in a religiously pluralistic society, an interfaith witness researcher said.

"Southern Baptists have a dismal record in adequately facing the challenges of living in a religiously pluralistic society," Maurice Smith told those attending the Home Mission Board's annual meeting of state interfaith witness coordinators, March 19-22.

Smith, a former missionary to Ghana, was associate director for the board's interfaith witness department before his retirement in December.

Too many Southern Baptists respond to religious pluralism with anger, fear, confusion, compromise or denial, he said, resulting in withdrawal from the religious community.

"Southern Baptists have become one of the most privatized groups of the nation," he said. "Southern Baptists need to learn to do theology in a religious environment in which people of other religions also act."

Smith noted several examples of Southern Baptists responding positively to religious pluralism. In addition to the work of the interfaith witness department, Smith noted many seminary professors involve students in encounters with people of other religions.

The Christian Life Commission and state convention counterparts also have worked with other religious organizations in areas of religious liberty, separation of church and state, human rights and the affirmation of biblical values in society, he said.

But regarding work with other Christians, Smith said many Southern Baptists have shunned their responsibility to minister and witness with other Christian denominations.

"Southern Baptists have many valuable contributions to make to the wider Christian community," he said. "Other denominations need Southern Baptists, and whether Southern Baptists admit it or not, they need other denominations."

He noted when Bold Mission Thrust was adopted in the late 1970s, Southern Baptists undertook one of the greatest enterprises in their history, but shared their goals with practically no other Christian organizations.

"How can Southern Baptists talk effectively to people of non-Christian religions if Southern Baptists are not willing to talk to people who are supposed to be fellow Christians?" he asked.

Regarding dialogue with people of other religions, Smith said many Southern Baptists cannot clearly communicate the gospel message.

"Many Baptists can talk about the gospel in church, but how many can explain it in the marketplace, where other people also have opinions and beliefs and convictions?" he asked.

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Smith said many Southern Baptists no longer use the Baptist Faith and Message for one of its intended purposes: explaining Baptists' beliefs to other people.

"It is important that Baptists talk among themselves about who they are and what they believe. But if that talk never gets out to lost people, who cares who Southern Baptists are?"

Religious pluralism will require some adjustments for Southern Baptists, he said. Among them:

-- A better understanding of differences in terminology among religions. While Christians usually mean the Bible when they say "scripture," people of other religions may use the same term to mean the religious books important to them.

Some Christians fail to understand their own terminology, he added. A recent poll found less than 25 percent of "born-again" Christians could define the term Great Commission, he said.

-- An awareness of the tendency toward religious relativism. Some people have responded to religious plurality by accepting all faiths as valid, "as long as you are really sincere," Smith said.

While religious pluralism does not change the gospel, he said, pluralism challenges every Christian to clarify the message and proclaim it more carefully and passionately.

-- A greater willingness to sponsor and attend dialogues with other religious bodies.

Smith recalled a dialogue years ago between Jewish rabbis and Southern Baptists at a seminary. One rabbi asked a pastor what it meant to be born again, he said. "When Baptists and Jews get together, they inevitably talk about Jesus. And whether that happens formally or informally, it is always enriching."

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Sanchez: Friendship can win  
Catholics, not arguments

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
3/25/94

FORT MILL, S.C. (BP)--Southern Baptists can witness better to Roman Catholics by developing friendships than by winning arguments, Daniel Sanchez told state interfaith witness coordinators at their annual meeting.

"I don't know of anybody who has been saved because it was proven to them that there is no purgatory," said Sanchez, professor of missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. The meeting, at New Heritage USA, was sponsored by the Home Mission Board.

Careful, Bible-based discussions about salvation should be at the root of witnessing to Catholics, said Sanchez, who has written a series of Bible studies designed to help evangelical Christians witness to Roman Catholics.

While the plan of salvation is no different for Catholics than for anyone else, Sanchez said Southern Baptists must be prepared to answer questions when a Catholic notices differences between the gospel message and his or her Catholic traditions.

Baptists should be able to disagree with Catholics without being disagreeable, he said. "Don't criticize the Catholic Church," he said. "Even if you feel that you have a valid point, this is not in the spirit of Christ and it will only antagonize people."

