



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 25, 2000

(00-46)

#### IN THIS ISSUE:

- Texas official criticizes changes proposed in SBC statement
- Texas Baptists withhold funds from Houston Baptist University
- Religious charities lead way in boom in charitable-giving
- Sex-channel-scrambling provision violates free speech, high court rules

#### Texas official criticizes changes proposed in SBC statement

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- The top executive of the Southern Baptist Convention's largest state affiliate has issued comments critical of changes proposed in the denomination's official doctrinal statement.

Revisions in the "Baptist Faith and Message" that will be voted on in June elevate the Bible above Christ, fail to safeguard Baptist distinctives of soul liberty and priesthood of the believer and violate local-church autonomy, said Charles Wade, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

He also repeated concerns expressed about a family amendment added two years ago, which is carried over into the new version, saying it ignores Bible passages calling for "mutual submission" by husband and wife.

Emphasizing he was speaking for himself and not the BGCT, Wade said in a prepared statement that the committee proposing the rewrite was wise not to use the word "inerrancy" to describe the inspiration of Scripture. The term, he said, is "divisive and politically charged."

However, Wade said he is "deeply concerned" about other changes in the statement on Scripture. The statement currently describes the Bible as "the record of God's revelation" to man. The new version omits the words "the record of."

That is a crucial distinction, Wade said. "Jesus is the revelation of God," he said. "The Bible is the divine and inspired record of that revelation."

He also took exception to the deletion of the final sentence from the statement on Scripture: "The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ."

Every method of interpreting the Bible needs a guiding principle, Wade said, and Baptists should make it clear that guiding principle is Christ. "The Christological principle of hermeneutics is vitally important, and the committee took that out. I deeply regret that," he said.

Wade affirmed the study committee for including language from earlier Baptist statements of faith that "the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament."

However, Wade said he regretted the omission of the last four paragraphs from the preamble to the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message." That passage contained the document's only explicit references to soul competency and the priesthood of the believer. "Baptists emphasize the soul's competency before God, freedom in religion and the priesthood of the believer," Wade said.

Wade said he hopes the statement will be amended to include those four paragraphs when it is debated at the June 13-14 SBC annual meeting in Orlando, Fla.

Wade also took issue with the sentence, "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

He acknowledged that few Southern Baptist churches have female senior pastors but said that including such a statement in the "Baptist Faith and Message" would violate the right of local churches to decide the issue for themselves.

"Even among those who personally do not support women serving as pastor, there are many who would not presume to tell another church whom that congregation could or could not call," Wade said.

Wade also noted with regret that the committee failed to make significant changes in the statement on the family, which calls for wives to submit to their husbands. At the BGCT annual meeting in El Paso last year, Texas Baptists affirmed the 1963 statement of faith without the family amendment.

"Although the committee did amend one sentence in the article on the family, they declined to respond to our appeal that they recognize the implications of Ephesians 5:21 and add the idea of mutual submission to the document," Wade said.

While underscoring that he cannot speak for Texas Baptists, Wade added, "I do hope that all Southern Baptists will study carefully and consider prayerfully the revisions made in the 'Baptist Faith and Message.'"

"If this document is adopted, even though it is not binding on individual Baptists or churches, it will be used by SBC-appointed trustees to test the doctrinal positions of seminary professors and missionaries," he said.

Ten other executive directors of Baptist state conventions were sent e-mails asking them to comment on proposed changes to the "Baptist Faith and Message." None responded in time to be included in this article.

-30-

## **Texas Baptists withhold funds from Houston Baptist University**

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- The Baptist General Convention of Texas executive board has responded to a move by Houston Baptist University to alter ties with the state convention by withholding funds earmarked for the school until the dispute is resolved.

Texas Baptist leaders voted May 23 in Dallas to hold funds for the university in this year's budget in escrow and to establish a committee to study "the unilateral action" of HBU trustees to create a self-perpetuating board.

Trustees of the school surprised state convention leaders by amending university bylaws May 16 to allow the BGCT to elect 25 percent of its trustees. The state convention previously nominated and elected all the school's trustees.

University President E.D. Hodo said the action was taken to preserve "institutional autonomy," which he said was being compromised by a BGCT policy that only individuals from churches that support the state convention financially would be nominated as new trustees. That would exclude churches that have recently stopped funding the moderate-led BGCT in favor of a new, rival, conservative convention.

HBU is budgeted to receive about \$1.5 million from the BGCT this year. That represents about 5 percent of the university's overall operating budget.

Specifically excluded from the funds to be escrowed are ministerial-tuition grants and payments to a faculty/staff doctoral-loan program.

"In taking this unilateral action, the trustees of Houston Baptist University have violated the bylaws of the BGCT," said Keith Bruce, director of Texas Baptists' Christian education coordinating board. "There is a stated procedure of coming to the convention and presenting a proposal" that was not followed.

In a brief, impromptu statement, Hodo told the executive board the university's action was "a question of the autonomy of the board." He said he was reluctant to comment further until the proposed committee completes its work.

"We're not going to allow people to draw us into issues that are not issues on our behalf," he said.

Bruce sought to correct an impression reported in media -- including the Southern Baptist Convention news service, Baptist Press -- that the BGCT policy would target ethnic-minority churches that cannot afford to support the state convention.

Hodo, who was quoted to that effect in the Houston Chronicle, later termed the newspaper report unfortunate and said minority representation "was not the issue from our point of view. That was a sidebar, and the sidebar became the main point."

Mark Bumpus, chairman of the state nominating committee for institutional boards, said minority representation was not at risk and that ethnic diversity is a primary goal for the nominating group.

