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State Baptist leaders describe
HMB committee as 'open,' 'honest'

Baptist Press
9/1/94

ATLANTA (BP)--The first meeting of a controversial Southern Baptist Home Mission Board committee was described as an "honest attempt to find better ways to work with states" by a Texas leader attending the Aug. 30 meeting.

Herb Pederson, director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas' missions division, was among several state leaders invited to the meeting and six who attended.

HMB directors voted in June to create a committee to study "how the Home Mission Board should cooperate with state conventions that channel designated funds to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and non-SBC entities."

The committee has been perceived by some as penalizing state conventions. Roy Smith, executive director-treasurer in North Carolina, was quoted in the North Carolina Biblical Recorder newsjournal as saying Baptists "respond to cooperation, not to threats or mandates." The committee was cited by Florida Baptist leaders as a justification for their proposal to alter the way the state funds home missions.

"Our purpose is not now and never has been, nor will it ever be, to investigate any state," said Bob Curtis, chairman of the HMB board of directors and chairman of the study committee. Curtis is pastor of Ballwin Baptist Church, Ballwin, Mo.

The word investigate "strikes at the very heart of our autonomous relationships with state conventions," Curtis said. "We cooperate with each other, but we have no authority to dictate what states can do regarding their work or funds."

Don Widemon, executive director of the Missouri Baptist Convention, said he attended the August meeting "with a great deal of apprehension" because creating the committee "seemed to be an inappropriate action which demonstrated lack of knowledge or misunderstanding."

After the meeting, however, Widemon said he was "pleased and comforted by the tone of the meeting ... it's helpful that we got off on the right foot."

Charles Sullivan, executive director of State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, described the meeting as "very open."

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"There was absolutely no sense in which I felt threatened or interrogated or put on the spot, or that I was being coerced, or that the authority of the state convention was being usurped," Sullivan said. "They didn't try to tell us what to do or that we were doing anything wrong."

Other state Baptist leaders attending the meeting were Troy Morrison, executive director, Alabama Baptist State Convention; Don Mabry, a director of missions in Louisiana; and Lonnie Chavez, a director of missions in California.

The committee will meet with all state convention executive directors in September and submit a report to the board of directors by the end of the year.

"Our purpose is to study how we relate to states that are being challenged by some to move away from a cooperative and proven method for doing missions: the Cooperative Program," Curtis said.

"We sought to discover in this meeting how our cooperative agreements with states could be strengthened, what mutual concerns we shared, and how we can get the message out that the Cooperative Program, while not being the only way, has been and will continue to be the best way of doing missions together."

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Pastors' conference moved to avoid
Falwell speaking at Clinton's church

Baptist Press
9/1/94

By Trennis Henderson

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--The on and off invitation for Jerry Falwell to preach during the Arkansas Baptist Pastors' Conference is on again, according to pastors' conference president Wallace Edgar.

Falwell will be the closing speaker for the Oct. 31 conference at First Baptist Church, Little Rock. The state convention annual meeting, which begins the following day, will be held at Immanuel Baptist Church, Little Rock.

Much of the uncertainty about Falwell's participation in the pastors' conference has centered around the original location of the conference at Immanuel -- President Bill Clinton's home church -- and Falwell's promotion of an anti-Clinton videotape on his "Old Time Gospel Hour" television program.

Edgar, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Texarkana, extended the invitation for Falwell to speak at the conference, noting "several people said it would be a boost in evangelism, soul-winning and witnessing to invite Dr. Falwell."

However, following a meeting this summer with Immanuel's pastor, Rex Horne, state convention's executive director Don Moore, and convention president Ronnie Rogers, Edgar sent a letter to Arkansas Baptist pastors announcing he had "been asked by some of our state leadership that (Falwell) not be permitted to come." He added Falwell "said he understood and would honor their request."

Horne, who said he would personally "accept any blame" for asking Falwell not speak at Immanuel, insisted Edgar, Moore and Rogers "had nothing to do with the decision."

Emphasizing "there are bigger issues involved than one issue or one personality," Horne added, "Most people think it's Falwell vs. Clinton, which is simply not the case."

Although he initially was willing for Falwell to speak during the conference at Immanuel, Horne said a closer examination of what Falwell was promoting on his television program led him to determine "that I was not comfortable having Falwell in our pulpit."

