

Associated Baptist Press

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August 17, 1995

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Nashville, Tennessee

Mantle professed faith in Christ before his death, preacher says

By Laura Horne

DALLAS (ABP) -- Mickey Mantle had a deathbed conversion to Christianity, according to former-teammate Bobby Richardson, who officiated at Mantle's funeral.

A crowd of about 2,000 overflowed the sanctuary, chapel and hall at Lovers Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas -- where Mantle supported a family therapy ministry -- to bid farewell to the baseball great.

Richardson, a lay preacher who played with Mantle on New York Yankee teams in the 1950s and 1960s, ministered to the Hall of Famer during his dying days. He told those at the Aug. 15 funeral that Mantle had long resisted but finally accepted Christ as his savior.

Richardson encouraged fans to support the Mickey Mantle Foundation which was set up to promote the need for organ donors. Before his death, Mantle chose the slogan: "Be a hero. Be a donor."

"If Mick could hold a press conference from where he is today, I know that he would want to introduce you to his true hero, Jesus Christ," Richardson said.

Richardson added that the greatest tribute family, friends and fans can give to Mantle is to receive Christ as well.

Mantle, 63, died at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas, Aug. 13 following a liver transplant on June 8 and a battle with cancer that spread to his lungs and other vital organs.

North Carolina Baptist executive disputes remarks in Patterson interview

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- The leader of one of four Baptist state conventions labeled by seminary president Paige Patterson as "weak" in their acceptance of conservative reforms took strong exception to Patterson's remarks.

Roy Smith, executive director-treasurer of the 1.2 million-member Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, termed it "regrettable" that Patterson "felt it necessary to denigrate" Baptists in North Carolina, Virginia, Texas and Kentucky in an interview in the July issue of Texas Baptist, a conservative newspaper based in Houston.

Patterson, an architect of the conservative juggernaut which gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention during the 1980s, termed those conventions "our weakest states" in assessing the state of the SBC. Patterson is president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

"There has never been any doubt about Patterson's commitment to the 'conservative resurgence' in the Southern Baptist Convention," Smith said, "but I am amazed that he has issued a declaration of war in the state conventions which he characterized as 'weak states.'"

Patterson's assessment that "time is on the side" of conservatives in moderate-dominated states will "ensure a call to arms to the various political factions within these state conventions," Smith said.

In the interview, Patterson also set the four state conventions, along with others that might share some of their sentiments, "in direct opposition" to the SBC, Smith continued, "as if the Baptists in these states were not part" of the national convention.

Smith said he "would be interested in knowing how Dr. Patterson defines 'weak' state conventions," noting that the four states provide about 28 percent of the SBC's national budget.

"It has been difficult to maintain a high level of support for the Southern Baptist Convention among a growing number of North Carolina Baptists," Smith said. "This statement by a seminary president in our state, who knows little of the history and heritage of North Carolina Baptists, will make it more difficult to generate excitement about continuing to provide sacrificial gifts to fund his school."

Smith also took "strong exception" to Patterson's statement that Baptist state conventions in North Carolina and Virginia are controlled by "liberal bureaucracies."

That grouping "definitely includes me, and all other elected and employed leaders of the Baptist Convention of North Carolina," Smith said, disputing Patterson's characterization. "There has been an honest effort to keep North Carolina Baptists in the mainstream of Baptist life, refusing to identify with the extremes of the right or left. It appears that such a stance is totally unacceptable to Dr. Patterson, who evidently prefers a lock-step of creedal intolerance."

State convention executives in Texas, Virginia and Kentucky could not be reached for comment Aug. 17.

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-- By Bob Allen

Trustee wants Mohler protesters blocked from HMB appointment

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Students at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who oppose seminary President Albert Mohler may have a hard time getting appointed home missionaries.

Some trustees of the Home Mission Board want to exclude Mohler opponents from missionary appointment.

"At the Home Mission Board missionary personnel committee, we find out if any candidate who has just

'graduated from Southern participated in the protests against the president," said trustee Walter Carpenter, a Houston attorney and member of the committee. "If one ever has or does, he [or] she will not be considered."

"We agree with Mohler that students are there only to learn, not to participate in management or politics," wrote Carpenter in a recent issue of the Texas Baptist, a conservative newspaper which he edits.

Student protests, including a two-week sit-in and public rallies, erupted on the Southern campus in Louisville, Ky., last March after Mohler fired Diana Garland, dean of the seminary's social-work school. Though Mohler's actions drew the support of seminary trustees, several accrediting agencies are investigating.

