

Associated Baptist Press

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January 19, 1996

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Nashville, Tennessee

JAN 29 1996
(96/5)

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Creed named dean at Truett Seminary

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Brad Creed, associate dean of Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary since 1993, was elected dean of the seminary in Waco, Texas, Jan. 19.

Creed's election by Baylor's board of regents is effective immediately, according to officials at the university.

Creed succeeds Robert Sloan, the first Truett Seminary dean, who was elected president of Baylor last year. Since, Russell Dilday, former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary who now teaches preaching at Truett, has been acting dean.

"There is no one in Baptist life who knows better the history and vision of Truett Seminary than Dr. Brad Creed," Sloan said. He described Creed as "probably the most widely respected theological educator among Texas Baptist pastors of his generation."

Creed is a 1979 Baylor graduate with a master's and doctor's degree from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

He has been pastor at three Texas Baptist churches: First Baptist Church of Natchitoches and McCart Meadows Baptist Church and Wheatland Baptist Church, both in Fort Worth.

Truett Seminary is one of several new Baptist schools offering theological education as an alternative to seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention, which have turned more conservative in recent years. Truett opened in August 1994 and currently enrolls about 100 students.

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-- By Bob Allen

Evangelism conference speakers tout 'Texas 2000' church-starting plan

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- A plan to start 1,400 new Baptist churches in Texas gained center stage in the state convention's annual evangelism conference Jan. 15-17 in Fort Worth.

Texas, commonly called the buckle of the Bible Belt, has become a mission field, speakers said. Last year, a strategy committee drew up "Texas 2000," plans and goals aimed at sharing the gospel message with the estimated 9 million unchurched Texans by the end of the decade.

"The goal of Texas 2000 is humanly impossible," said Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Director William Pinson. However, he noted that the 74-member strategy committee "wept as they realized God could do what we could not do."

In their state convention meeting last November, Texas Baptists adopted a budget setting aside \$1.5 million to fund the church-starting initiative -- money they had been sending to the Southern Baptist Convention. Conservative leaders in the state and SBC leaders said the cut would hurt worldwide missions efforts and some complained it was motivated at least in part by politics.

Charles Redmond, pastor of First Baptist Church in Pasadena, told the evangelism conference crowd that Texas Baptists must respond to the Holy Spirit without lengthy discussion and deliberation in order to achieve the goals of Texas 2000.

"When the Spirit speaks to us, there's no time of deliberating, just obeying and delivering the message," Redmond said.

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-- By ABP staff

No convention now, but a network soon, Texas conservatives predict

By Ken Camp

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- It's premature for conservative Texas Baptists to form their own state convention, but their leaders are putting a statewide network into place, according to Miles Seaborn, president of Southern Baptists of Texas.

Seaborn, pastor of Birchman Baptist Church, Fort Worth, spoke to about 100 people at a "fellowship" meeting at a Fort Worth hotel after the Jan. 16 evening session of the Texas Baptist evangelism conference.

Messengers to the 1995 Baptist General Convention of Texas in San Antonio elected a moderate slate of officers and adopted a budget reducing funds to the Southern Baptist Convention, which is controlled by conservatives.

Those actions fueled speculation that dissatisfied conservatives in Texas might create their own state convention. But Seaborn said such a move is not imminent.

"We need a full-blown convention right now like we need a hole in the head," Seaborn said. "What we need is a basic organization to meet our needs now and to prepare for the future."

A study committee met earlier in the day, Seaborn said, to begin charting the organization's future course. Offering few specifics, he simply said the group was developing a plan for reaching people, communicating concerns, encouraging like-minded Texas Baptists and bringing more young pastors into the fold.

"Things are being set in place. We're not going to lay it all out at this time," he said. "We're asking you to trust us at this point in time."

An unnamed person, whom Seaborn called the group's "secret weapon," met with the committee to help them develop a strategy. They will meet again next month.

Joining Seaborn on the study committee were Claude Thomas, pastor of First Baptist Church in Eules; Rick Scarborough, pastor of First Baptist Church in Pearland; Brant O'Hair, a layman at Southcrest Baptist Church in Lubbock; Gary Miller, pastor of Sagamore Hill Baptist Church in Fort Worth; and Gerald Smith, a layman at Arlington Park Baptist Church in Arlington.

Smith, treasurer of Southern Baptists of Texas, reported that the organization has a bank balance of about \$9,400. Currently, 28 churches are channeling gifts to Southern Baptists of Texas through the BGCT treasurer's office and nine send their checks directly to the organization. Seven other individuals also are contributing regularly, Smith said.

The organization will continue to publish its newsletter, "The Plumline," when funds permit, Seaborn said. Its editor, John Yeats, recently was named to head the Indiana Baptist. That paper had printed the Plumline as a supplemental wraparound, with a reported circulation of 4,500 in Texas.

