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Interfaith group asks SBC to retract resolution on Jewish evangelism

By Bob Allen

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- An interfaith conference in Washington has called on the Southern Baptist Convention to retract last summer's resolution calling for evangelization of Jews.

The Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington recently adopted a statement imploring the SBC to retract its "Resolution on Jewish Evangelism" adopted by the convention in June and rescind its implementation.

The SBC resolution called on Southern Baptists to "direct our energies and resources" toward evangelization of Jews. Major Jewish organizations decried the resolution, along with the unrelated appointment of a home missionary to Jewish people, as anti-Semitic. Officials of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board said the resolution merely stated what most Baptists believe -- that all people must profess Jesus to be saved.

Directors of the 18-year-old interfaith group called the SBC resolution "contrary to the spirit of interreligious respect and understanding." The group urged Southern Baptist churches and denominational bodies to "engage the Jewish community in the true spirit of dialogue" which it defined as "not an opportunity to proselytize but as a way to gain understanding of another faith -- and of one's own -- through mutual respect."

Singling out one faith community as particularly needing conversion "impugns the integrity and legitimacy of that faith," the interfaith group stated. Singling out Jews for conversion has "horrific historical precedents," the statement continued, including "many centuries of persecution and stigmatization by Christians."

Such "delegitimization of Judaism and dehumanization of the Jews ultimately led to the unspeakable horror of the Holocaust, during which one third of the world's Jewish population was exterminated," the resolution continued.

While recognizing that evangelism plays "a vital role in the life of many faith communities," the interfaith group insisted that "missionary zeal be tempered with honesty, humility and respect."

The statement also criticized the convention's recognition of about 30 congregations of "Messianic Jews." Such churches, which hold Christian beliefs but use Hebrew phrases, Jewish rituals and other religious practices intended to appeal to Jews, "are among the most deceptive of proselytizers targeting the Jewish community," the interfaith group said.

A goal of doubling the number of Messianic Southern Baptist congregations by 2003 is "particularly insensitive," the statement continued, and "ignores the historic and current experience of Jewish people."

Jim Sibley, a home missionary named last summer to develop evangelistic ministries among Jews and start churches in predominantly Jewish communities, said the interfaith group's resolution "fails to understand the advisory nature" of an SBC resolution. It would be impossible for the SBC to rescind a resolution adopted by a previous convention, he said.

Sibley, a former Southern Baptist representative to Israel who proposed the SBC resolution, denied it "targeted" Jews for evangelism. The reason Jewish people were specified, he said, was because others had raised questions about whether Jews need the gospel.

Sibley also denied that Messianic congregations are deceptive. The rabbinic community and Messianic believers simply define who is a Jew in different ways, he said. "We refuse to accept a definition of Jewishness that excludes faith in Jesus," Sibley said.

"Were the Apostle Paul to apply for membership in their group, he would be refused," Sibley said.

The interfaith conference's statement was supported by representatives from the Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, Protestant, Roman Catholic and Sikh communities. One member of the interfaith conference, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, disassociated itself from the statement.

In its discussions, the interfaith conference met with Jere Allen, executive director/minister of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, a member organization of the interfaith conference.

Allen said he explained to the group that SBC resolutions are non-binding and represent "simply the majority feeling of the messengers who are present that day." He was unable to attend the meeting at which the interfaith group's resolution was adopted, he said, but agreed to disseminate it to Baptist churches in the D.C. convention. He said doing so does not imply endorsement of the resolution and he preferred not to take a position either supporting or criticizing its content.

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Former Texas Baptist head James Landes dead at 84

DALLAS (ABP) -- James Landes, 84, former Texas Baptist leader and educator, died Dec. 28 in Waco, Texas.

Landes was executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas from 1974 to 1983. He also was president of Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene and a pastor for 30 years at churches in Texas including First Baptist Church in Richardson and First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls. Since retiring at age 70, he lived in Waco, where he was distinguished professor of religion at Baylor University.

At a Jan. 1 funeral service in Dallas, former Southern Baptist Convention president Jimmy Allen called Landes "an encourager" whose ideas led Texas Baptists to increase mission work in the state's cities.

