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Clinton, Gore give voters  
first all-Baptist ticket

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee

By Greg Warner

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- By choosing Sen. Al Gore for his running mate, presidential candidate Bill Clinton apparently has given American voters their first all-Baptist ticket for the nation's two highest offices.

Clinton, the governor of Arkansas who is set to receive the Democratic nomination for president July 15, announced his choice of Gore, a 44-year-old senator from Tennessee, in a press conference at the governor's mansion in Little Rock July 9.

Both Clinton, 46, and Gore, 44, are members of Southern Baptist churches and have made no secret of their faith. The Southern Baptist Convention is the nation's largest Protestant denomination with about 15 million members.

A native of Hope, Ark., Clinton is a longtime member of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, where he sings in the choir when he is in town.

Gore is a member of Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Crystal City, Va., just across the Potomac River from Washington. Gore was born in Washington, D.C., as the son of a Tennessee senator, but the family home is in Carthage, Tenn.

Two Southern Baptists have served as president -- Harry Truman and Jimmy Carter. But neither had a Southern Baptist for vice president. Although research is sketchy, the Clinton-Gore ticket apparently is the first all-Baptist tandem to seek the country's two top offices.

"It's unbelievable that they would pick two from the same denomination," explained Ed McAteer of Memphis, Tenn., a conservative Republican political activist who claims Democrat Gore as a personal friend.

The denominational bond shared by Clinton and Gore may be more of a historical novelty than a factor in the election, however. Most political observers said the candidates' religious affiliation will have little if any effect in an election driven by economic issues.

Walter Shurden, professor of church history at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., said he would attach little significance to Clinton's selection of a fellow Baptist, adding, "I don't think their being Baptist guarantees

any Baptist support for them."

Spokespersons for Clinton and Gore were unavailable July 9 to comment on the Baptist connection. But there was no indication from the Clinton campaign that the selection of Gore was designed to get Southern Baptist votes.

If Clinton and Gore do harbor such hopes, however, they likely will find themselves at odds with the leaders of their denomination over several key issues -- most notably abortion.

Both Clinton and Gore favor a woman's right to abortion, while the Southern Baptist Convention in recent years has consistently opposed abortion in resolutions passed at their annual meetings.

Richard Land, executive director of the denomination's Christian Life Commission, criticized Clinton's position on fetal-tissue research -- which Land said encourages abortion -- in a June 29 article in the denomination's news service.

Leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention, which has been under a growing conservative influence for more than a decade, likely will find their views more in tune with the Republican incumbents, George Bush and Dan Quayle. In fact, both Bush and Quayle were received enthusiastically when they spoke to the annual Southern Baptist Convention -- Bush in 1991 and Quayle last month.

McAteer, who was instrumental in swaying Southern Baptist voters to the Republican party during Ronald Reagan's campaign and presidency, said most Southern Baptists are more conservative than Clinton and Gore. And, he added, the so-called character questions that have dogged Clinton have hurt his candidacy among Southern Baptists.

But, McAteer said, Gore's presence on the ticket will give the Democrats a chance to recapture some of the Baptist voters, if they appeal to them in the right way. "They are not going to get the Baptist vote unless they say the right things," said McAteer, a member of Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, Tenn.

McAteer said Bush's opposition to abortion is the key to his support among conservative Christians. If Bush wavers on that issue, however, he could lose that support to Clinton or Perot, he warned.

Other conservatives say Bush already has disappointed Christian voters. "I don't think Bush has done a good enough job to make evangelicals feel comfortable," said one Baptist leader, who asked not to be identified.

McAteer said he has invited Clinton and the other candidates to speak to the National Affairs Briefing he is organizing for Aug. 21-22 in Dallas, but he said he would rather have Gore in his place. Already Bush, Pat Buchanan, Oliver North and Jerry Falwell have tentatively agreed to speak.

A similar conservative rally organized by McAteer in 1980 established Ronald Reagan's popularity among conservative Christians and triggered the development of the Religious Right movement.

