



Nashville, Tennessee
**Associated
Baptist Press**

Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

Phone: 800.340.6626
Fax: 904.262.7745
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

May 18, 2000

(00-43)

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Committee proposes revisions to 'Baptist Faith and Message'**
- Associated Baptist Press announces bureau chief**
- Former SBC missions leader criticizes conservative 'takeover'**

**Committee proposes revisions
to 'Baptist Faith and Message'**

By Bob Allen

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Proposed revisions to Southern Baptists' official statement of faith tighten boundaries on biblical interpretation and theology and emphasize that God is all-knowing and that people must accept Christ to be saved. Others discourage the ordination of women as pastors, reject charismatic teachings, oppose abortion and homosexuality and soften requirements for keeping the Sabbath.

A blue-ribbon committee appointed last year to review the "Baptist Faith and Message" statement made its report public May 18. Revisions to the faith statement, which is not binding on local churches and individual Baptists but is used as a guide in hiring denominational employees, will be considered by the Southern Baptist Convention when it meets June 13-14 in Orlando, Fla.

The new statement borrows from two earlier "Baptist Faith and Message" versions, the first in 1925 and the other in 1963. It revises but does not add or subtract to the number of articles in the statement, 18, including one added two years ago on the family.

The committee report notes that both of the earlier documents reflect concerns of their particular point in history. In 1925 Southern Baptists answered "a pervasive anti-supernaturalism in culture." In 1963, the response was to questions raised about the authority of the Bible. In 1998, when the SBC amended the 1963 statement, it was to clear up cultural confusion about the family.

The new document, the committee said, responds to "a culture hostile to the very notion of truth."

"Our generation faces the reality of a postmodern culture, complete with rampant relativism and the denial of absolute truth," committee chairman Adrian Rogers said in a statement reported by Baptist Press. "A pervasive secularism has infected our society and its corrosive effects are evident throughout the life of our nation. Moral decay and assaults upon cherished truths dominate the arena in which we must now minister, and to which we must now proclaim the gospel."

As expected, the revisions also reflect changes within the denomination. The new document employs more narrow language in describing the Bible, the atonement, salvation, women's roles and social responsibility.

The new document omits mention of "the soul's competency before God, freedom in religion and the priesthood of the believer" that was in a preamble to the 1963 statement. Herschel Hobbs, the primary author of the 1963 document, described the preamble as its most important part, because it clarifies that the statement is not intended as a creed.

Recommended changes in the "Baptist Faith and Message" include:

-- The Scriptures. The new language describes the Holy Bible as "God's revelation of himself to man." The 1963 version called it "the record" of God's revelation. That subtle distinction allowed many moderates to affirm the statement without embracing the view of biblical inerrancy, which views the whole Bible as literally true.

While the new article doesn't use the word "inerrancy," as some expected, it retains the 1963 description of "truth, without any mixture of error" for the Bible's matter. It then adds a sentence elaborating: "Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy."

The new statement on Scripture deletes a final sentence from the 1963 version that said, "The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ." That language has "been subject to misunderstanding," Rogers said.

Some have used that language to mean that parts of the Bible, such as the teachings of Jesus, carry more weight than other parts, such as when God orders Joshua to destroy everything when the Israelites invade Palestine.

"Jesus Christ cannot be divided from the biblical revelation that is testimony to him," Rogers said. "Scripture cannot be set against Scripture."

-- God. New language describes God as "all powerful and all knowing." God's knowledge extends, the statement says, "to all things, past present and future, including the future decisions of his free creatures."

The phrase challenges in part a controversial "openness of God" theology, which views God as engaging in mutual relationships with lost people that have no guaranteed outcome. Hence, God does not always know what will occur and even changes his mind if events warrant it.

The wording also resonates with Calvinism, a theological view that is gaining popularity among some Southern Baptists, by emphasizing God's foreknowledge of future events. It stops short, however, of the Calvinist belief that God actually predetermines those events, including who will and will not be saved.

-- Christ. A subsection on "God the Son" adds a word describing Christ's death on the cross as "substitutionary."