William Pinson, who succeeded Landes as Texas Baptists' top executive, described him as "a servant minister" who distinguished himself as a pastor, administrator and courageous family man who with his wife, Irene, helped a physically challenged daughter to become a distinguished musician and teacher.

Landes was on a committee which wrote the "Baptist Faith and Message" statement adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963. He also was a first-vice president of the SBC, preached the convention's annual sermon in 1953 and was a trustee for many agencies, boards and institutions.

A native of Lewisville, Ark., Landes earned the bachelor of science degree from Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark., and the master of theology degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Five universities awarded him honorary degrees.

Landes died on the 59th anniversary of his marriage to the former Irene Pearson of Fayetteville, Ark.

Besides his wife, Landes is survived by his daughter, Ruth Pitts, a teacher of piano, voice and music theory; her husband and by two grandsons.

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-- By Orville Scott

Marion Hayes dead at 100

BETHESDA, Md. (ABP) -- Marion Prather Hayes, widow of former Southern Baptist Convention president and Arkansas congressman Brooks Hayes, died Dec. 19 in Bethesda, Md. She was 100.

Raised a Methodist, she taught Sunday school at Second Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., though she was never baptized as a member. "She felt her baptism in the Methodist Church was enough," her son, Steele Hayes, a retired justice of the Arkansas Supreme Court, told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

Her husband, who died in 1981, served eight terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. He was voted out of office for supporting blacks in the 1957 Little Rock school desegregation crisis. When he was elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1958 and 1959, he was the first layman to hold the post in nearly 50 years.

Marion Hayes was the author of two books, "The Land Where Time Began" and "Simple Talks for Special Days." She delivered the prayer at a ceremony when President Clinton was inaugurated in 1992.

The cause of death was heart failure. She broke a hip in mid-October but had recovered from the injury, her son told the Arkansas newspaper.

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-- By ABP staff

Author heads effort to renew America

By Marv Knox

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (ABP) -- Mature, caring Christians can bring healing to America's ailing families, businesses and politics, says a recent book by a Baptist lay minister.

By facilitating reconciliation, Christians can help restore the nation's fragmented relationships -- from bedrooms to boardrooms, and even to the halls of Congress, Howard Butt writes in "Renewing America's Soul," a book published in 1996.

The key is living according to the relationship principle embodied by the Trinity, the three-in-one personal nature of God, insists Butt, a philanthropist, businessman and Christian leader.

Butt, of Kerrville, Texas, is president of the H.E. Butt Foundation, Laity Lodge Foundation and Christian Men Inc. He is vice chairman of the H.E. Butt Grocery Co. He is a member of Trinity Baptist Church in San Antonio.

"There is no way spiritual renewal is going to come to our nation without reconciliation in our relationships permeating the lives of Christians," Butt said in an interview. "That quality of relational reconciliation is so obviously what Jesus is calling us to.

"We are to be agents, ambassadors of reconciliation. And yet there is so much estrangement within our families, our churches, our denomination and within the body politic. Obviously, revival has to address those estrangements and alienations. They are a reproach on our faith."

Reproach, yes. Unnatural, no.

Human relationships naturally revolve around issues of authority and submission, Butt explains in his book. Whether the relationship is between parent and child, husband and wife, boss and employee, or politician and citizen, it is torn by the tension between authority and submission.

"Why do we rebel against authority?" Butt asks. "Because we feel -- rightly or wrongly -- that authority has rejected us.

"Rejection -- being thrown away or culled out or discarded as unsatisfactory -- has to be one of the most painful things that ever happens. To feel ignored, left out, not good enough, somehow inferior hurts us all."

Unfortunately, submission to authority triggers those natural feelings, Butt reports.

He cites a study of retired executives that found a common thread in the problems they faced when they worked for U.S. corporations -- rebellion against authority. "How do you cope with a boss in any organization without making yourself a lackey?" one person asked. "... Am I attacking my boss to prove I can attack my father and get rewarded?"

The urge to attack one's parents is a natural instinct, due to conflicts related to authority, Butt charges, citing as evidence the story of Adam and Eve and their sons in the Bible.

To get past this notion, Butt calls for a spiritually inspired reconciliation between the generations. Children of any age need to work out their relationships with their parents, affirming love and forgiveness, he says.