Apparently no home-mission candidates have been denied appointment because of participation in the protests, but Carpenter said one has been investigated.

The Atlanta-based Home Mission Board has 4,913 missionaries under appointment in a variety of roles, including church starters and mission pastors. Members of the trustees' missionary personnel committee do not interview the candidates personally but act on recommendations from the staff, which conducts interviews and background checks.

Both Everett Geis, chairman of the committee, and Dan Garcia, director of the HMB's human resources division, said the official criteria for appointment and the board's screening process for candidates do not address the Southern protests.

"It really hasn't come up, and I'm a little surprised by [Carpenter's] comment," said Garcia. "It's not a criterion."

"It is not policy and I regret any implication that it is," conceded Carpenter in an interview Aug. 17. But, he added, "I am going to ask the question" of future Southern graduates who seek appointment.

In the case of one recent Southern graduate, whom Carpenter would not identify "the HMB staff people had already asked that question," he said. Carpenter would not identify the staff member involved either, but he said, "he knew there had been no such involvement" in the protests. Carpenter's inquiry apparently was in private and not part of the committee's proceedings.

Both Geis and Garcia said they are unaware of any candidate coming under such scrutiny. Geis, pastor of First Baptist Church in Delhi, La., said the issue of anti-Mohler protesters "has never come up for discussion in the missionary personnel committee."

"I don't have any idea where this came from," he said.

But Carpenter promised to keep the issue alive. If any missionary candidate is known to have participated in the campus protests, he said, "I would want to review those circumstances very carefully."

Diana Garland said the protests are being misinterpreted. "There were no protests against Dr. Mohler," she said, but only students showing support for the social-work school.

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-- By Greg Warner

Pioneer woman pastor resigns Memphis church

By Bob Allen

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (ABP) -- Nancy Hastings Sehested, a pioneer woman minister in the Southern Baptist Convention, has resigned as senior pastor of Prescott Memorial Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., a post she has held since 1987.

Sehested has accepted a position as writer-in-residence for Sunset Ministries, an ecumenical retreat center in Lake Junaluska, N.C. She also plans to work weekends at the Sunset Inn, a bread-and-breakfast operated by friends.

"I have not made this decision out of any crisis event at the church or out of a sense of forced leaving," Sehested wrote in a letter to the congregation. "I am responding to a strong stirring of my heart. I hope and pray that it is the rumbling of God's Spirit calling me toward this opportunity."

Her last scheduled sermon at the Memphis church is Aug. 27.

Sehested was unavailable for comment Aug. 17, but her husband, Ken Sehested, director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, said the move is "in effect a kind of sabbatical."

After 15 years in pastoral ministry, she has "felt for several years the desire and need to write some of her experiences down," Ken Sehested said. Before going to Memphis, she was associate pastor of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga.

Her new job is "in effect a temporary one," he said. She plans to begin looking for another pastorate in the fall. When she accepts a new church, Sehested said he will move the Baptist Peace Fellowship offices from Memphis to "wherever she lands." In the meantime, he said, the couple will have a "commuter marriage."

Sehested's call as senior pastor of the 235-member Memphis congregation in August 1987 stirred controversy in the 120-church Shelby Baptist Association, which expelled Prescott Memorial that October for calling a woman pastor.

According to news reports, Sehested was believed at the time to be the only woman pastor in a church affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention and one of only four female senior pastors in the 15 million-member Southern Baptist Convention.

Today the Louisville, Ky.,-based Baptist Women in Ministry counts 1,150 women who have been ordained in Southern Baptist churches. But most serve as chaplains or church staff ministers, not senior pastors.

The association's action against Prescott Memorial did not affect the church's relationship to the Tennessee Baptist Convention or the SBC. More recently, however, the congregation voted to drop its ties to the conservative-dominated SBC and reaffirm its existing relationships with other Baptist bodies, including the American Baptist Churches in the USA, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Alliance of Baptists.

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-- David Waters of the Memphis Commercial-Appeal contributed to this story.

Gathering emphasizes freedom as basis of Baptist spirituality

By Walker Knight

MARS HILL, N.C. (ABP) -- A second annual gathering of Baptists interested in contemplative spirituality echoed a long-held Baptist belief that "to be authentic and responsible, faith must be free."

Speakers at the meeting, held Aug. 3-5 at Mars Hill College in western North Carolina, explored traditional Baptist spiritual practices under the theme of freedom: freedom for faith, freedom for prayer, freedom for the Word, freedom for missions and freedom for community.

Historian Glenn Hinson from Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (Va.) deplored a current trend to stress a public display of faith, which he termed "religious flashing." Illustrated by the demand for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution allowing prayer in public schools, the trend represents a radical turn in the Baptist mind-set, he said.

