



Nashville, Tennessee
Associated
Baptist Press

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May 30, 2000

(00-47)

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**New SBC statement continues
'mixed messages,' scholar says**

By Bob Allen

SAVANNAH, Ga. (ABP) -- Latest revisions proposed to Southern Baptists' official confession of faith perpetuate decades of "mixed messages" to women, according to a female scholar.

Carolyn Blevins, associate professor of religion at Carson-Newman College, said recent denominational pronouncements defying women's ordination contradict historic views of soul liberty and priesthood of the believer.

A 1984 Southern Baptist Convention resolution, for example, affirmed equal dignity of men and women yet excluded females as pastors and deacons. Simultaneously exalting and subordinating women "sounds like an oxymoron to me," she said.

Likewise, Blevins said during the May 25-27 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Historical Society in Savannah, Ga., an article in proposed revisions to the SBC's current "Baptist Faith and Message" limiting pastoral roles to men is "incongruent" with a separate pronouncement that each individual is accountable to God.

"If each person is accountable to God, how can Southern Baptists state a limitation?" on who can be a pastor, Blevins asked.

Such contradictions have created "a corps of hostile women" who struggle with their call to ministry, Blevins said. A few have tried to minister within the SBC, some have moved to other denominations and others have "become agnostics," she said.

"We Baptists tout the doctrine of freedom, while we stifle the voices of women," Blevins said.

Southern Baptist women hit a "stained-glass ceiling" during the 20th century, Blevins said. Women started the century being "kept silent" by men, made gradual progress toward equality and then were pushed back by fundamentalists who took over the denomination in the last two decades.

Based on their theology, which recognizes the dignity of each individual, Southern Baptists "ought to be the leaders in social change," Blevins said. However, on issues including racism and women's rights, Southern Baptists have been on the "trailing edge," she said.

Women's call for "liberation" has been met by men calling for "limitation," Blevins said.

She characterized the voice of Southern Baptist women in the 20th century as "a strong soloist surrounded by a chorus of opposition."

While voices of Southern Baptist women in the century were often muted or confused, Blevins said, some stepped forward as "noisy voices" for equality.

Charles Deweese, the Historical Society's executive director, profiled W.O. Carver, a longtime professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. While Carver, who retired in 1943, did not believe in feminism, "He boldly advocated increased roles for women in Baptist life," Deweese said.

Carver, a professor of missions and world religions for 45 years, was also a mentor to women who studied at the Woman's Missionary Union Training School that later became part of the seminary campus in Louisville, Ky.

Deweese said Carver reacted strongly against translations of the Bible that he felt were biased against females. In a 1941 address, Carver said the King James Version's translation of Ephesians 5:22-32, which calls for wives to obey their husbands, "was totally wrong," Deweese said.

That passage was cited in a 1998 "Baptist Faith and Message" amendment calling for wives to "graciously submit" to the "servant leadership" of their husbands.

Deweese said Carver contended that the verb is not imperative and does not mean "obey" in the original Greek. Carver considered a male-dominated translation of the passage "a perversion of grammar, syntax and sense," Deweese said.

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Spiritual experience 'biggest loser' in SBC doctrinal shift, scholar says

By Johnny Pierce

SAVANNAH, Ga. (ABP) -- Individual spiritual experience is "at the very heart of what it means to be a Baptist," said Thomas Graves, president of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, lamenting that the issue "has been neglected and even worse maligned."

Speaking to the Southern Baptist Historical Society meeting at the 200-year-old First Baptist Church in Savannah, Ga., Graves reflected on Baptist identity in the last century by exploring demographic changes and identifying three doctrinal issues he considers part of a "clear transformation in the public perception" of Baptists.

"There was a time when the South was viewed as the cultural backwater of the nation," Graves said, adding that the "poverty of the South in the first half of the 20th century had a profound impact on the perception of Southern Baptists." The region's status, however, changed dramatically in the second half of the century, he noted.

