

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Southern Baptists offer praise, concern about Million Man March**

By Ken Walker

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- White Southern Baptist social observers endorsed the message of the recent "Million Man March," despite their concern over its connection with the controversial Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan.

David Gushee, a Christian ethics professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, noted that unlike Martin Luther King's 1963 march on Washington, the Oct. 16 gathering offered no place for whites or interest in building bridges between the races. However, he said whites shouldn't react with scorn to the march.

"In the spirit of Jesus, we must ask what we have done to cause the black community to write us off as irrelevant to meeting their needs," Gushee said. Gushee called unemployment, crime and other African-American ills a social disaster to which "everyone in society is called on to respond, especially the church."

White churches, however, have demonstrated little care for solving problems of the urban underclass, Gushee added. Also, politically, many whites tend to vote their economic and ideological self-interest instead of following the gospel imperative to "care for the least of these," Gushee said.

Bill Leonard, chairman of the religion department at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., said the march illustrated the nation's need to atone for racial division. Society may be less segregated than in the 1960s, but that doesn't mean the problem is solved, he said.

"In terms of the white church, you hope in one case we would do something in the area of race relations that we wouldn't have to repent for 150 years later," said Leonard, referring to the Southern Baptist Convention's recent resolution on slavery and racism.

He said the body of Christ must try to deal with race in new ways and recognize that the divisions are as much economic as they are theological.

He called it shocking that 33 percent of African-American males in their 20s are in some way involved in the criminal justice system. "Our way of dealing with the problem of unemployment and education is by putting them in prison," Leonard said.

One way to resolve white-black tensions is dialogue to promote understanding, said Richard Groves, pastor of Wake Forest Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C. The former president of the Alliance of Baptists heads an Alliance team that meets regularly with members of the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

PNBC General Secretary Tyrone Pitts is scheduled to speak Oct. 29 at Wake Forest Baptist, which 18 months ago forged an alliance with an African-American congregation, Groves said.

Later, members from the black and white congregations will discuss a book on middle-class black rage. The book's author says anger stems from racism aimed at well-educated, more affluent blacks even though they "play by the rules" of white society.

"We realize we have to start talking and saying things across racial lines that we're saying to each other," Groves said. "I hope the march will open doors all over the country to remove the invisible barriers between people.

Groves termed it "ironic" that the Million Man March came on the heels of the O.J. Simpson verdict. "I don't know if that made things worse or just illustrated how bad they were," he said.

Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn., said the march symbolized America's deep racial division, but praised its call to individual responsibility for black males. He said it corrects a misperception that African-Americans care only about government's obligation to help them.

"Farrakhan's racist, anti-Semitic and bellicose language is counterproductive and harmful to American discourse," Parham said, "but simply because he provided leadership to the march, that is not justification to ignore the themes of personal responsibility that were articulated."

Parham noted similarities between goals of the march and of Promise Keepers, a rapidly growing, predominantly white Christian men's movement.

Both movements are speaking out about the need for male leadership in the family and society, Parham said.

"In recent decades, our culture has articulated distorted images of what it means to be a responsible male. Some have made maleness the root of all evil. So I'm encouraged by what both groups are doing," Parham said.

The Denver-based Promise Keepers, however, issued a statement disavowing any identification with Farrakhan. The group said it would not endorse the Million Man March because it was not Christ-centered, included a political agenda and ran counter to Promise Keeper's call for racial reconciliation.

The SBC Brotherhood Commission, which has a cooperative agreement with Promise Keepers, took a similar stand, although President James Williams noted the march confirmed trends seen in the Christian men's movement, particularly men's struggle with their place in society.

Despite the Brotherhood's parallel concerns about men assuming a proper role in the home, seeking forgiveness and responsible citizenship, Williams frowned on the "mixture of politics, social action and world religion" at the march.

"Our primary issue is with the leadership," he said. "I would encourage my African-American brothers in Christ to be acutely aware of the theological differences between them and the Nation of Islam."

"Christians must hold firm to their belief in a triune God who created and loves all mankind and is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," Smith said.

Nor should distinctions between Dr. King's vision of an peacefully integrated society and Farrakhan's separatist attitudes be overlooked, said Gushee.

Gushee, the author of "Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust," an account of Christians who aided Jews in Nazi Germany, said some of the Islamic leader's statements about other races and creeds have been vile.

"One must be struck by the tragic deterioration between King and Farrakhan and what it says about our country," Gushee said. "The difference between the two men is more than symbolic. King taught that racism can't be overcome by more racism and hatred can't be overcome by more hatred."

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-- Ken Walker is a free-lance writer in Louisville, Ky.

## **Southwestern trustees protest Texas plan to cut SBC funding**

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees urged Texas Baptists to reconsider a plan to cut funding to the Southern Baptist Convention about \$1.5 million next year.