In picking Gore, Clinton deviated from conventional political wisdom, which says vice presidents are chosen to balance the characteristics of the president. In addition to being Southern Baptist, both Clinton and Gore are Ivy League graduates, young, politically moderate and from the South.

Political analysts said Clinton's choice was intended in part to portray the Democrats as the party of youth and give the ticket an edge in the politically critical South.

McAteer said Gore's image as a family man will help the ticket. The father of four, Gore was an unsuccessful presidential candidate in 1988 who declined to seek the office in 1992 because of family considerations.

Gore's wife, Tipper, also is considered an asset with conservative voters, although her role as a deaconess in her church may hurt with some. The couple led the fight in Congress against pornography and violence in rock music lyrics, and Tipper Gore spoke on the topic at the SBC Christian

Life Commission annual seminar in 1986. The couple were baptized in 1980.

Al Gore's specialties are foreign-policy and environmental issues. As a senator, he was principal sponsor of the resolution creating Earth Day in 1990. He has visited Antarctica to investigate damage to the ozone layer and Brazil to survey the depletion of the rain forest.

Gore wrote the forward to a recent book on environmentalism published by the SBC Woman's Missionary Union and written by Baptist ethicist Robert Parham.

Parham said Gore and Clinton, as "politicians with authentic Christian faith," represent the Baptist tradition of commitment to "the politics of the common good expressed through responsibility for others."

Jim Smith, director of governmental relations for the Christian Life Commission, declined to comment July 9 on "how the Clinton-Gore team will be received by Southern Baptists" for fear of appearing to endorse one or another of the presidential tickets.

While the Clinton-Gore Baptist connection may not translate into votes, Baptist historian Shurden said, "It does at least represent that some Baptists have entered into the mainstream of the cultural and political life of this country."

Jimmy Carter "sort of broke the ice" for Baptists in politics, agreed Nancy Ammerman, a Southern Baptist and professor of sociology at Emory University in Atlanta.

Although Carter's much-publicized faith vaulted Southern Baptists into the national spotlight in 1976, many conservative Baptists were eventually disillusioned with Carter's progressive stance on some issues and voted for Reagan in 1980.

"They won't return to the fold just because you have Southern Baptists on the ticket, because they are going to see them as a carbon copy (of Carter)," Ammerman explained.

Ammerman predicted the Gore nomination won't help Clinton with "that one-fourth to one-third of Southern Baptists that have had their political consciousness raised in a conservative direction," Ammerman said.

But, Ammerman said, that conservative block may not be as large as some suspect. She said her research has found that only 21 percent of Southern Baptists are "enthusiastic supporters of the entire conservative social agenda," which she identified in part as anti-abortion, pro-defense and against civil-rights protections for homosexuals.

The majority of Southern Baptists, 55 percent, agree more than they disagree with that agenda, according to the 1985 study, published in the journal *Review of Religious Research*. Meanwhile, 24 percent reject the agenda outright. Ammerman said Clinton and Gore would line up with those rejecting the conservative agenda.

Both Ammerman and Shurden agreed Baptist voters will pay more attention to political labels than denominational labels when picking a president.

"I think that the general tone of the Southern Baptist Convention right now is such that it will go with whoever is the furthest to the right," Shurden said.

Southern Baptists, like other Americans, pick a president on the basis of "a whole complicated array of factors," Ammerman said, particularly what effect the candidates' policies might have on their pocketbooks.

Still, Ammerman said, the Baptist factor will help the Democrats with a few voters. For Southern Baptists undecided about a candidate, the Baptist connection could prove to be "one of those marginal swing factors," she said. "If you have this in common with those (candidates), it might make you feel more comfortable with them."

Conservative leaders point out Bush is no shoo-in to receive their votes, despite his opposition to abortion. While Bush endorses what he

calls "the traditional family," some conservatives are upset he hasn't taken a strong stance against homosexuality.