Jesus Christ is the model for reconciliation, Butt stresses. In teaching his followers to "turn the other cheek," Jesus overcame feelings of rejection associated with authority, he says.

"Rejection ... is exactly what Jesus took for us, once for all, on the cross," he writes. "By it he gives us the psychological strength -- in everyday life -- to cope with the smarting of our rejection, overcoming it for ourselves and for others. ...

"The pain Jesus accepted on the cross is the same pain that enables him to hold the universe together, including our relational lives today. That's the message: Out of our rejections, he builds us up."

God surpassed the human understanding of authority and its destructive force in relationships through the Trinity, Butt maintains.

God the Father, Lord of the universe, represents authority, he says.

Jesus Christ, the Son, represents submission. He willingly accepted an inferior position when he took the form of a human being and came to Earth.

The Holy Spirit represents the relational bond between the two, "the unbreakable flexibility uniting them," he claims.

Jesus acted out of "authoritative submission," a pattern of relating that should be followed by believers today, Butt said in an interview.

Jesus did not relinquish his essential sense of self or his godly identity in the process, Butt said. Jesus was a willful participant in the divine activity that brought him to Earth and resulted in his death and resurrection. Jesus' participation reveals that submission does not equal loss of self, validity or value, Butt explained.

If Christians adopt Jesus' attitude of authoritative submission, they will change the nation, he predicted.

"Authoritative submission moves from the individual to the family," he said. "Then it moves to the people he works with on the job -- the way he relates to his boss or supervisor, the way she supervises other people. it becomes the secular life of the laity in our churches.

"It moves into our jobs, and that's one way our bureaucracy can be changed. ... As that begins to change, it will inevitably move into politics."

The results can be staggering, Butt added.

"You're going to have a group of Christians, millions of us, who exhibit love" and other Christian virtues, he noted. "As we exhibit that in our secular institutions and organizations, there is no way it will remain there. That is what Washington is tuned in to stay in touch with. There is no way it's not going to permeate into the life of ... the nation."

By living lives that reflect security found in Christ and explaining that sense of security to others, Christians can heal the nation's bedrooms, boardrooms and community gathering places, he writes.

They can do that by being the "secular church," Butt stresses. That's the church at work in the world.

"The secular church is all our various ordinary, day-to-day relationships," he says.

"When Jesus tells us to go into the world and preach the gospel, he means it extensively: yes, into Europe, Africa or Japan. But he also means it intensively: embody God's message in your own world of business, law, architecture, medicine, education ... art, entertainment, construction, communications, philanthropy and live out the gospel there. We are to go into all the worlds."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: "Renewing America's Soul" is published by Fleming H. Revell for distribution in Christian bookstores and by The Continuum Publishing Group for distribution in secular bookstores.

Longtime rescue mission updating its approach

By Laurie Lattimore

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- When the town's "worst drunk" of 1930s Birmingham, Ala., became a Christian, members at the city's Gospel Tabernacle were skeptical. They suspected Jimmie Hale would be taking a shot of whiskey soon after the service.

Hale, a drunk for 17 years, had walked down the church aisle many times before, always promising but never changing. He had not been sober for four years and had tried suicide more than once.

But that night, Hale's walk down the aisle was for real, and he became one of the most zealous missionaries in downtown Birmingham. Most nights he could be found preaching at his once-favorite downtown pub.

In 1944, Jimmie Hale opened up a mission for the city's homeless on First Avenue North in the building where he sold his last drop of whiskey as a bartender. Later that year, at age 39, he died. But his work continued.

Today, more than 50 years after its start, the Jimmie Hale Mission is not just a shelter. It is a place for recovery.

Tony Cooper, executive director of the mission for the last six years, said the mission's purpose is to make a difference in the lives of those who come in.

"Making a difference is what Christ was all about and what a Christian conversion is all about," said Cooper, a member of First Baptist Church of Gardendale. "It's about a life changed because of Jesus Christ."

Although the Jimmie Hale Mission does have a soup kitchen and shelter for men -- plus a new women's center opening next spring and a year-old alcohol and drug addiction recovery residential center north of Birmingham -- the mission's focus is on long-term help, not just short-term needs.