Meeting Oct. 16-18, trustees for the SBC seminary located in Fort Worth, Texas, approved a resolution affirming the Baptist General Convention's goal of starting 1,400 new churches in five years but discouraging the state convention's plan to raise money for the project by cutting the amount it sends to fund international ministries of the SBC.

The trustee resolution calls on Texas Baptists to consider the impact of the cut on missionaries and the "financial hardship" it will cause to students at Southwestern and other SBC seminaries.

Rather than reduce funding to the SBC, the resolution suggests challenging Texas churches to increase by a half percent the portion of their budgets given to support both the state and national conventions through the Cooperative Program unified funding plan.

Texas Baptists are scheduled to meet Nov. 13-14 in San Antonio to consider increasing the share of Cooperative Program dollars to remain in the state next year by 2.5 percent, to 67 percent. If the budget is met, that would mean about \$1.5 million less for SBC ministries in 1996.

According to seminary officials, the cut would cost Southwestern \$51,245 this fiscal year and \$87,900 in fiscal year 1996-97.

If Southwestern uses endowment funds to make up for the loss, it would require \$1.8 million in new principle, seminary President Ken Hemphill told trustees.

Trustee chairman Ralph Pulley, a Dallas attorney, said the resolution expresses the board of trustees' continued support for the Cooperative Program. "We would be remiss if we did not turn that expression into a formal resolution, making our constituency aware of our concern about continued support of the Cooperative Program," Pulley said.

Moderates control the 2.6 million-member Texas convention, while conservatives are in charge in the 15 million-member SBC. Some interpret Texas' proposed reduction in its donation as a protest of conservative control in the national convention.

Among conservative reforms in the SBC was the March 1993 firing of Southwestern's president, Russell Dilday, which set off a firestorm of reaction among moderates in Texas and other states.

In other business at the meeting on the seminary campus, Southwestern trustees:

-- Unanimously elected Jack Terry as vice president for institutional development. Terry is currently dean of Southwestern's religious education school. Terry, who has been serving as interim director of institutional advancement since May, will assume the vice presidency Nov. 1. He replaces Jay Chance, who resigned in May.

-- Approved the new Lewis and Betty Drummond Chair of Spiritual Awakening. Evangelist Billy Graham will be honorary chair for the \$1 million fund drive to endow the professorship.

Drummond, a former evangelism professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and former president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, now teaches at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala. He is a graduate of Southwestern Seminary.

-- Hired Dan Earl Clement to the School of Religious Education faculty as associate professor of psychology and counseling. Clement earned his master of arts in religious education and doctor of philosophy degrees from Southwestern.

-- Approved the 1996 recipients of the B.H. Carroll Founder's Day award, the highest honor bestowed by the seminary. This year's recipients are Joe and Eleanor Hayes of Greenville, S.C., and C.M. and Louise King of Kingsville, Texas. Joe Hayes is president and chairman of the board for Hayes Food Products, Inc. C.M. King worked with Hoechst Celanese Corporation in Kingsville until his retirement in 1982.

-- Approved the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ended July 31, 1995. The seminary finished the budget year in the black, noted Hubert Martin, vice president for business affairs.

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-- By Bob Allen. Based on reporting by Jan Johnsonius and Jim Jones.

## **Texas CLC revises abortion statement, retains exceptions**

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) --The Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission has revised its position paper on abortion, affirming reverence for life but allowing for abortion in certain "extreme circumstances."

"Abortion as birth control is not compatible with the gospel's call to reverence for life," the revised document states.

But competing claims between the mother and the fetus must also be considered, according to the paper.

Circumstances in which Christians might "prayerfully choose abortion as the least tragic choice," the paper states, are threats to the life of the mother, cases of rape or incest, pregnancies involving severe fetal deformity and disease incompatible with life, and cases of severe and chronic mental illness in which the pregnancy imminently and severely threatens the life of the mother.

Raising possible exceptions "should not be interpreted as encouraging abortion even in the face of extreme circumstances," the revised document states.

The Texas CLC's abortion statement, initially published in December 1992, has been controversial among conservative Baptists desiring a more restrictive statement. The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention condemns abortion in all situations except to save the life of the mother.

Messengers to the 1993 Baptist General Convention of Texas meeting in Dallas rejected a motion that would have instructed the Texas CLC to rewrite its statement on abortion to bring it in line with the SBC position.

The issue came up again at last year's state convention in Amarillo. Rather than take action on a motion that would have instructed the commission to "renounce the exceptions for abortion" and "rewrite the paper with clear biblical support for the preservation and protection of the unborn child," messengers voted to refer the matter to the CLC.

At their Oct. 13 meeting, CLC commissioners made several editorial changes in a draft revised document but left largely unchanged the portions clarifying but retaining potential exceptions to the basic position against abortion.

In opening discussion on the matter, commission chairman George Mason, pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, lamented that most attention would focus on the exceptions rather than the "full-orbed document" that presents a profound respect for life and fundamental aversion to abortion.