"Substitutionary atonement" is one of several historic views explaining how Christ's crucifixion is effective in God's forgiveness of sin. It holds that humans are separated by their sins from a holy God, but a sinless Christ offered himself to suffer God's wrath in their place. The view is one of five "fundamentals" of the faith that describe classic fundamentalism. Other, more liberal, views, meanwhile, suggest that Christ's willingness to suffer and die illustrate God's great love for humanity but that Jesus did not strictly have to die in order for God to forgive sins.

-- The Holy Spirit. In another subsection of the article on God, the statement adds that the Holy Spirit "at the moment of regeneration ... baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ." That counters the view of some charismatic Christians, that salvation and a subsequent infilling or "baptism" of the Spirit are separate events, the latter often manifested by speaking in tongues.

-- Salvation. A new sentence proclaims, "There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord." Southern Baptists have in recent months been criticized for targeting evangelistic efforts at Jews, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists.

-- The church. The new statement repeats earlier language describing the scriptural offices in a local congregation as pastors and deacons. It now specifies, however, "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

-- The Lord's Day. While tightening several doctrinal stances, the new statement liberalizes Southern Baptists' view of the Sabbath. Previous statements on the Lord's Day called for "refraining from worldly amusements and resting from secular employments." The revised statement says, "Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ."

-- Evangelism. The previous statement described every Christian's duty to seek to win the lost by "personal effort" and other methods. The new one goes further, urging "verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle."

-- Christians and the social order. Perhaps the most obvious changes in the entire document are expansions in a list of social concerns to opposition of racism, "all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality and pornography," abortion and euthanasia.

No substantive changes are recommended in nine of the remaining articles. An article on "Man" adds a notation that the "gift of gender is ... part of the goodness of creation."

-30-

Associated Baptist Press announces bureau chief

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Associated Baptist Press has opened its first regional news bureau in the nation's capital and named Kenny Byrd its Washington bureau chief.

Byrd, 27, a native of Nashville, Tenn., and a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., has already covered the beat for the national, independent news service based in Jacksonville, Fla., for four years.

He has been the lead writer for Baptist News Service, the reporting arm of the Baptist Joint Committee, a religious-liberty advocacy agency. While there are no formal ties between the two organizations, the BNS has functioned as a capital desk for ABP in a partnership that dates back nearly to the founding of the subscription-based news service for religious and secular media in 1990.

That arrangement changed recently, after a committee of journalists that determines who gets access to press galleries in Congress revoked Baptist News Service's longstanding credentials because of its ties to the Washington-based BJC, which, among other programs, is involved in lobbying.

While the BJC has maintained internal safeguards to guard the independence of its news operation, the Standing Committee of Correspondents recently decided those measures were inadequate, reportedly at the prompting of officials of the Southern Baptist Convention who argued that the denomination's official news service, Baptist Press, ought also to qualify for credentials.

Baptist Press, with headquarters in Nashville, Tenn., has a Washington bureau housed in the nation's capital in offices of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the convention's moral-concerns and religious-liberty agency. Baptist Press lost congressional credentials in 1995 and has been unsuccessful in bids to regain them.

In response to Baptist News Service losing access to news coverage, directors of ABP voted in April to open the 10-year-old news service's first regional bureau in Washington, effective May 1. ABP will rent office space from the BJC as part of the arrangement.

ABP is in the process of applying for credentials for its Washington bureau.

ABP Executive Editor Greg Warner said Byrd is a natural choice to fill the new position. "Having someone with Kenny's experience who can hit the ground running will give us a tremendous advantage," Warner said. "We are delighted that his services are available to us."

Bob Allen, editor of the news service, said having its own Washington bureau "will help ABP to be more responsive to the needs of our primary users, the Baptist state papers, and secular news media."

-30-

-- By ABP staff

Former SBC missions leader criticizes conservative 'takeover'

By Tim Palmer

COLUMBIA, Mo. (ABP) -- In his strongest remarks on record to date, a longtime missions leader claimed conservatives gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention through deception.

"This whole takeover was based on deceit, on lying, on cheating," said Keith Parks, former president of the SBC agency now known as the International Mission Board.

Parks took early retirement from the Richmond, Va., agency, then called the Foreign Mission Board, in 1992 because of philosophical differences with an increasingly conservative board of trustees. While he has previously criticized convention leaders for allowing controversy to override the denomination's main priority of cooperative missions, Parks' recent remarks are his most pointed against Southern Baptists' current leaders.