"Baptist forbears would scratch their heads in puzzlement at this," Hinson said, "for who could possibly prevent prayer, prayer being something secret, an affair of the heart which no human being could either authorize or prevent? What supporters of this amendment want is not prayer, but public prayer which would propagate their

own brand of religious faith."

Such "flashing" sees faith as assent to definite statements, Hinson explained. "You must subscribe to my creed or you will forfeit your salvation."

Hinson quoted a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention who said "if we decide that pickles have souls, then those who teach in our seminaries ought to teach that pickles have souls." Such a statement, Hinson said, echoes Ignatius Loyola's saying: "If the [Roman Catholic] Church says that anything which appears to our eyes to be white is black, we will believe that it is black."

Hinson stressed that "faith begins in awe, not in cognition," and that God is the initiator of faith. "It would be presumptuous of human beings to imagine they could just think 'God' and start believing."

According to Hinson, God has created human beings with a faculty other human beings cannot control, "the 'I' at the center of our being, on which even the Almighty God will not trample."

"Our commitment to this voluntary principle does not mean that Baptists will have a spirituality all their own, one we could call a Baptist spirituality, but it bears in significant ways on our approach to spirituality. It means we will avoid language and methods which compromise the freedom of faith," Hinson said.

This year's gathering registered 94 participants, a significant increase over 1994. The group took another step toward establishing a Baptist academy on spirituality. Within the next three years they plan to join the Upper Room Foundation in Nashville, Tenn., in sponsoring three one-week spiritual academies in the areas of Louisville, Ky.; Charlotte, N.C., and Jackson, Miss., according to Gary Furr of Birmingham, Ala., chair of a steering committee exploring this possibility.

Participants overwhelmingly voted to continue the annual gatherings, which this year attracted people from 16 states and two foreign countries for the creative worship services, small group experiences, and times of silence, prayer and meditation.

Tom Turner of Greenville, S.C., publisher of the spirituality journal "Skylight" and, along with Hinson, one of the initiators of the gathering, said one reason the retreat was held was to better understand the meaning of Baptist spirituality.

Turner, who said his calling is to a life of prayer, spoke on freedom for prayer. He told of the occasion in 1525 in Zurich, Switzerland, when three people met to agree that baptism should be preceded by faith and followed by bold living. The three then baptized each other, an action for which they were executed.

"These original Baptists took time to pray," Turner added. "It illustrates the centrality of prayer in the Christian life. Prayer is the turning point that joins study and action. It is neither study nor action, and it cannot take the place of either. But it integrates them and opens both to the transforming grace and power of God."

Turner asked what would it mean if Baptists placed prayer at the center of their lives, individually and corporately. "We build halls for preaching, schools for study, religious malls for activity, houses of support for missions. What would it mean for a Baptist church to become 'a house of prayer for all peoples?'"

He said it will not happen by accident, only when Baptists hunger for it and wait on the movements of the Spirit in their lives.

To strengthen this process, Turner advocated more "spiritual directors," guides who will "listen to us, respect us and provide the unique guidance that will help us learn how to be in God's presence with trust and joy."

He called on churches to add spiritual directors to their staffs. Earlier this year a number of Baptists who are trained as spiritual directors held a meeting at Richmond, and many of them attended the gathering at Mars Hill.

Lloyd Allen of Clinton, Miss., said that while the Baptist way begins with soul freedom, freedom for the Word is a natural companion. "It is a freedom for transformation into Christlikeness by the word of God alive and active in Holy Scripture."

"The Baptist way calls for intellectual freedom to apply the best available biblical scholarship to the life of prayer. Devotional approaches which ignore the questions raised by contemporary biblical criticism are not adequate," Allen said.

He gave suggestions for recapturing a balanced, prayerful approach to Scripture: read the Bible; reflect thoughtfully on what you have read; respond in prayer to your reading, study and reflection, and finally, repose or

wait upon the Spirit in silence.

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ADDITION: In the Aug. 14 story "Questions could be clarified this fall at Southern Seminary," please replace the 7th paragraph with the following:

On-campus enrollment for the fall of 1992 -- the last before Mohler became president -- was 1,679.

NOTE: The 1992 figure was not available from the seminary when the initial story was published. The 1992-93 total enrollment figure which was published (2,858) is accurate but includes all semesters and both on- and off-campus enrollment. For comparison, the total enrollment for the 1994-95 school year was 2,487.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Another issue of ABP is likely for Friday, Aug. 18.

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