Roger Deerinwater, pastor of First Baptist Church in Archer City, Texas, opposed the exceptions noted in the position paper, saying they leave a "wide open door" to allowing abortions.

"Any exception -- other than to protect the life of the mother -- denies the sovereignty of God," he said.

Deerinwater said that by including exceptions to opposition in certain cases, the abortion document "comes off as more of a pro-choice than a pro-life piece, and I'm convinced that grassroots Southern Baptists in Texas don't feel that way."

Ebbie Smith, professor of ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a member of the committee that revised the CLC paper, took issue with any characterization of the document that would paint it as anything less than basically against abortion.

"I think this is a strong stand against abortion," he said.

In other business, the CLC approved a proposal by its world hunger committee designed to increase giving to hunger relief, which has dropped sharply in recent years.

Citing examples like the "adopt-a-child" approach of World Vision and the Christian Children's Fund and the "Manna" and "Jerusalem" projects of the Southern Baptist Foreign and Home Mission Boards, the committee proposed a similar way of personalizing world hunger giving.

Instead of promoting a general world hunger offering which is split 80 percent-to-20 percent between the two Southern Baptist mission boards, the Texas convention would solicit specific national or worldwide ministry proposals from those two boards, as well as the Baptist World Alliance and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Proposals for projects within Texas would come from local Baptist associations and churches.

Targeted distribution of funds would be 60 percent to worldwide hunger causes, 20 percent to hunger projects within the United States, and 20 percent to hunger programs in Texas.

The proposed change must be approved by the state convention's Administrative Committee and Executive Board.

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## **Baptist Center for Ethics hires new staff member**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Baptist Center for Ethics has added an experienced Baptist editor to its staff in Nashville, Tenn.

Harold Smith, a longtime employee of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, has been named project coordinator for the agency, announced Robert Parham, executive director.

At the Baptist Center for Ethics, Smith will develop study guides and other printed resources, offer leadership training in local churches and help the four-year-old agency broaden its outreach, Parham said.

Parham said Smith's "seasoned denominational knowledge and network" will help the center reach beyond its current core constituency of "baby-boomer" moderate Baptists.

Smith, 60, worked on the management and editorial staffs of the Sunday School Board's Broadman and Holman publishing division 14 years before taking advantage of an early retirement incentive offer in 1992.

Earlier, he was a pastor in Indiana and Kentucky. Smith currently is an adjunct instructor of religion at Belmont University, a Baptist school in Nashville.

Smith is a graduate of Howard College, now Samford University, in Birmingham, Ala. He holds the bachelor of divinity, master of theology and doctor of philosophy degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

The Baptist Center for Ethics was begun in 1991 to provide "positive and proactive educational resources to the mainstream Christian community," said Parham, who worked under moderate leadership at the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission in the 1980s. The CLC, like other agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention, is now headed by a conservative.

The center is an independent agency partially funded by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group that offers an alternative missions program and other services to moderate Southern Baptists dissatisfied with SBC agencies under conservative control.

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## **Christian's responsibility is to go and tell, Parks says**

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- One-fourth of the world's people never have heard the name of Jesus Christ because too many people who claim to follow Christ won't heed his call to go and tell, Keith Parks said Oct. 6.

Parks, former president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and current missions coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, addressed a missions celebration sponsored by the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship. About 270 people attended the session at Buechel Park Baptist Church in Louisville.

"The primary reason one-fourth of the world has never heard the news of Jesus is we've allowed the culture to force its standard upon us and we've lost the Christian standard," Parks said.

Parks recounted the biblical parable Jesus told of a host who planned a banquet to which none of the invited dignitaries came. So the host sent his servants "into the highways and hedges" to compel anyone they found to come and eat.

"There are multitudes in this world who would be (at God's banquet) if one of his servants would invite them," Parks said. "The Great Host has enough servants to send to all places to invite people."

God wants to send some Christians to their own neighborhoods and others to the most distant parts of the world, Parks said. "Our task is to find out where he would send us."

However, the Christian church's focus must be on the one-fourth of the world's population to which the gospel of Jesus has not been preached, Parks asserted. "There is no way they can find out unless one of his servants obeys him and tells them."

The world's 46 million Gypsy people are among those largely neglected by Christian missionaries, Parks said. He described Gypsies as "probably the most dispersed, persecuted, discriminated-against people in the world."

He told about the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's missionary work among Gypsies and the response it has drawn from a Gypsy who is a Christian pastor. "This pastor can't believe a non-Gypsy group is willing to send missionaries to the Gypsies. 'No non-Gypsy group has ever done that,'" Parks quoted the pastor.

This pastor said Gypsy Christians have considered their people to be the "most distant" peoples of the earth referred to in the Bible. "When the Lord finally gets to us, maybe the Great Banquet is near," the pastor said.

The four-year-old Fellowship, an organization of moderate Southern Baptists, currently has 83 missionaries, and that number will increase to more than 100 by December, Parks reported.

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