Cooper said Jimmie Hale Mission is changing its philosophy from that of a shelter which also offers a recovery program to a place focused primarily on long-term restoration that also provides for some basic needs. Cooper calls this new approach in urban ministry his own version of "homeless reform."

Men staying at the shelter cannot stay more than seven days a month and must attend the chapel service every night at 7 p.m. They are fed dinner and breakfast, given a shower and change of clothes.

Cooper said the reason for the restrictions is to help break the homeless cycle and get the men off the streets.

"We want to give them meals, clothes and a bed for a night. That is good, but what about tomorrow? We want to be a stepping stone, not a doormat." If the mission does too much for someone, he said, it contributes to the problem and not the solution. "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish, and you feed him for life."

Cooper said that has been the foundation of their approach, keeping Christ and his teaching as the focus. At the original Jimmie Hale Mission, with its soup kitchen and shelter, men are encouraged to participate in a discipleship program that teaches the Bible plus some practical skills to help them adjust to the world again. Approximately 40 men are in the "recovery" program now, where they take classes, help run the shelter and soup kitchen and stay overnight.

Birmingham-area churches pitch in, donating money and food, preparing meals and offering other help to both the shelter and the recovery center. Most of the churches are Baptist.

To help Birmingham's homeless break out of the cycle of need, Cooper said the mission starts by teaching a Christian foundation. They build on that foundation with education, some job training and also helping men find affordable housing.

Cooper said there is more to solving the homeless problem than just telling people to find a job. In fact nearly 30 percent of the men who come into the Jimmie Hale Mission for food and a bed have a minimum-wage job and work at least 25 hours a week, he said.

"People struggle with values, self esteem, work ethic," Cooper said. "We want to give hope so that they can see a brighter future."

The mission works with Birmingham's Adult Learning Center to help men get their high-school-equivalency degrees and also with the health department to teach the men cooking and meal planning.

The women and children's center -- which currently is just a clothes-distribution center but will soon provide the same shelter and meal benefits as the men's center, plus a children's playroom -- will also provide education and training in proper child care.

Bob Scheid, superintendent of the men's center downtown, emphasized that the gospel focus of the Jimmie Hale Mission is the key. "We give out shoes and soup and clothes and provide a bed, but the bottom line is that they hear the gospel," Scheid said. "The gospel is what saves and transforms one's life."

Since changing the priority of the mission from short-term street rescue to long-term recovery, Scheid said the number of men in the shelter has decreased from up to 80 men a night to about 40. But the residential, Bible-based education program has grown rapidly -- from 20 in the summer to about 45 currently.

Greg Shrewsbury, once an attorney who now serves as the mission's program director, said the accountability built into the 12-week program helps men take responsibility for their lives but does not force them to accept the gospel. Some men respond to the message of the gospel right away while others take years. "We just leave it up to God," Shrewsbury said.

The Jimmie Hale Mission has also left its finances up to God, relying entirely upon financial donations from churches and others. "We've been around 53 years and God has always provided," Shrewsbury said.

The Christian focus of the Jimmie Hale Mission is a dimension most social organizations do not provide, Tony Cooper noted.

"As Christians we know the real help comes from beginning a new life and a heart changed from the inside out," he said. "We address the soul. Other agencies leave out the most necessary part of helping someone truly recover."

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Issues of cooperation, future dominate Baptist news in '96

By Bob Allen and Greg Warner

(ABP) -- What will be the shape of Baptist life in the future? That question dominated the news among Baptists in 1996.

As the tedious process of downsizing the Southern Baptist Convention continued, Baptists in the various state Baptist conventions -- and the fledgling Cooperative Baptist Fellowship -- debated how they will relate to the national body and each other.

In Virginia, Baptist conservatives broke away from the moderate-led Baptist General Association of Virginia. That action in September was ranked by Baptist state newspaper editors as the top story in Baptist life during 1996.

The decision by the new group, Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia, to sever ties with the 173-year-old Virginia association was the first formal split in a state convention to result from the long dispute between conservatives and moderates in the SBC.