Hodo said in an interview he was not surprised by the executive board's vote to withhold funding from the university. "The convention has not deviated from what we anticipated they would do," he said.

He said he supported the appointment of a special committee and that BGCT leaders have been gracious in their response.

-30-

## **Religious charities lead way in boom in charitable-giving**

By Sarah Griffith

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Giving to religion comprised the largest share in what one expert called a "charity boom" in the United States, according to figures released May 24.

Religion represented 43 percent of charitable contributions in 1999, according to estimates given by the Trust for Philanthropy, a nonprofit division of the American Association of Fund-Raising Counsel.

A Baptist ethicist credited the stock market and "good economic times" for an increase in overall charitable giving.

"Let's hope the religious community's moral teachings to support causes for the poor and the common good also played a part," said Robert Parham of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn.

Religious charities received nearly \$82 billion of \$190 billion given in 1999, a rise of 5.5 percent from 1998.

Religion showed the largest gain in charitable giving, \$ 4.29 billion. That was double that of the next largest increase, gifts to education, which grew by \$2.14 billion.

Total charitable giving grew faster than last year's economy and has increased \$15 billion annually since 1997.

"The new figures are remarkable," said Bruce Reed in a New York Times article, saying charitable giving in the last seven years now totals \$1 trillion.

In 1995, personal giving represented 1.5 percent of personal income. In 1998 and 1999, it reached 1.8 percent.

"Clearly America is in a charity boom," Reed added to the Washington Post.

While charitable giving has increased, "it did not quite keep pace with the tremendous accumulation in wealth," according to the Times article.

Though personal giving represents 1.8 percent of personal income, "it could ultimately be 3.6 or 3.7 percent ... without affecting wealth," Claude Rosenberg, founder and president of the San Francisco-based Newtthing Group, told the Washington Post.

-30-

## **Sex-channel-scrambling provision violates free speech, high court rules**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON -- A law requiring cable channels to either totally scramble adult-oriented programs or show them late at night in order to protect children goes too far, and infringes the free-speech rights of adults, the United States Supreme Court ruled May 22.

A provision in Congress' Telecommunications Act of 1996 addressed a problem called "signal bleed," where audio and sometimes-discernible video of subscription-only channels come across the sets of non-subscribers.

A section in the bill known as the "Communications Decency Act" required providers of programming with strong sexual content, such as the Playboy Channel, to "fully scramble" the signal, blocking it entirely from the homes of non-subscribers. If that isn't possible, the law restricted hours for such programming to between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., when children are less likely to view them.

In a 5-4 decision, however, the high court struck down that provision, finding that a separate provision in the law provides adequate protection without restricting free speech.

Writing for the majority, Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy said that Congress was right in passing a law to protect children from exposure to indecent material but that it must be done "in a way consistent with First Amendment principles." The Communications Decency Act failed to meet that burden, Kennedy said.

The high court agreed with a lower court that a separate section of the law that requires cable operators to block signals free of charge at a subscriber's request accomplishes a similar goal in a less-restrictive manner.

The Clinton administration and Justice Department had argued for keeping the ban on partially scrambled channels. The decision split two Clinton-appointed justices and also left the court's two most conservative judges on opposite sides.

Joining Kennedy in the majority were Associate Justices John Paul Stevens, David Souter, Clarence Thomas and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Stevens and Thomas filed separate concurring opinions.

Dissenting from the majority were Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Associate Justices Steven Breyer, Sandra Day O'Connor and Antonin Scalia. Scalia also filed a separate dissenting opinion.

Writing for the dissenters, Breyer said the majority opinion "threatens to leave Congress without power to help the millions of parents who do not want to expose their children to commercial pornography."

Cable operators scramble channels so that only paying customers have access to certain programs. To comply with the 1996 law, most cable operators adopted the "time channeling" approach and aired sexually explicit material only in the late-night and early morning hours.

For two-thirds of the day, the court ruling noted, no household in those service areas could receive the programming, whether or not the household or viewer wanted to do so.

Playboy Entertainment Group challenged the provision as "unnecessarily content-based legislation" that violates the First Amendment.

The majority ruling said the statute was enacted because not all scrambling technology is perfect and that digital scrambling, which allows easier blocking of signals, "appears not to be economical" at present.

Because many adults find sexually explicit material offensive and children may inadvertently see it, Congress has "legitimate reasons" for regulating it, the court said. All parties in the case agreed, however, the Playboy's programming is not "obscene," and therefore is protected under the First Amendment.

"No one suggests the government must be indifferent to unwanted, indecent speech that comes into the home without parental consent," the majority ruled. "The speech here, all agree, is protected speech; and the question is what standard the government must meet in order to restrict it."

"The objective of shielding children does not suffice to support a blanket ban if the protection can be accomplished by a less-restrictive alternative," the court ruled.

Playboy applauded the decision in a press release. "We have always supported the right of individuals to control what information comes into their homes," said Christie Hefner, chairwoman and CEO of Playboy. Hefner said that the law's "Section 504," which was left standing, addresses that issue, but "Section 505," which was struck down, "limits choice."

Others who advocate stronger controls on sexual content, however, criticized the ruling.

"Playboy's enthusiasm for the Supreme Court ruling is all the evidence one needs that the ruling is flat wrong," said Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn. "I hope that Congress will take steps to write a law that would not place all the burden on parents to protect their children from the harmful technological problem of signal bleed."

Jan LaRue, senior director of legal studies at the Family Research Council, said the Supreme Court "has placed the burden on cable subscribers rather than cable programmers to prevent unwanted sexually explicit programming from bleeding through into the home."

"It's opt-out rather than opt-in," LaRue said.

-30-

**END**

---