That perceived weakness prompted an angry letter to Bush July 1 from the CLC's Land, who described the president's apparent support for homosexual rights as a "betrayal" of traditional family values.

With independent presidential hopeful Ross Perot also registering at least qualified support of homosexual rights and the right to abortion, conservative Christians have no clear choice for president yet.

Clinton and Gore could step into that gap, McAteer said, if they approach conservative voters in the right way. "It is a marketing possibility," he said.

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Baptist distinctives at risk,  
Democratic candidate says

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Bill Clinton, the likely Democratic presidential nominee, says Baptist distinctives of "reasoned tolerance" and church-state separation are at risk today.

In an interview with Bill Moyers aired July 7 on Public Broadcasting System stations, the Arkansas governor said he is saddened by the long-running feud between moderates and fundamentalists within the Southern Baptist Convention.

That controversy has resulted in fundamentalists gaining control of Southern Baptists' national organizational structures and the formation of new moderate organizations.

"I really hate to see it going on, and it's affected the lives of pastors I know and families I know and churches that I know," Clinton told Moyers.

"It's really been tough on us," he said. "As you might imagine, I'm pretty much on the side of the moderates in the fight, and the thing that has always been special about our church at its best was its reasoned tolerance and its understanding of the real wall between church and state.

"And all of that is at risk today in the interplay of forces."

Clinton, a member of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., gave the Democratic Party an all-Southern-Baptist ticket by selecting Tennessee Sen. Albert Gore Jr. as his running mate.

But it is unclear how much support a Clinton-Gore ticket will enjoy among Southern Baptists. Clinton's and Gore's views on controversial issues such as abortion rights, fetal-tissue research and church-state separation are at odds with the stances adopted by the fundamentalist-led SBC during the Reagan and Bush administrations.

Clinton acknowledged to Moyers that his views on racial equality and his siding with Southern Baptist moderates "might" jeopardize his political base in the South, but not necessarily.

"I think a lot of the impulses in ordinary practicing Baptists to side with the conservatives are good impulses," he said. "People think that...things are out of hand, that excess has caused a lot of the problems, both the personal and political problems, that people have faced in this country over the last several years, so I think their impulses are good.

"I just think that we have to argue about what's the best way to manifest those impulses, and I welcome the chance to do that."

Clinton dismissed the notion of a "natural base" for accepting ideas, instead contending that political support may cut across geographic and

generational lines.

"But I know one thing," he said. "There's no point in being president if you don't have something you believe, if you won't stand up for it, and then (if) you won't try to make it real in the life of the country.

"So I just have to be who I am and I think that in that sense, in terms of my church, I'm much more in the mainstream tradition of the church and that's where I'm comfortable being."

Asked what one idea he would fight for regardless of political costs, Clinton said: "Racial equality, the absence of discrimination, the end of these terrible divisions that are gripping our country. I'll stand for it against all comers to the very end."

Clinton said it is unclear what impact the abortion issue will have in the November election but said he is concerned "that we're just one (Supreme Court) judge away from repealing Roe vs. Wade," the landmark 1973 decision that recognized a woman's right to privacy in abortion decisions.

"I think Americans can differ on what restrictions or delays or second thoughts they want to give to the issue of abortion," he said, "but I believe most of us would like to see it not criminalized again."

Clinton told Moyers he would see to it that his first Supreme Court appointee supports the Roe decision.

Such a "litmus test," Clinton said, "makes me uncomfortable, but we...will have had then 12 years in which Presidents Reagan and Bush will have appointed 70 percent of the federal judges. Many, many of them were appointed more for their politically correct views -- their extreme conservatism, and their relative youth, so they could stay on the court a long time -- than for their education, their background, their judgment and their experience."

Clinton, who repeatedly faced questions about his character during the grueling Democratic primary process, defined the term: "Character is living and doing the right things for other people, as well as for yourself," he said. "Character is striving continuously for real integrity -- that is, putting your mind and your body and your spirit in the same place at the same time. It is the effort to act in a way that makes a difference to other people and that is the right thing to do."