Noting Immanuel is "first a church and not a convention center," he said, "I feel a responsibility to our people for what I preach and practice and what we believe together. I feel certain things are appropriate and other things are not."

"I respect the pastors' conference leadership and their right to invite whoever they want and meet wherever they want," Horne said. He reiterated, however, the move to withdraw Falwell's invitation "was something I requested. The decision was mine alone."

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Following the statewide mailout to pastors, Edgar said he was "flooded with letters," most of which favored Falwell speaking at the conference. In response, Edgar contacted Bill Elliff, pastor of First Baptist Church, Little Rock, about moving the pastors' conference there.

"It wasn't going to work out for Dr. Falwell to come if it was at Immanuel," Edgar acknowledged. "Having it at First Baptist will take the attention away from the controversial issue of having it at Immanuel."

Elliff, who said he is not a big fan of either Falwell or Clinton, explained, "It's not a big deal. Our decision was not so much pro-Falwell as the right of the pastors' conference to have who they want to have. We felt like if this is what the elected officers wanted to do and it's within reason, we ought to accommodate that. I don't have so much against Falwell that I would negate his coming."

Calling the decision to move the conference to First Baptist "a simple process," Elliff added, "I would be sympathetic with Rex's concerns that if Falwell came there it would be a media event more than if it was at another church."

Despite the controversy surrounding Falwell's presence, Edgar said, "We're looking forward to a great conference. We're expecting God to do some great things."

Focusing on the theme, "Reaching People with the Only Hope ... Jesus," Edgar added, "I hope pastors can come away with a greater motivation to witness and win people and bring them into the kingdom."

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SBC Cooperative Program gifts
dip in August; ahead for year

Baptist Press
9/1/94

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program gifts for August dropped 3 percent below the same month a year ago but receipts for the fiscal year still were nearly \$3.5 million above the previous year, according to Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee.

Gifts for August 1994 totaled \$10,924,478 compared to August 1993 of \$11,266,269, or a dip of 3.03 percent.

Total gifts for the year to date, 11 months of the SBC fiscal year, totaled \$129,555,054 compared to the previous year-to-date figure of \$126,101,303, or a 2.74 percent increase.

The SBC program allocation budget requires \$11,519,561 per month or \$126,715,173 for the 11-month period. That makes the total gifts for the year 2.24 percent above the amount needed to meet the year-to-date budget.

Designated gifts for the month were \$2,227,428 compared to a year ago of \$2,667,917. The year-to-date total for designated gifts is almost identical to the previous year: \$125,679,914 compared to \$125,311,027, or a .29 percent increase.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state and regional conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. Designated contributions include the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions, world hunger and other special gifts.

State and regional conventions retain a percentage of Cooperative Program contributions they receive from the churches to support work in their areas and send the remaining funds to the Executive Committee for national and international ministries. The percentage of distribution is at the discretion of each state or regional convention.

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BSU director's ordination
leads to associational action By Toby Druin

DALLAS (BP)--The executive board of Galveston Baptist Association voted Aug. 29 to request the transfer of Raye Nell Dyer as director of the Baptist Student Union at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston.

The action, on a 29-10 vote with one abstention, came after the association's BSU advisory committee reported it felt Dyer and the association had "irreconcilable differences" growing out of the process of her ordination to the gospel ministry.

The committee asked the association executive board to ask the state convention's division of student work to relocate Dyer "with all due haste."

Although the salaries and benefits of BSU directors are paid by the state convention (the association provides program funds), the directors must be approved locally and require continued local endorsement, said Jack Greever, director of the division of student work for the Baptist General Convention of Texas. On a state school campus, approval comes from the local association; on Baptist school campuses, it comes from the school administration.

Greever said he planned to talk with Dyer about a new place of service but would have to have her permission before he could place her at another school.

Dyer told the Baptist Standard newsjournal she is willing to think and pray about any options Greever might present to her.

Dyer, 43, has been BSU director in Galveston since 1985. She became the focus of a controversy that has divided the association when she sought ordination to the gospel ministry in 1991 at First Baptist Church, Galveston. When the ordination was delayed, she joined and was ordained by South Main Baptist Church, Houston.

The BSU advisory committee in the Galveston Baptist Association moved to have her removed in February, blaming her "strong-willed determination" to be ordained for a "chasm" in the association. Instead, however, a committee was named to outline steps for reconciliation.