"The nation now banks with Charlotte, turns to Atlanta for its news, relies on Austin and Raleigh-Durham for technological leadership, looks to Houston to meet its energy needs and vacations in Orlando."

Graves said that with the election of Jimmy Carter as president in the 1970s, "Baptists of the Southland moved into the mainstream of American life and occupied the central position of political power."

However, he noted that statistics for Sunday school attendance in latter decades of the last century indicated that "Baptists of the South ended the century on a downward note."

Three key issues reflect major changes in how Southern Baptists are now perceived, said Graves, describing the first as a shift from emphasizing the historic Baptist position on religious freedom. "Regardless of its social background, the call for religious liberty was a key to the public perception of Baptists," he said.

Southern Baptists' change of perspective on this issue has been "rapid and thorough," Graves said. He said the nation's largest Protestant denomination has moved from being "leading advocates of the disestablishment of religion to being the foremost exponents of cultural religion."

Graves said Southern Baptists also made a "radical transformation" from long-held positions on the priesthood of the believer and soul competency. Once holding that "individuals have been empowered by God to decide freely on the issues of faith," he said, the SBC shifted to an emphasis on "authoritarian leadership" during the late 20th century.

The third shift was a move from "anti-creedalism to creedalism," Graves said. As a result of these three moves "the perception of Baptists in the 20th century was dramatically altered," he said.

However, Graves said the "one key issue ... largely neglected in the midst of our current denominational confusion" is the role of individual religious experience, which he described as perhaps "the biggest loser" in recent Baptist battles.

"It is interesting that as we fight over the correct Baptist doctrines, we have all lost a hold on what it most means to be a Baptist," Graves said. He noted that Baptist theologian E. Y. Mullins "extolled the centrality of spiritual experience as being the only source of first-hand religious knowledge."

Graves responded to recent comments by Southern Seminary President Albert Mohler concerning Mullins' position on religious experience. "Mohler's criticism of the value of spiritual experience shows his reliance, not on Baptist tradition and clearly not on Calvin as he claims, but on Princeton Fundamentalism."

"The importance of subjective spiritual encounter rightly belongs in the forefront of any discussion of Baptist life," said Graves. "One hopes that future doctrinal debates among Baptists would not neglect, and surely not degrade, the centrality of spiritual experience."

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SBC Historical Society to study name change

By Bob Allen

SAVANNAH, Ga. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Historical Society, independent of the Southern Baptist Convention since 1995, authorized a committee May 26 to study whether the 62-year-old organization should remove "Southern Baptist" from its name.

The society for church historians formerly was an auxiliary to the SBC Historical Commission, dissolved in a major denominational restructuring.

Formed in 1938, the society predates the now-defunct commission by 13 years. It was the SBC's official history agency until the Historical Commission was chartered in 1951. After the commission folded, responsibility for recording denominational history transferred to a council of seminary presidents.

The Historical Society, however, opted to continue as an organization independent of the SBC. It has since hired a staff and sought to broaden support in local churches, associations and state conventions, as well as other Baptist organizations and institutions, like seminaries and divinity schools.

In light of those and other changes, society member Alan Lefever made the motion at the group's annual meeting May 25-27 in Savannah, Ga., calling for a five-member committee to consider if the organization should continue to be called the "Southern Baptist" Historical Society.

Citing recent controversial stances of the nation's largest Protestant denomination, Lefever, director of the Texas Baptist Historical Collection at the Baptist General Convention of Texas, wondered if retaining the name "is in our best interest in the larger constituency we serve."

That constituency, he continued, "certainly includes the Southern Baptist Convention but is broader than that as well."

Society president Merrill Hawkins, assistant professor of religion at Carson-Newman College, said changing the name has been discussed often in corridor talk at society meetings.

Some want to keep the old name because the term "Southern Baptist" implies a constituency larger than the national body, including also state conventions, associations and local churches, he said. Others disavow the rightward shift in SBC leadership and claim the convention's current leaders no longer support the society's mission.

