
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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Draper wins easy election
to Sunday School Board helm

Southern Baptist
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By Greg Warner

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- With glowing praise and little debate, James T. Draper Jr. was elected the eighth president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board July 18 at the agency's headquarters in Nashville, Tenn.

The choice of Draper, which came on the unanimous recommendation of the trustees' 10-member presidential search committee, was endorsed without opposition by the 80-plus board members present. Only one trustee -- dentist Leon Bolton of Memphis, Tenn. -- abstained from the roll-call vote.

The 55-year-old Draper, pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, for the past 16 years, will assume the presidency of Southern Baptists' publishing-and-curriculum agency Aug. 18.

After his election, Draper was lauded as "a person of integrity...a person of intensity and...a person of high intellect" by board chairman William Anderson of Clearwater, Fla.

Search committee chairman Wayne Dubose of Shreveport, La., said he received "a tidal wave of affirmation" after the committee's choice became known. "I have not received one negative letter or phone call about this," he said. "Southern Baptists have overwhelmingly said, 'Wise decision.'"

Draper's tranquil election stood in stark contrast to the Jan. 17 meeting at which his predecessor, Lloyd Elder, was forced to take early retirement in a dispute with trustees over management of the board.

Despite the harmony evident among trustees at Draper's election, scars from the tumultuous January session remained, as trustees voted overwhelmingly to conduct "sensitive" parts of their three-hour afternoon session behind closed doors.

If there was any opposition to Draper, it was shielded from the public by trustees, who interviewed the candidate and discussed his hiring during the one-and-a-half-hour private session.

The meeting was closed for "the discussion of some things that probably ought not be in the papers right now," said Robert Tenery of Mocksville, N.C., who made the motion to go into executive session.

Tenery's substitute motion was approved in place of an earlier motion to leave the meeting open to the public. Although trustees were told the search committee had no preference and that Draper "is comfortable either way," Tenery's motion was approved with only about five negative votes.

After a presentation from the search committee, including a seven-minute videotape on Draper's pastoral and denominational career, the candidate was introduced to the board. Trustees then closed the meeting to conduct their interview.

Afterward the small crowd of reporters, employees and observers were invited back into the meeting, where the roll-call vote was immediately taken.

Draper's election came almost exactly six months after trustees accepted the early retirement of Elder, who served as president since 1984.

Elder, 58, retired rather than face probable firing by trustees, who accused him of mishandling a controversial history of the board, mismanaging three unprofitable board ventures, and secretly tape recording telephone conversations with board members.

Trustees, who have been criticized widely for the size of Elder's salary (\$135,888) and for paying him half his salary in retirement, did not disclose the amount Draper will be paid.

But in a press conference after the election, Anderson acknowledged Draper will be paid the same salary as Elder but with a cap on any retirement or departure package.

Elder was out of town during Draper's election. No mention of his absence was made during the open meeting of trustees.

Draper's election July 18 came with barely enough time for Elder to complete the agreed-upon 30-day transition period before the trustees hold their regular semi-annual meeting Aug. 18-20.

Anderson said the timing of the trustees' special called meeting July 18 was not intentional but it was providential, since it will allow Draper to participate in the board's August meeting.

After the election, trustee Bolton said he abstained in the vote because Draper "does not have any more experience in the field of management than the one who was dismissed."

Noting the primary complaint against Elder was his management style, Bolton said the search committee failed to demonstrate that Draper had the management skills needed for the job.

"Since I did not get to express myself on the matter that concerned me, I felt it was best to abstain," Bolton said. He added, however, he is "ready to cooperate" with Draper, whom Bolton described as "a fine man."

Bolton said there was no opposition to Draper expressed in the closed-door meeting.

Most trustees were reluctant to talk specifically about their private session with Draper, although they reportedly were not instructed to keep the meeting's content confidential.

Draper was asked "the kinds of things you would expect of a person coming on as CEO," said Dan Collins, a trustee and attorney from Taylors, S.C.

Collins, a former board officer, defended the closed-door session as appropriate in light of the sensitivity and responsibility of the election.

Chairman Anderson later told reporters the trustees' familiarity with Draper made the interview easy. "Jimmy is known so well among our people. He has written so widely."

"I didn't sense that he flinched one time, he didn't hesitate one time to answer questions," Anderson said. "There were no hard questions, as far as I could tell."

Draper could not pinpoint one question he considered toughest. One topic that was addressed, he acknowledged, was his view of biblical authority -- "I told them I believe in the inerrancy of Scripture."

Draper, a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said the standard of inerrancy would "be a given" under his administration at the board. "We wouldn't want anyone to be involved in leadership or teaching who would not have a high view of Scripture," he said.

But he said he would not insist on the word "inerrancy" as the only appropriate description of biblical authority. "As long as we mean God's word is God-breathed, is inspired, infallible, inerrant,

perfect, authoritative, whatever word you use if it means the same thing, that's the direction we want to go," he said. "We are people who believe the Bible, and we want to go on that basis as a given."

Although Draper said the SBC Peace Committee's four examples of biblical belief "are illustrative of the view that I have stated," he said those four examples wouldn't necessarily be used to screen employees and writers at the board -- a practice employed at some SBC agencies.