The committee's 10 recommendations, presented at the Aug. 29 meeting, included that Dyer agree her handling of her request to be ordained was "divisive and inconsiderate," that she apologize to her former church and association and that she and the association agree not to use the press to promote their views.

Dyer said she could not agree to the provisions and said the way the recommendations were handed violated her agreement with the committee.

She said she had understood she was to work with the committee in outlining the steps but that she had no opportunity for input.

"I was not included in the process," she said. "I had opportunity only to respond."

She said when she received a copy of the guidelines she had shared a copy with members of First Baptist Church, Galveston, and then was accused of "breaching confidentiality" although several other people -- pastors and laypersons -- had also received copies.

She has a week to vacate her office, she said Sept. 1 while preparing to speak to the students in the BSU. Many are angry, she said, and are having a hard time understanding the process.

"As difficult as this has been," she said, "I still feel at peace about my journey and decisions. I feel God's embrace and care for his purpose in my life. I feel I still have my integrity and will leave with that, even though it has come with a pretty high price."

Grayson Glass, Galveston Association director of missions, said that for some on the executive board of the association the vote probably was on the issue of women's ordination.

"But I think we could have weathered that had the series of events not alienated more and more people," he said. "That was a strong conviction on the part of some, and they voted it. But mostly it was a fellowship thing."

**Ken Hemphill emphasizes
spirituality in education**

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--In his first presidential address to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's student body and faculty en masse, Ken Hemphill urged them to view their educational and ministerial experiences in a spiritual light.

"If God Almighty, the sovereign God of the universe, pounded an old Roman cross deep into the muck and mud of our sin-sick world, and he concreted this foundation with the blood of his only son, what must we be building on that foundation?" Hemphill asked his standing-room-only audience Aug. 30 in the first chapel service of Southwestern's 87th year.

Ministers cannot afford to build the church with anything less than the "gold, silver and precious stone" of their lives, Southwestern's seventh president said. "As you study, prepare, pray and spend time here, I exhort you to invest wisely because the foundation was purchased at great cost."

Hemphill told seminary students and faculty their answers to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" will determine not only their eternal destinies, but also the impacts they will have in seminary and ministry throughout eternity.

"Too much is at stake. Your being here is not a political decision -- it is a call from the sovereign God to prepare so that his Holy Spirit can use you to invest your life in the redemption of the world," he said. "Everything we build at this seminary and everything you build in your churches and your lives must be based on the perfect Word of God."

According to Hemphill, church ministry by God's foundational power is more effective than current trends.

"I am convinced that as we become so enamored with methodologies, models and marketing strategies, we become almost carnal in our thinking about how the church grows," Hemphill commented. "Jesus said, 'I will build my church.' The priority is for us to live in dynamic relationship with the Lord of the church so that he can grow it through us."

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**Massachusetts missionaries
praise God for free church**

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
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FRANKLIN, Mass. (BP)--When money's no object, churches can buy any building. Southern Baptist home missionaries Charles and Laura Lee Chamblee, however, have learned God also can provide a building when there's no money at all.

Money was literally no object this spring when the Chamblees started looking for a place their growing congregation could meet.

With an average attendance of 45, the mission had outgrown the Elks Lodge No. 2136 and was getting close to reaching the fire code limit of 49 people in the building it was renting.

In June, a local nondenominational church contacted Chamblee, offering to sell its building because the pastor, Walter Lanagan, was retiring and the church was disbanding.

The building appraised for \$225,000, said Chamblee, 27. "I told the Lanagans that there was no way a little mission church could afford \$225,000."

Nevertheless, the pastor and his wife asked Chamblee to meet with the church board of directors. Chamblee said he agreed, thinking they might "fix a payment plan over the next 650 years or something."

The day of the meeting, Chamblee said, the 92-year-old chairman of the church's board told him, "God called us to begin this work back in 1932 and we now feel as though God is calling us to bring it to a close. We feel that God has placed the gauntlet for reaching Franklin on you and your church."

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"And then he said, 'Just as God has been good to us, we feel we need to be good to you. We want to give you our building and property.'"

Chamblee said he was overwhelmed. "It was everything I could do not to bust out crying like a little baby," he said. "One of the first thoughts that went through my mind was the verse, 'To him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we could ever ask and imagine.'"