Rather than arguing, Sanchez recommends answering disagreements with verses from the Bible. "When we stick to the Word of God, I think that we can help people come to a saving knowledge of Christ without being derailed by all kinds of discussions."

Confronting on the differences between Baptists and Catholics could build barriers that prevent a Christian from sharing the gospel, he said.

"It is not important for us to straighten them out theologically at every point," he said. "When they get ahold of Christ and he makes a difference in their lives, then they will let go of the things that don't matter."

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Sanchez' Bible studies compare Roman Catholic reactions to the gospel with the stories of the Samaritan woman at the well, Nicodemus and Saul of Tarsus' conversion.

The studies were not intended to single out Catholics more than any other group that has unsaved members, he said. But the Barna Report annual survey found only 22 percent of the Catholics polled would be considered "born again."

"We have a lot of people with a Catholic background who have not come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ," Sanchez said. "We have a lot of people with a Baptist background who have not come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ."

Sanchez said he thinks Christians can best be disciplined by an evangelical group, but he said church membership should not be the reason for witnessing to Catholics. "We would not achieve much if we could get them to stop being nominal Catholics and get them to be nominal Baptists."

Christians should not be afraid to witness to people who are religious if it is believed they are still unsaved, he said. "Sometimes we are unwilling to witness to people who are religious simply because they are sincere. But if they do not know Jesus Christ, they are sincerely lost."

The bible study books, titled "Sharing Our Faith with Roman Catholic Friends," are available from Home Mission Board Customer Services at 1-800-634-2462.

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HMB interfaith staffer urges  
'refocus' beyond Freemasonry

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
3/25/94

FORT MILL, S.C. (BP)--After more than a year's involvement in the issue of Freemasonry, the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department should refocus on aiding Southern Baptists witnessing efforts to people of other religions, the interim director of the department said.

"The assignment to study Freemasonry and the events surrounding that work caused us to get off track from our assigned task," said Tal Davis. "I hope we can get back to the clearly delineated purpose for which our office exists."

Davis made his remarks during the "state of the department" speech at the annual meeting of state interfaith witness coordinators, March 19-22.

Last year, at the request of the Southern Baptist Convention, the department prepared a report on Freemasonry. Although some critics of Masonic teachings still question the report and the manner in which it was done, Davis said the department has spent too much time studying the fraternal organization.

"It has affected our staff," he said. "None of us have had time to work on writing new pieces" about cults and other religions.

If allowed to refocus on religions and cults, Davis said the department will write this year materials that Southern Baptists can give directly to Mormons, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses and followers of the New Age movement.

In addition to writing materials, the department has more than 600 interfaith witness training associates who speak to churches and associations about religions and cults. Last year, they held more than 700 conferences nationwide, speaking to more than 43,000 people, he said.

Davis added the Home and Foreign Mission boards will co-sponsor a conference on ministry to Muslims at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center June 24-25.

Phil Roberts, director-elect for the department, also addressed state coordinators during the conference, outlining six of his ideas:

-- Continuing the proactive evangelistic approach to reaching people of other religions and cults.

-- Upgrading materials, including audio-visual products, that can be used to train churches when interfaith witness associates are not available.

-- Cooperating with other agencies.

-- Encouraging more publishing, especially through the Baptist Sunday School Board.

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-- Calling together other evangelical groups to strategize to reach people in other religions and cults.

-- Broadening the horizons of the department to include such groups as secularists, materialists and humanists. "They are idealists, and we need to include them in any strategy to reach America for Christ," Roberts said.

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**9-year-old attempts  
cross-country flight**

By Sandy DeVaney

Baptist Press  
3/25/94

PHOENIX, Ariz. (BP)--While most 9-year-olds spend their weekends playing basketball, one Phoenix boy has spent his time mastering the controls of an airplane.

Aaron Wax, a Royal Ambassador from North Phoenix Baptist Church, left Phoenix March 23 in an attempt to become the youngest person to pilot a plane coast-to-coast.