Unlike some of his colleagues in the SBC's fundamental-conservative movement, Draper said he does not mind wearing the label "fundamentalist." "I consider myself a fundamentalist if you let me spell it with a small "f" and mean by that strict adherence to the fundamentals of our faith," he said.

Although fundamentalists are often characterized as mean-spirited, Draper said, "I'm not mad at anybody." Anderson said the trustees were impressed with that quality in their new president.

"The keenest thing I believe about Jimmy is he is able to get along with people who do not agree with him about things," said the board chairman and pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Clearwater. "I think that is a gift from God. I think we need that in our convention. We need that in our organization.

"That doesn't mean he's a compromiser," Anderson added. "He's just able to get to what we can agree on and get on down the road."

Anderson said the election of Draper, a prominent fundamental-conservative leader, does not signal a desire of trustees to redirect the ministry of the Sunday School Board, one of the denomination's largest agencies with 1,900 employees and an annual budget of \$190 million.

"I don't sense that a substantive difference is coming in terms of personnel being used or the processes by which we do things," he said.

Draper, who was elected SBC president in 1982 as part of a movement to turn the denomination in a more conservative direction, is the most prominent fundamental-conservative to be chosen to lead one of the Southern Baptist Convention's 20 agencies and institutions. In recent years Draper has been mentioned frequently as a strong candidate for several agency posts, including some not yet vacant.

"As far as the movement within Southern Baptist life," Draper said, "there needed to be someone who had been more visible to assume some positions, and that hopefully will bring confidence."

The need for such leadership, however, was not a factor in his decision to take the board presidency, he said. "Not from my side."

Search committee members, who approached Draper at least three times about the position, told of Draper's initial reluctance to be considered.

Draper told reporters the only hesitancy he and his wife, Carol Ann, had about the position was over leaving the pastoral ministry, a prospect he considered "traumatic." "I've done nothing but be a pastor for 35 years," he said.

"We were never negative about the Sunday School Board or even about the position," he explained. "It was just so foreign to what we had done."

Once he determined it was God's will, he said, his hesitancy disappeared.

Committee members said they noticed the difference. Iris White of Columbia, Md., told trustees Draper was "a different man" the second time she and other committee members interviewed him. "He was animated, excited, warm, friendly."

Draper was the committee's choice from among the 21 candidates considered, search chairman DuBose told trustees. Interviews were

"attempted" with eight of the candidates, said DuBose pastor of Summer Grove Baptist Church in Shreveport, but he declined to name those interviewed.

Draper, a native of Texas, holds a bachelor's degree from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and a master of divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He has since served as a trustee of both institutions, as well as the SBC Annuity Board.

He is the author of 17 books and a frequent participant in overseas mission projects.

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BJC, coalition ask court
to maintain neutrality rule

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Baptist Joint Committee has joined a broad coalition of Christian, Jewish and religious-liberty organizations in asking the U.S. Supreme Court to maintain its established rule that government must be neutral toward religion.

In a friend-of-the-court brief filed July 17 by University of Texas law professor Douglas Laycock, the groups asked the high court to reject requests by the U.S. Solicitor General and attorneys for the Providence, R.I., School Committee that the court replace its long-held strict standard for deciding establishment-clause cases with a more lenient "coercion" standard. Under such a standard, government could support or promote religion as long as people are not forced to participate.

The Justice Department joined the case in February, asking the high court to overturn lower court decisions holding that invocations and benedictions at Providence middle-school and high-school commencement ceremonies violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment. The government brief also asked the high court to reconsider the scope and application of the "Lemon test," a three-part standard long relied upon to assure government neutrality toward religion.

The Lemon standard requires that government actions have a secular purpose, neither advance nor inhibit religion and avoid excessive entanglement with religion.

The bulk of the brief argues in favor of the court's neutrality standard, contending that the proposed coercion rule is inconsistent with every accepted source of constitutional interpretation, constitutional history, court precedent and sound policy toward religion.

The religious organizations represented in the brief include four major Jewish groups, most mainline Protestant groups under the umbrella of the National Council of Churches, and the Seventh-day Adventists.

Other religious groups, including the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, the U.S. Catholic Conference and the National Association of Evangelicals, filed briefs either in support of various forms of a coercion test or in defense of the graduation prayers on free-speech grounds.

"We decided to file as part of a coalition because we thought it was important for religious groups who take the establishment clause seriously to stand shoulder to shoulder and say, 'No thanks' to government's attempt to weaken the establishment clause," said BJC Associate General Counsel Brent Walker. "I'm sure the court will take seriously our consolidated brief because of the number and diversity of the groups and, frankly, Doug Laycock's prestige."

Walker, who worked with Laycock in preparing the brief, noted that Laycock is recognized as one of the nation's leading constitutional scholars and that his writing has been cited by the Supreme Court.

"The message we wanted to send to the court is that government should not try to get into the religion business," Walker said. "Governmental neutrality -- neither advancing nor inhibiting religion -- is good, not bad. When government tries to give religion a helping hand, religion almost always comes out worse off than if 'Caesar' had just left it alone."