Parks, who recently retired as global-missions coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an organization formed by disgruntled moderates in 1991, spoke four times May 8-11 in Missouri. He was invited by Mainstream Missouri Baptists, a moderate group formed to defend the state against the so-called "conservative resurgence" that took control of the SBC during the 1980s.

Parks, at one time among the SBC's most respected leaders, said Southern Baptists came together in 1845 for missions, unifying a regionally and theologically diverse group of churches.

"There were a lot of differences and disagreements, but the consensus was, 'Let's unite behind the gospel and share it with the world,'" Parks said.

Parks described conversations he once had with former SBC president Adrian Rogers, who countered that doctrine -- not missions -- is what has held Southern Baptists together.

Evidence that Rogers' view has prevailed is seen in the fact that Independent Baptist Jerry Falwell now is in the theological center of Southern Baptist leaders, Parks said. "(Falwell) hasn't moved, but SBC leadership has moved to where he's been all along," Parks said.

Parks said he learned several lessons from watching and being removed from leadership for refusing to embrace the conservative takeover of the SBC.

One, he said, is the battle was not, as conservatives claimed, over theology.

"Never one time did anyone try to accuse me of not believing the Bible," he said. "They'd say, 'If you support the conservative resurgence, you can stay.'"

Most of Parks' FMB presidency spanned the first decade of the conservative movement's rise. He recalled leaders repeatedly insisting they wanted only parity.

Once they succeeded in gaining complete control in 1990 when the SBC met in New Orleans, however, they celebrated the achievement. "They sat there and bragged about the fact that they had lied and cheated and deceived," Parks said.

Parks voiced dismay at what happened once the takeover was complete. "The people called Baptists didn't even blink," he said. "They said, 'We'll follow these guys who acted unbiblically.'"

As conservatives moved to exclude people who weren't committed to their political takeover, Parks continued, the whole nature of the SBC annual meeting changed. "Missions night," which had been the big event, became overshadowed by the election of a president.

Baptists have always disagreed, Parks said, but they formerly sought to change minds through persuasion. Now, he charged, Southern Baptist leaders resort to coercion and control, with rewards for those who do as they're told. "There are preachers who are afraid to come to this meeting tonight," he said to illustrate.

Parks said the SBC has shifted from being "confessional," where churches voluntarily unite around similar beliefs, to "creedal," where orthodoxy is a requirement for inclusion.

He described the mindset of current SBC leaders as: "This is what you must believe, and we'll decide if you do." Parks described this approach as making decisions based on legalism instead of grace.

Parks said he believes if Baptists across the land really understood what has happened, they would rise in opposition to the convention's conservative leaders. He encouraged his listeners to share with others what they had learned. "If you think it doesn't affect your church, then you are an isolated church and not a Southern Baptist church to begin with," he said.

One example of how churches suffer, Parks said, is that many congregations continue the habit of hiring ministers who are graduates of Southern Baptist seminaries, even though those seminaries no longer teach traditional Southern Baptist views.

Parks concluded by quoting a philosopher who said, "All it takes for evil to prevail is for good people to do nothing."

In an interview after his speech, Parks said he broke his public silence about SBC leaders only because he had been asked to speak on Baptist principles and on what happened in the SBC. "Usually I'm asked to speak on missions," he explained.

Parks said he doesn't enjoy criticizing the takeover. "It's an unpleasant task," he said, "because it's a tragic thing that has happened to Southern Baptists."

Parks' four-day speaking tour was just one event in a recent upswing in Baptist political activity in Missouri.

Organizers of Project 1000 -- the Missouri Baptist Laymen's Association effort to consolidate conservatives' control in Missouri -- also had a statewide meeting May 9 in Jefferson City.

Both sides are gearing up for the Oct. 30-Nov. 1 state convention meeting, where conservatives hope to elect their third consecutive president.

Project 1000 leader Roger Moran declined a request to admit a reporter to the May 9 meeting, which took place in Jefferson City.

"Our meetings are closed," Moran said. "That's the way we like it, and that's the way we're going to keep it." He denied the organization has anything to hide, however. "Our agenda is to tell the truth to people."

-30-

-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

END