In an address to the society, Hawkins neither endorsed nor opposed a name change but said whatever the outcome, the organization should embrace the broad constituency of Baptists.

He called for "avoiding entanglements with the current SBC leadership without excluding Southern Baptist leadership," while also opening up conversations with groups like the Baptist World Alliance and American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Hawkins said he would like the society to become "the heritage-promoting agency of Baptists in the South."

Charles Deweese, a former Historical Commission associate director hired as the Historical Society's first full-time executive director last fall, called the last 12 months "a major year of transition for this organization."

The group ended 1999 in the black, he said, noting increases in state conventions and colleges donating to the society, and moved past \$250,000 in endowment, toward a goal of \$1 million.

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Controversial poverty bill gets bipartisan backing

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- In an effort to help impoverished communities, President Bill Clinton and top congressional leaders have agreed to back a bill that includes a controversial provision funding drug-rehab programs that are faith based.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., and a bipartisan group of lawmakers joined Clinton at a White House press event May 23 to endorse the American Community Renewal Act. The measure was first introduced several years ago by Reps. J. C. Watts, R-Okla., and Jim Talent, R-Mo.

Sponsors hope to steer the bill through the House of Representatives by the end of June. It would identify 40 impoverished "renewal communities," making them eligible for tax incentives and home-ownership opportunities.

But the faith-based initiative popularly known as "charitable choice" has raised church-state concerns, and the agreement has angered some congressional Democrats.

The language and details of the agreement are still being hammered out. But earlier versions of the act would allow religious organizations, such as churches, to receive tax dollars without altering the religious character of their drug programs.

Critics say the faith-based initiative could open the door for lawsuits against churches that accept funds.

In April, the Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, which receives nearly two-thirds of its funding from the state, was sued by civil-liberties groups for firing a lesbian employee. The lawsuit charges that the woman lost her job because she did not share religious views of the Baptist agency.

In a phone interview with Associated Baptist Press, Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., blasted the White House-GOP agreement. "I oppose funding religious bigotry with federal money," he said. "You haven't been able to discriminate based on religion in hiring with federal money since we passed the civil rights laws of the 1960s."

Scott said he had expressed his concerns to the White House. "Under this plan -- while receiving federal dollars -- you could tell a job applicant to his face that 'we don't hire your kind because of your religion,'" he said. "That is now illegal in this country, but under this provision it will be legal."

Another critic of the faith-based initiative is Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Texas, who has been a leading opponent of charitable-choice initiatives in the House.

"I am not optimistic that the Congress or the White House will protect the principle of church-state separation when it comes to the issue of charitable choice," Edwards told ABP. "Hopefully the Supreme Court will rule unconstitutional what is a huge chink in the wall of separation between church and state."

Edwards said he could think of no better way to create religious animosity and dissension in America than to "put billions of federal dollars on the table and tell churches to compete for that money."

He also criticized leading presidential candidates for backing the idea. "Mr. Gore and Mr. Bush should re-read the first 16 words of the Bill of Rights," he said.

The initiative would prohibit the use of tax funds for proselytizing, Edwards said, and thereby "take away the very tool that makes these faith groups effective -- the injection of their faith."

"If anyone thinks the federal government will fund religious organizations to the tune of billions of dollars and will not regulate them, then they are blind to the realities of government," Edwards said.

Sources close to the negotiations say the community-renewal plan has undergone a series of changes.

The church-state issues come down to whether the bill in its final form will allow "pervasively sectarian" organizations to receive funds. Both the White House and the GOP agree that it will be implemented in a "constitutional" manner, but they appear to have different opinions of what that means.

A White House press release outlining the details of the agreement noted that bill's charitable-choice provisions "must be construed and implemented consistent with the constitutional line between church and state."

Hastert said lawmakers have "very, very carefully crafted that language" to avoid constitutional problems.

Bill Shapard, aid to Congressman Watts, told ABP that churches should not be excluded from receiving government funds for social services.