BJC Executive Director James Dunn said the religious-liberty agency's focus is directed at preserving the high standard for church-state separation.

"The Baptist Joint Committee, true to Baptist insights and contributions to the Bill of Rights, is primarily interested in maintaining government neutrality," he said. "The weakness of the so-called 'coercion test' is its obvious failure to offer any protection from government meddling, intrusion and entanglement."

In a document released this week, Texas Christian Life Commission Director Phil Strickland also criticized the proposed coercion test as representing a fundamental change in church-state relations.

"Instead of playing the neutral role required by the Lemon test, the government could directly accommodate or encourage a religious practice," Strickland stated. "The coercion test would, for example, allow government to sponsor non-denominational religious services as long as no one was forced to attend."

Strickland noted that the Lemon test has served the high court and nation well for over 20 years.

"It has protected us from the evils of government-established religion while allowing appropriate religious expression in public schools and other government institutions," he said.

In his brief, Laycock argues the coercion test would end government neutrality and open the door for wide government involvement in religion.

"The President, the Congress, or the Providence School Committee, could adopt and promulgate creeds," the brief states. "The only constraint would be that government could not coerce people to believe in these creeds."

The brief also contends that the establishment clause must be understood against the historical background of disestablishment of religion in the states.

"Defenders of establishment everywhere tried to preserve establishment by making it less coercive, less preferential and more inclusive," the brief states. "In the extreme cases of South Carolina and Virginia (where the Church of England was the established church), establishment was reduced to a bare endorsement. These bare endorsements were rejected as establishments."

The brief also disputes the Providence official's argument that government prayer must be constitutional because the founder's did it. That argument proceeds backward, the brief states.

"It lets the behavior of government officials control the meaning of the Constitution, when the whole point is for the Constitution to control the behavior of government officials."

The brief further argues that the Supreme Court repeatedly has rejected the coercion test. After noting that the three parts of the Lemon test did not originate in the Lemon v. Kurtzman ruling but rather represent a convenient formulation of the criteria developed by the high court over the years, the brief disputes the Justice Department's contention that "the problem is Lemon."

"The government's problem is the whole history of establishment-

clause jurisprudence in this court."

Laycock also argues that government-sponsored religious observances hurt believers as well as non-believers.

"Such observances hurt all religions by imposing government's preferred form of religion on public occasions. It is not possible for government to sponsor a generic prayer. Whatever form government chooses, it imposes that form on all believers who would prefer a different form."

In a final point, the brief argues that the graduation prayers at issue in the Rhode Island case violate both the neutrality standard and any plausible coercion standard.

Rejecting the argument that the graduation prayer case represents a voluntary ceremony, the brief states that an essential feature of the Providence case is a "captive audience of young children."

"Providence says to its high-school graduates and to its middle-school promotees: if you wish to be honored on your promotion, you must first be 'compelled to listen to the prayers' of others."

The Providence schools' practice of providing guidelines for clergy to follow in praying hopelessly entangles government and religion, the brief states.

"Just as 'it is no part of the business of government to compose official prayers' so it is no part of the business of government to proscribe official guidelines for prayer."

Additionally, the brief argues that school-sponsored, school-supervised prayer is not the only way to take religious note of graduation. Private baccalaureate services sponsored by local churches and synagogues or voluntary student groups exercising their equal-access rights might organize a religious service for the occasion.

Groups other than the BJC, Seventh-day Adventists and the National Council of Churches who are parties to the brief are the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, New York Coalition for Public Education and Religious Liberty (PEARL), the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, People for the American Way, the American Jewish Committee, and the American Jewish Congress.

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Amnesty International calls for single human-rights standard

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Amnesty International USA, a worldwide human-rights organization, called on the United States to engage a single human rights standard.

After a June 9 press conference at which the organization released its 1991 report, Amnesty representatives delivered to the White House nearly 40,000 petitions calling for the single standard.

"There will be no end to the perpetual cycle of human-rights violations worldwide until governments are ready to make the commitment to upholding a single human-rights standard at home or abroad, regardless of foreign relations or political expediency," said John Healey, executive director of the 30-year-old organization, in an Amnesty press release.

Amnesty's 290-page annual report raises concerns about human-rights issues in 141 countries during 1990. The report indicated tens of thousands of people were illegally executed, tortured or unfairly imprisoned by governments in 1990.

Amnesty reported about half the countries in the world jailed

prisoners of conscience, with more than 100 governments mistreating prisoners to various degrees.

Some human rights violations highlighted in the report include:

-- Soldiers persecuted blacks from southern Mauritania, arresting thousands and killing defenseless villagers;

-- Iraqi forces, after the invasion of Kuwait, made arrests and carried out extrajudicial executions;

-- "Death squad" killings escalated in Colombia; and

-- Pervasive and systematic torture continued in Turkey.

Speakers -- including former prisoners of foreign governments -- lauded Amnesty as a valuable global conscience, representing some victims' only link to the outside world. Amnesty has more than 1.1 million members.

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--By Pam Parry

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