Built in the early 1960s, the building seats about 100 people, he said. In addition to the first floor sanctuary, it has a fellowship hall, baby grand piano and church office. "Everything that could be used for ministry they left," he said.

Located 26 miles southwest of Boston, Franklin is the fastest-growing town in Massachusetts, he said. "In the past 15 years it's gone from a population of 9,000 to a population of 26,000 and it's still growing. Nobody really perceives that growth stopping any time soon."

The two churches will hold a joint worship service Saturday, Sept. 17, to exchange the deed for the land and property, said Chamblee.

"This is just one of a number of things that God has been doing in our midst recently," said Chamblee, a Birmingham, Ala., native. "Small miracles have been happening all over the place."

Chamblee noted the gift came from a church that wasn't Southern Baptist. "This church has no denominational affiliation, whatsoever. All they knew was that God was doing something and that was one way of their being a part of it."

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Dead Sea Scrolls: gold mine
of affirmation for the faith

By Laurie Lattimore

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9/1/94

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--A two-hour box office smash -- with fictional archaeologist Indiana Jones braving snakes, tarantulas and bad guys to explore the Dead Sea Scrolls legacy -- wouldn't do justice to the significance of the centuries-old Jewish writings, the oldest known version of the Old Testament.

To the academic world, their 1947 discovery just 10 miles east of Jerusalem in the Qumran caves then under Jordan rule, has proven to be a gold mine. But many Christian lay people have little comprehension of the scrolls' significance.

Unlike the grocery store tabloids would have us believe, the scrolls say nothing of Elvis' return. Mainstream scholars also discount fringe theories that Jesus Christ is mentioned in the scrolls -- particularly an absurd translation from Australian Barbara Theiring that Jesus did not die on the cross but was drugged and later revived by the disciples so he could marry Mary Magdalene.

What the scrolls reveal directly is that the Old Testament used today is extremely close to the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the Dead Sea manuscripts -- judged to have been written between 200 B.C. and 50 A.D. The sheer consistency of the Old Testament offers Christians validity and confirmation, scholars contend.

"It's nothing shy of miraculous," said Larry McKinney, professor of archaeology and biblical backgrounds at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo. McKinney's master's thesis dealt with a Habakkuk scroll, to narrow the time period in which it was written. Based in part on writing styles and spellings, McKinney determined the Habakkuk scroll was written 80-65 B.C.

The first of the hidden scrolls were found in the Judean desert by Bedouin shepherds -- and it was the archaeological discovery of the century. Scrolls were uncovered between 1947 and 1956 in 11 different rocky Qumran caves. About 10 miles outside of Jerusalem, the caves are adjacent to the ruins of a settlement of the ascetic Jewish sect known as the Essenes -- believed to be the authors of the scrolls.

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About 800 partial and complete texts make up the Dead Sea Scrolls -- the first native documents to come out of the Holy Land from the centuries before Christ. About 127 of the documents are biblical texts -- representing the entire Old Testament. Fragments have been found from every book except Esther, the only book of the modern Bible that does not mention God.

Cave 4, excavated in 1952, represented the largest single trove of biblical texts -- thousands of fragments from most of the Hebrew Bible. Many of the fragments from Cave 4 were among the scrolls kept secret by appointed scholars until 1991.

The Jordan government initially took control of all but the first few scrolls, which were translated and published by independent Israeli scholars and displayed at the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem starting in 1965.

Father Roland De Vaux was assigned by Jordan authorities to assemble an international team of seven scholars to publish the rest of the scrolls. Scrolls were published regularly for nearly a decade, but the process slowed as scholars became overwhelmed with the amount of material to work through.

After the Six-Day War in 1967 when Israel claimed territory from Jordan, Syria and the United Arab Republic, the scrolls came under the Israeli Antiquities Authority and disclosure was broadened. The team of scholars chosen to translate and publish the scrolls was expanded to about 40.

In 1989, photocopies of the scrolls in Jordan and Israel were placed in American libraries as safehouses because of war in the Middle East. They went to Huntington Library in San Marino, Calif., and Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. Two years later, the Huntington Library decided to open the vaults and make the complete set available. In concurrence with that decision, Israel began officially disseminating the material shortly after Huntington made the scrolls available.

As access to the scrolls broadened, so have the interpretations -- from bogus theories that the end of the world was revealed to the more debatable questions of whether foreshadowing of Jesus' coming indicates the Essenes mark the actual beginning of the Christian church, even before the death of Jesus.