Clinton also emphasized his rejection of fatalism and his belief in the possibility of change.

"You know, you and I are raised in this Baptist tradition where we know that no one is a stranger to sin, but we believe in redemption and improvement and going on," he told Moyers. "And I believe that about a society.

"I mean, to me, character in this presidential race is telling the American people the truth about where we are and where we've got to go and having the steely determination and the love and compassion and the caring to do what it takes to get us there."

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Pastors confirm faith  
of Clinton, Gore

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- In spite of allegations of marital infidelity raised against Bill Clinton during the presidential primaries, his former pastor characterizes the Arkansas governor and likely Democratic nominee as strongly committed to family values.

Brian Harbour, who served as Clinton's pastor at Immanuel Baptist

Church, Little Rock, Ark., from 1985 to 1990, believes that any marital discord between the governor and his wife, Hillary, was resolved years ago.

"I believe they worked past their earlier problems, dating back to when he was elected to his first term as governor," said Harbour, now pastor of First Baptist Church of Richardson, Texas, a Dallas suburb. "During the years I was there, they demonstrated a strong family cohesiveness."

Based both on Clinton's religious values and his pragmatism, Harbour gives no credence to the claims by former nightclub singer Gennifer Flowers that Clinton had a long-term affair with her.

"He has had ambitions for several years of running for the office he's pursuing now, and that certainly would have been a deterrent, along with his commitment to his family," he said.

Clinton regularly attended Immanuel during Harbour's tenure there and contributed financially to the church. Harbour recalls the governor singing in the sanctuary choir and playing his saxophone at a Christmas Eve service.

Clinton also played an active role in a Billy Graham crusade held in Little Rock in the late 1980s, inviting team members to dinner at the governor's mansion and attending the evangelistic meetings himself.

Although Hillary Clinton is a member and former Bible class teacher at a United Methodist church in Little Rock, Harbour said she occasionally attended Immanuel Baptist Church with her husband.

Contrary to the "Slick Willie" image of Clinton projected by his opponents, Harbour characterized Clinton as a man of deep faith with an abiding concern for the value of all people.

"He has deep roots to his faith, going back to his childhood. It's inevitable that his faith would have some impact on the decisions he might make and the leadership he would give," Harbour said, citing specifically Clinton's concern for education. "He believed everybody should have the opportunity to develop to the greatest potential God has given them."

Clinton demonstrated a spirit of racial inclusiveness as governor, naming a significant number of persons from minority groups to key positions, Harbour recalled.

Clinton's announced running mate, Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.), is a "theologically based, spiritually oriented person" with a deep commitment to family values, according to his pastor of more than a decade.

"His concern for environmental and international issues comes from his spiritual concern for the human race," said Jack Turner, former pastor of Mount Vernon Baptist Church, Crystal City, Va. "It is part of his belief and faith system."

Turner, who retired as pastor of the multiracial, suburban Washington congregation one year ago, served the church that Gore and his family have attended since he first came to the capital as a newly elected member of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1977.

"Senator Gore is a person of deep reverence and respect," said Turner, an unabashed supporter of Gore.

"Though he has a respect for all beliefs and I've never heard him make a prejudicial statement or express bias toward a person of another faith or belief, he has a profound commitment to his own beliefs."

Gore's wife, "Tipper," served a term as deaconess at Mount Vernon Baptist Church, and the family always has faithfully attended worship services whenever they were in Washington, their former pastor said.

Gore often would arrange his travel schedule into Washington so that he could go directly from the airport to the church to meet his family for services.

"I remember once he was unable to get a taxi at the airport, and he walked a mile and a half to our church so that he could worship with his

family," Turner said.

He described Gore as a "family-oriented person committed to family values," noting the senator's devotion to his wife and their four children.