Publishing the newsletter in conjunction with the Indiana Baptist offered Southern Baptists in Texas an alternative news source to the Baptist Standard, the weekly Texas Baptist news journal, Seaborn said.

A recent editorial in the Baptist Standard underscored the need for an alternative publication, Seaborn charged. In a Jan. 17 editorial, editor Toby Druin said the nomination of Oklahoma pastor Tom Elliff as SBC president signals the continuation of a "control game" by "a tight circle of conservative leaders" in Southern Baptist life. Seaborn labeled the editorial "scurrilous," "vindictive" and "filled with hypocrisy."

Druin declined to comment on Seaborn's statement.

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Former Baptist college president pleads guilty to theft charges

JACKSON, Miss. (ABP) -- Lewis Nobles, accused of stealing \$3 million from the Baptist college where he was president for 25 years, pleaded guilty to mail fraud, tax evasion and money laundering in federal court Jan. 17.

Sentencing is scheduled April 15. Nobles, 70, could receive up to 40 years in prison and fines of \$1.5 million for the crimes, but prosecutors are not seeking a maximum sentence because Nobles lacks a prior record and cooperated with authorities.

In exchange for the guilty pleas, prosecutors dropped other charges, including violation of the Mann Act which forbids transporting women across state lines to perform unlawful sexual acts.

Nobles resigned in 1993 as president of Mississippi College, a Baptist school with 2,400 students in Clinton, Miss., after trustees confronted him with allegations that he embezzled \$3 million over 16 years in donations intended for the school. Because of a five-year statute of limitations, he was charged formally with stealing \$1.7 million. Only two thefts, totaling \$197,000, were cited in the Jan. 17 disposition of the case.

Nobles is alleged to have diverted funds through a series of complex banking maneuvers, using the money for personal investments and a lavish lifestyle that included frequent dalliances with prostitutes.

Two days before a scheduled hearing in 1995, Nobles fled, leading FBI agents on a bizarre chase that ended in a hotel room in San Francisco, where he apparently attempted suicide by swallowing cyanide moments before he was apprehended.

After his arrest, Nobles was hospitalized 35 days while he underwent two emergency surgeries to repair damage to his stomach and esophagus and suffered a stroke. He was later examined by psychiatrists who declared him mentally incompetent to stand trial, but after further treatment they reversed their recommendation.

Throughout the ordeal, Nobles maintained his innocence and said at one point he was looking forward to his trial so he could clear his name.

According to the Jackson (Miss.) Clarion-Ledger, Nobles' friends have remained supportive, collecting a defense fund and insisting on his innocence. "If I'd been incarcerated for a year and stuck in with convicted felons, I might plead guilty to something I didn't do just to get out," long-time supporter Ed McDonald told the paper.

As part of his plea-bargain arrangement, Nobles agreed to turn over to Mississippi College four parcels of land and stock in four brokerage accounts, assets worth an estimated \$400,000 to \$500,000.

In an effort to recover further funds, the college has filed lawsuits against Nobles and OmniBank, one of the banks where Nobles set up accounts for the alleged money-laundering scheme.

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-- By ABP staff

Mercer to break ground for new theology school

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Mercer University will break ground for a new School of Theology building Feb. 6, university officials announced Jan. 19.

A ceremonial ground breaking is scheduled Feb. 6 at Mercer's Atlanta campus. The Georgia Baptist university's main campus is in Macon.

The building, expected to be completed by next January at a \$3 million price tag, will house both the theology school, which is scheduled to begin classes this fall, and offices of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The Fellowship, an organization of moderate Southern Baptists, currently rents offices in Atlanta. In September, the group's Coordinating Council voted to lease offices from Mercer for five years and to buy a piece of land adjacent to the campus. Total cost for the lease-purchase is \$2 million.

Fellowship officials said the property was purchased as an investment but that it could be used in the future to build a permanent headquarters.

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-- By Bob Allen

Ousted French bishop starts cyberspace diocese

PARIS (ABP) -- A controversial French bishop dismissed by the Roman Catholic Church last year has started a new "diocese" in cyberspace.

According to Ecumenical News International, the Vatican dismissed Jacques Gaillot as Bishop of Evreux, France, last year for defending homosexuals, promoting the use of condoms and urging that priests be allowed to marry.

Gaillot announced on French television Jan. 14 that he had created on the Internet the world's "first virtual diocese," to be called Partenia.

Partenia is the name of the non-existent diocese in desert North Africa to which Gaillot was nominally transferred by the Vatican when he was removed from Evreux.

"Today, through the new tools of communication and information, Partenia exists again, and will become the first virtual diocese, giving me the means to pursue my action," Gaillot said.

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-- By ABP staff

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