Other stories of who is in, who is out, and who will lead in Baptist life accounted for five of the top 10 stories of the year, according to the informal survey of Baptist editors conducted by Associated Baptist Press.

Not all the attention was focused inward, however. Southern Baptists also joined the national debate over a controversial abortion procedure, responded to a rash of church arsons, protested the growing persecution of Christians overseas, and threatened to boycott Disney for perceived anti-family actions.

The proposed boycott of the Walt Disney Co. ranked second on the list of top stories for the year, according to the editors. A resolution passed by the Southern Baptist Convention in June called on Baptists nationwide to consider a boycott of Disney unless the entertainment giant changes policies criticized as departing from its family image. Among complaints are the production of R-rated movies by a Disney subsidiary and a corporate policy extending worker's spousal benefits to live-in partners of gays.

Also during their June convention, the attention of Southern Baptists was drawn to a spate of fires at predominantly African-American churches across the country, and they pledged \$281,000 to help rebuild the churches. That story ranked third in the editors' poll. Other Baptist groups, as well as the National Council of Churches, raised similar funds.

Denominational downsizing, which was ranked first by the editors last year, was still on the minds of Southern Baptists in 1996, ranking fourth in the poll. A 10-member task force began implementing a massive reorganization, which will reduce the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12. Layoffs began before the end of the year at one agency, but most of the shakeup will come in 1997. No firm figures have been given about how many people will lose their jobs.

While the conservatives who dominate the SBC debated what shape to give their convention, moderate Southern Baptists decided not to form their own.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an organization of moderates displeased with the SBC's current direction, voted in June not to become a convention -- the fifth most important story of 1996. A year-long study showed most CBF members felt alienated from the Southern Baptist Convention but were not ready to sever formal ties.

The other stories ranked in the top 10:

6. Evangelization of Jews. Another resolution at the 1996 SBC meeting that drew widespread attention called on Southern Baptists to "direct our energies and resources" toward evangelization of Jews. Major Jewish organizations decried the resolution, along with the unrelated appointment of a home missionary to Jewish people, as anti-Semitic. Home Mission Board officials said the resolution merely stated what Baptists believe -- that all people must profess Jesus to be saved.

7. Persecution of Christians overseas. Widespread persecution of Christians remains a problem in many countries, according to a report last fall by a monitoring agency which said more Christians died for their faith in the 20th century than any other century in history. Among targeted Christians was Robert Hussein, a Christian convert who fled Kuwait after being convicted of apostasy in May. In November, the U.S. State Department named an advisory panel on religious persecution which included Jim Henry, former SBC president.

8. Partial-birth abortion. Opponents of a controversial late-term abortion procedure succeeded in getting it banned in Congress. President Clinton said he personally opposes the procedure but vetoed the bill after Congress refused to allow exceptions for "serious adverse consequences" to the mother's health. The Southern Baptist Convention was among critics of the veto, passing a strongly worded resolution in June. Just prior to the SBC meeting, 11 past presidents of the convention wrote a letter demanding Clinton "repent" of the veto.

9. Membership guidelines for Florida Baptists. The Florida Baptist Convention became the first Baptist state convention to adopt doctrinal requirements for affiliation. Traditionally in Baptist life, regional associations have dealt with doctrinal concerns, while state and national bodies based membership on financial support. Since Florida allows churches to belong to the state convention without joining an association, officials said the convention had no way to regulate membership. John Sullivan, head of the Florida convention, predicted the new guidelines would be a "watershed document" for other state conventions dealing with similar concerns.

10. Home Mission Board president resigns. Larry Lewis, president of the SBC Home Mission Board since 1987, announced in September he would resign at the end of the year. Lewis said the HMB, one of three agencies being merged as part of the restructuring of the SBC, needs a new leader for its new role. Lewis, 61, will go to work for Mission America, a network of denominational and para-church evangelical groups, under an arrangement in which the HMB pays his salary.

Among the other stories ranked high by the Baptist editors (in order): the ministry of Baptist volunteers during the Olympics, passage of the Defense of Marriage Act by Congress, Georgia Baptists' censure of Mercer University President Kirby Godsey over a controversial book, the election of Daniel Vestal as chief executive of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and the re-election of Bill Clinton.

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