That commitment to family was deepened when his young son, Albert III, was struck by a speeding car in a baseball stadium parking lot. The boy was hospitalized for several weeks at Johns Hopkins University Medical Center and was later moved to a hospital in New Orleans for treatment of nerve damage. He is reported now to be fully recovered.

"Al and Tipper were by young Albert's side throughout the ordeal. That raised to a new level their appreciation for the precious nature and frailty of life and quickened in them a sensitivity to other families' experiences of anguish," Turner said.

"Al is a man acquainted with grief and loss, yet he remains a person of great faith, hope and enthusiasm for life."

Gore has been deeply hurt by the on-going division between factions of the Southern Baptist Convention, Turner said. "He has been very much concerned and disappointed this his denomination would devote so much of its energy to being drawn into that controversy," he said.

Turner said that while neither Gore nor his wife favor governmental censorship, the senator always has backed Tipper's involvement in pushing for parental warning labels on sexually explicit records.

"He was quite supportive of her concerns that children should be protected from unnecessary obscenities," he said.

Both Harbour and Turner said their former parishioners were committed to the traditional Baptist position of strict institutional church-state separation.

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Beaufort shuns street preachers,  
welcomes 'World Changers'

By Susan Todd Doyle

BEAUFORT, S.C. (ABP) -- The same week that Beaufort, S.C., took street preachers to court for breaking the city's noise law, a group of World Changers hammered out a message of their own.

World Changers is an eight-day coeducational missions education project for high school youth sponsored by the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission.

The tiny town of Beaufort made national news recently because of a fight between street preachers and Beaufort merchants. Last October, the city passed an ordinance prohibiting loud and unseemly noise near residences and businesses. The merchants charged the preachers with harassing and berating passers-by, causing a decline in business.

Even though the Baptist teenagers made a lot of racket as they shared the message of God's love, the city of Beaufort welcomed them, proclaiming June 27-July 4 World Changers Week.

Using hammers and saws to repair homes for people who otherwise couldn't repairs them, 183 teenagers and their leaders made a difference in the lives of many Beaufort residents.

The teenagers, from eight states, spent June 27-July 3 in the Beaufort area working on a World Changers work project, one of 12 projects this summer sponsored by the Brotherhood Commission.

The Beaufort project included the repair of 15 homes. Savannah River Baptist Association leaders worked with local social-service agencies to determine homes with the greatest needs.

The teenagers, divided into 15 work crews, made repairs to the homes under the direction of men from the area who have construction skills.

"These kids have touched lives that will never be the same," said Tommy Karn, director of missions for the Savannah River association.

The homeowners for whom the World Changers worked echoed Karn's statement in their own ways.

Looking at her refurbished kitchen, one woman softly said to herself, "That cold wind won't blow in here anymore."

Another said, "There's got to be a God here because most people would look at (this house) and say it is too rotten (to repair). I never thought I would see this house repaired."

A letter of thanks was given to each member of the crew that worked on one home.

"We, the Potts family, wish to express our most sincere thanks for the fellowship and labor given to us. The time you spent, and the work you did for us, is the most gratifying gift we could have received. It was badly needed and greatly appreciated."

One woman's joy was seen in her face. Confined to a wheelchair, she had not been outdoors in years. The front porch of her house had long since rotted. World Changers participants built her a porch and a ramp.

The nephew of one homeowner spent every day working alongside the teenagers. He had tried to make repairs to his widowed aunt's house but had not been able to do all that needed to be done. His tireless efforts so impressed the teenagers that when they discovered one day it was his birthday, they gave him a new bicycle to replace his old, rusted one.

Not only did the teenagers touch the lives of the homeowners, the homeowners touched the lives of the teenagers.

"The working isn't what helps us during World Changers," said Robert Lehmann, 17, from Green Trails Baptist Church, Chesterfield, Mo. "It's realizing things such as that others don't have as much as we do."

"I have so many decisions to make in my life, but with every decision I make, I'll end up with a good life. Not everybody has that."