The bottom line, theologians interviewed for this article agree, is that the modern Bible is remarkably consistent with the Qumran scrolls. Today's Bible is based on 10th century A.D. texts copied by the Masoretes, a group of Jewish scribes known for meticulous accuracy. In the 66 chapters of Isaiah, only 13 minor variations exist between the scrolls and the Masoretic text.

Edward Cook, research scholar at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, has been translating some of the scroll fragments since 1991. Cook said the fact that the Bible is so strikingly accurate is the major news of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery.

"When the oldest manuscripts of the Old Testament come from 1000 A.D. -- a long time after the prophets had lived -- there is fear and suspicion that (the Old Testament translations) might have been changed," Cook said. "The Dead Sea Scrolls show that it hadn't changed, confirming that the Old Testament was not corrupted."

Fred Young, retired dean and Old Testament professor at Central Seminary in Kansas City, Kan., noted the scribes were "very faithful." Young has spent years compiling a library and bibliography of all printed material about the Dead Sea Scrolls. He estimates he has 15,000 to 20,000 titles in his bibliography and copies of about 14,000 of those writings. He hopes to have at least 25,000 titles by the end of 1997 -- representing 50 years of published material since the scrolls were discovered.

In a few cases, recent translations of the Bible have included newly disclosed texts from the Qumran scrolls. The 1990 New Revised Standard Version adds an entire paragraph in 1 Samuel that is in the scrolls but not in the Masoretic text. Chapter 11 tells of King Saul leading his people against the Ammonites. The Qumran text describes the oppression of the Israelites by the Ammonite king Nahash.

McKinney noted an instance in which the scrolls did not contain text in the modern Bible. There is no third chapter in the Habakkuk, which is a prayer by the prophet in today's translations. He said scholars question whether scribes added the prayer later.

The scrolls -- both biblical texts and other documents -- give insight into early Judaism and the beginnings of the Christian church after Jesus' crucifixion. Some of the documents are considered "apocrypha," coming from the inter-testament period in which the Essenes wrote their views of a war at the end of time and of the coming of a Messiah. Jesus' name is not written, but the Essenes anticipated their messiah would be a prophet like Moses, a king like David and a priest like Aaron.

Young said he concurs with many scholars who believe the Essenes were influential to the writers of the Gospels. A passage from a scroll in Cave 4 apparently refers to the Messiah's coming: he will "heal the wounded, resurrect the dead (and) preach glad tidings to the poor." This closely resembles Luke 7:20-23, in which Jesus instructs the followers of John the Baptist to tell of the healings they witnessed.

Published in the Biblical Archaeology Review, another fragment from the Qumran scrolls reads, "... and by his name shall he be hailed as the Son of God, and they shall call him Son of the Most High." This Aramaic passage is almost identical to the first chapter of Luke when the angel Gabriel announces to Mary the birth of Jesus.

Hulitt Gloer, professor of New Testament at Midwestern Seminary, said he believes the similarities are strongest in the Gospel of John. Young added several theologians and historians believe many of the Essenes became Christians following the death of Jesus -- hence the similarity in the New Testament Gospels and the apocryphal scrolls -- but that the Old Testament came out of the Jewish tradition, not Christian.

Because of the apocryphal nature of some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Gloer said, his courses on New Testament backgrounds and First Century Palestinian Judaism rely heavily on insight provided by the scrolls.

"They give us a backdrop to the early church and the development of Christianity," Gloer said. The Essene tradition is considered to be the tradition of Jesus. "Understanding Judaism in the first century gives us more of the background from which Jesus came and taught, and insights into how the people thought about God and the kingdom of God."

Although the Dead Sea Scrolls perhaps have less glamour than an Indiana Jones adventure, Christians should be aware of the basic significance of the ancient manuscripts. General knowledge will help keep crackpot translations from gaining credence and will add validity to one's own beliefs in the Christian faith.

Gloer emphasized the Dead Sea Scrolls are not just for scholars; all Christians should be interested in the origin of the church and consistency in the faith.

"Before we were dealing with 10th century A.D. texts, and now we've got 1,000 years earlier. It is important to see the consistencies," he said. "And (the scrolls) are very important in trying to understand the early church and the tradition it came out of."

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