Aaron, his father, Sanford, and flight instructor Toby Ledbetter took off in a 172 Cessna from Phoenix-Deer Valley Municipal Airport March 23 to begin their six-day journey. They expected to fly a total of six hours per day on the 4,000-mile trip as they head for Kitty Hawk, N.C., back to San Diego, Calif., and then home to Phoenix.

The project is dedicated to making people aware of the needs of the homeless in the Phoenix area, especially the children, Aaron's father said. The Waxes sent out letters to local organizations encouraging them to become involved in Schoolhouse Foundation, a program that educates homeless children.

Aaron is active in the Royal Ambassador program at North Phoenix and says he enjoys learning about the missionaries. Along with patches he received from Air Force pilots, his flight suit includes his RA Crown Crusaders patch.

Aaron became interested in the project in September 1993 when an 11-year-old girl from Pennsylvania piloted a plane across country. Aaron began taking flying lessons in October.

"I'd like to give him all the opportunities I can," Aaron's father said. "I'm very proud for what he's accomplished already. He's a fine young man."

As late as March 17, it was questionable whether the trip would be made. Financing the \$3,000 trip was a concern, and different instructors were unsure whether Aaron was ready for the flight. Ledbetter evaluated Aaron's skills and said he could do it.

Along with his ability, Ledbetter said, "he's got a lot of determination."

Aaron's determination was obvious before takeoff. "It's not going to be easy, but I'll take the challenge," he said.

Even with all his flight training, Aaron still saves time for basketball. When asked about his career goals, he said, "I'd like to be a flight instructor -- or play basketball for the Phoenix Suns."

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EDITORS' NOTE: The approximate route Aaron is scheduled to follow (weather permitting) is: Mar. 23-Phoenix to Oklahoma City; Mar. 24-Oklahoma-Memphis; Mar. 25-Memphis-Charlotte, N.C.-Kitty Hawk; Mar. 26-Kitty Hawk,-Chattanooga, Tenn.; Mar. 27-Chattanooga-Dallas; Mar. 28-Dallas-Phoenix; Mar. 29-Phoenix-San Diego, Calif.-Phoenix.

**Mid-America scholarship funds  
to count as CP giving in N.C.**

ASHEBORO, N.C. (BP)--Scholarship funds designated by churches for Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary will be counted as Cooperative Program giving if channeled through the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, according to a decision by the executive committee of the convention's general board.

The executive committee, with authority to act on behalf of the general board in financial and personnel matters, took the action concerning Mid-America in response to a vote by messengers at the annual state convention last November for a study of allowing churches to designate money to independent Baptist seminaries Mid-America and Luther Rice.

A special study committee visited Mid-America in Memphis, Tenn., Feb. 25. In January, the committee eliminated Atlanta-based Luther Rice from consideration because it is not accredited by either the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) or the Association of Theological Schools (ATS).

Mid-America is accredited by SACS but not ATS.

CP-designated funds and church size are the two ways the state convention determines the number of messengers a church can send to the annual convention meetings.

Apart from the new CP designation for Mid-America scholarship funds, the North Carolina convention's Cooperative Program is divided into:

-- a "basic budget," with a 62 percent of \$17.9 million in anticipated giving by N.C. churches allocated to state convention causes and 38 percent to Southern Baptist Convention causes.

-- an "option budget," allocating 62 percent of any funds channeled through it to N.C. Baptist causes, 12 percent to the SBC Cooperative Program, 8 percent for theological education in N.C. Baptist colleges and 17.6 percent for "special missions," including 1 percent for the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. No giving projection is made for the option budget.

During the 1993 budget year, about 3,300 churches contributed \$24 million through the basic budget, while 250 or more congregations contributed \$2.5 million through the option budget.

The convention forwards church designated giving to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship -- about \$650,000 in 1993 -- but does not count those gifts in its Cooperative Program totals.

Each Baptist student endorsed by a church in the North Carolina convention in divinity studies at a N.C. Baptist college or the independent Baptist seminary in Richmond receives a \$2,000 yearly scholarship, according to the convention's funding plan.

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R.G. Puckett and Art Toalston contributed to this story.

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