Katie Williamson of Langley, S.C., had her own observation. "It breaks my heart to think that there are people right around us who live in these conditions." Williamson referred to homes with no running water and with gaping holes in the walls, floors and ceilings.

"I know it's in my own hometown," she said. "I've just been blind to it. It breaks my heart that I and my church haven't done anything about it before."

The importance of sharing their Christian faith was also underscored for many participants.

During an evening devotional time, Bob Griffin of Chesterfield, Mo., reminded his fellow youth group: "We need to be sure to share the truth with our families. The house will always fall away, rot and rust, but the truth is everlasting."

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Tax incentives proposed  
for charitable gifts

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Three members of the Senate Finance Committee introduced a bill July 2 that would encourage charitable giving by changing tax laws governing non-profit institutions and their donors.

The Charitable Contribution Tax Act (S. 2979), introduced by Sens. Daniel Moynihan, D-N.Y., John Danforth, R-Mo., and David Boren, D-Okla., would amend the tax code to encourage charitable donations and improve

compliance with reporting tax deductions.

One provision would make all gifts of appreciated property fully deductible on a permanent basis. Appreciated property includes real estate, stocks and tangible items such as collectibles whose value increased after being purchased.

The 1986 tax act subjected the appreciated portion of charitable gifts to the alternative minimum tax, precipitating a decline in large gifts to universities, hospitals, museums and other charitable institutions.

The bill would permanently repeal the provision subjecting the appreciated portion of charitable gifts to the alternative minimum tax so that all donors will receive a deduction equal to the property's fair market value.

Two other provisions would require more disclosure and substantiation of charitable contributions. One specifies that a taxpayer cannot deduct any contribution of \$100 or more without receipts from the church or charity receiving the donation.

Previously, the administration proposed that taxpayers who gave \$500 annually would have their names reported to the IRS by the charity. This new proposal involves single contributions of \$100 or more and requires only that the taxpayer attach a receipt to his return.

The other provision involves disclosure requirements related to "quid pro quo" contributions, payments made partly as a contribution and partly for goods and services provided by the church or charity.

The quid pro quo disclosure requirement stipulates the church or charity must inform the donor that the deductible amount is limited to how much the gift exceeds the value of goods or services provided. The church or charity also must provide the donor with a "good faith estimate of the value of such goods or services."

Both disclosure provisions would result in churches dealing exclusively with the donor, not the government.

"These new substantiation and disclosure requirements are a substantial revision of a disclosure proposal made by the administration in the president's budget for fiscal year 1993, released last February," Moynihan said. "They are the product of extensive discussion and work with affected organizations by the Treasury Department and congressional staff."

Danforth echoed Moynihan, saying the provision addresses the concerns of the charitable community in the reporting requirements area.

The charitable community, including Baptists, objected to the original reporting requirement that would have required churches to report directly to the government, thus making churches something of a tax enforcement agent of the IRS.

Brent Walker, associate general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, said: "It's a vast improvement over the administration's proposal. The across-the-board reporting requirement is out. Under this bill, the donors, not the churches, will deal with the IRS."

"The co-sponsors have attempted to tailor bill language to discourage tax evasion while preserving the autonomy of churches and other charities."

James Dunn, BJC executive director, noted: "We are continuing to probe and ask questions about the bill. While the proposal looks rather reasonable, I've never seen one that couldn't be improved upon."

Dunn added that it is rare for tax proposals to clear the legislative process without being altered.

The House of Representatives July 2 approved another tax bill affecting non-profit organizations. The Revenue Act of 1992 (H.R. 11), approved 356-55, would provide full deduction of gifts of appreciated property for 18 months. The House dropped proposals to extend beyond 1995 or make permanent the 3 percent floor of itemized tax deductions.

Present law limits itemized deductions, including charitable

contributions, for higher income individuals. Itemized deductions for high-income taxpayers are reduced by an amount equaling 3 percent of their adjusted gross income of more than \$100,000.

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-- By Pam Parry

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