"Anytime the federal government helps provide funding for a solution to a growing problem in our communities and yet leaves out faith-based communities, they're discriminating against them," he said.

Shapard pointed out that the government has been funding religious hospitals and Catholic universities for years. He said arguments about church-state separation tend to come up only "when we start talking about poor communities and black communities."

He also said he does not believe that churches should have to alter their hiring practices if they accept tax dollars. "I don't see why this piece of legislation will or should change any pre-existing employment clauses with a faith-based organization."

But opponents remain critical of the initiative.

"This agreement could lead to a constitutional disaster," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Melissa Rogers, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, said the U.S. Supreme Court has "generally held that pervasively sectarian organizations, like churches, cannot receive government money even for secular purposes."

Rogers said the court's ruling actually supports religious liberty. "That rule is not one of discrimination," she said. "It recognizes that religion is unique and is best protected by a healthy degree of separation."

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Thousands of youth, students gather in Memphis worship fest

By Jacinthia Jones

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (ABP) -- Some stood quietly in bare feet or soggy shoes with their hands raised above their heads in praise.

Others kneeled in the muddy field with their heads bowed deep in the wet, trodden grass.

But few seemed to notice the threatening storm clouds overhead or the rain that later fell. All listened intently and expectantly, as Louie Giglio prayed before thousands of college students gathered May 22 to pray and worship at Shelby Farms in Memphis, Tenn.

"From north, south, east and west, we come to stand before you to affirm that you are our God," Giglio said.

"This day belongs to you. Everything belongs to you."

Giglio, of Atlanta, is the founder of Passion Conferences and its annual daylong worship, music and prayer service, simply called OneDay. The first three OneDay events, held in Texas, attracted about 18,000 people combined.

This year's event was the largest ever for the nondenominational Christian gathering, which targets college students and young adult leaders. Organizers said almost 24,000 people had registered in advance and estimated that 50,000 attended Saturday. The event was carried live on the Internet at <http://www.oneday2000.org>.

Though Saturday was the main worship gathering, many started arriving Thursday afternoon and pitched hundreds of tents at Shelby Farms.

The event concluded the following day with a commissioning service, at which students mobilized to spread the message.

"It's awesome to see this many college students praising God," said Abby Barton, a 19-year-old student from the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

Hay wagon shuttles transported participants around the park.

In between prayers and speeches, people swayed and danced to Christian music as they watched the broadcast on three giant screens.

"I just wanted to come because there is a desperate need in this nation for everyone to get back on track," said Kara Payne, a 26-year-old from Arlington, Texas. She traveled with about 75 other students from four churches in Arlington and Fort Worth.

"It's an opportunity I couldn't pass up," said Jennifer Logan, 19, of the University of Georgia, Athens. She traveled with a group from Warren Baptist Church in Augusta, Ga.

By early Saturday, officials reported no serious incidents at the park, where drugs and alcohol were banned. One person was treated for cuts after apparently walking into a barbed wire fence while camped out the night before.

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Q-and-A interview with OneDay 2000 organizer

By David Winfrey

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Louie Giglio, director of Choice ministries, is the leader behind the movement leading up to OneDay 2000. Giglio, 41, also leads a weekly Bible study in Atlanta that draws more than 3,000 young adults. He talked with the Western Recorder to discuss the impact of OneDay.

Q: What was OneDay 2000?

A: It was the culmination of a vision we've been chasing for about five years now, and that vision was just to see college students, primarily, come together across ministry lines, denominational lines, geographic lines and to pray and seek God for spiritual awakening for this generation. ... We've done three national Passion conferences leading up to OneDay, but OneDay was the culmination of that vision.

Q: How will you gauge whether OneDay was a success?

A: I think it's going to take some time before we know the answer to that question. Attendance is not necessarily the right gauge. The feeling that we had, although it was so powerful and so riveting, I don't think necessarily is the right gauge. The fact that students came from every state and about two dozen foreign nations I don't think is necessarily the right gauge -- although that's a good sign. I think the gauge for us is going to be obedience. Worship in its authentic forms always leads us to obedience. ... There were maybe 4,000 students who stood toward the end of the day saying God was stirring their hearts for foreign missions. If five years from now a significant number of those students are somewhere in a foreign country or on the way, then I think we know it was authentic and OneDay was real. If tens of thousands of college students have come to know Christ in the next two or three years because of what happened on that field, then we know it was for real. Otherwise, it was an awesome day, but that's about all it was.

Q: Why does a OneDay conference last three days?

A: We finally came to the realization on a spiritual level that most people might not come ready at 10 o'clock Saturday for this kind of solemn assembly. OneDay was a one-shot deal, and this solemn assembly -- the whole Joel 2 nature of it -- just required that we prepare our hearts. So we put in place our Friday night gatherings just to allow people to do that ... preparing ourselves for the holy nature of what we'd come to do. We added Sunday on because we knew Saturday would be significant and we wanted people to have a chance to sleep on it, to let it really truly soak in before they get back in a car.

That's the spiritual side. On the human side a lot of these students drove 20-30 hours to come to Shelby farms or farther. Dave came from Sri Lanka. It cost him a year's wages to come. And for a guy like

Dave, for a group of students that we met from Duluth, Minn., who drove 25 hours, it was good for them to be able to come and settle in, catch their breath a little bit before OneDay and then have a chance to be there and let that settle a little bit before they had to jump back in the car for 30 more hours.

Q: How did you get the word out to attract students from 50 states and 24 nations?

A: It's been three things. First, word of mouth. We have a tremendous amount of confidence in the grass-roots network of students. They have connections with friends and students they went to high school with who are at other schools all over America. Secondly, the road to OneDay consisted of a 127-date campus tour ... taking the message to places all over. But the third way and the major way is the CDs that we've produced over the last three years from Passion events, and the Internet. A guy like Dave and a lot of people like him somehow had gotten their hands on a Passion CD, felt God in the music, went to the Web site, saw what was happening with OneDay, felt attracted and drawn to that kind of vision and came.

Q: What was the main message communicated during OneDay?

A: I think God wanted us to come around the cross of Christ. The cross has two major messages. One of them is we are free, we are clean, we are new. The second one is "die." The cross is a place of death, and die to self, die to your name, die to your reputation, die to your own ambition, die to this world, die to the flesh, die to everything and live only for the glory of God. ... Honestly, if death to self doesn't happen, all the prayers we prayed really never fully will engage. We'll never fully be unified. We'll never fully have a passion for the lost. We'll never have a burden to go to the nations and we'll never live for the church the way God wants us to.

Q: You've traveled around the country talking with Christian students. What are they telling you?

A: I think they're telling us that they're hungry for more. This is a pretty intense generation, and they want to be challenged and they want to be led. They are not afraid in any way of any depth of commitment.

Q: A lot of people are focusing on the music and worship style preferences. What are they missing?

A: I think what they're missing is the fact that God is eternal and God is bigger than music and he's far greater than any style preferences. ... Yes we've [done] a tremendous amount of what we've done around music. We value music. It's God's gift to us. But music, and particularly this whole conversation about styles, it simply is an indication that we're dealing on about the second level of a 45-story building and we need to go up the elevator a little higher into what really matters. ... Everything we're fighting for right now in terms of styles is going to change. What doesn't change is the eternal character of God. That's rooted in the eternal Word of God, and that's been carried by the eternal body of Christ, the church.

Q: Where does the OneDay leadership go from here?

A: We go back to the face of God. We've been committed for five years to something that is easier said than done and that's following God's spirit and being finished when he's finished.

We knew from the beginning that Passion did not have a long-term 10-15 year life span. We just felt like we were more a part of a movement and less a part of an institution.

We're open to all options. If God says this is the end, then we all have ministries and connections and other passions and visions that we'll pursue. If there's to be something else, then we'll follow God in that as well.

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