



# Associated Baptist Press

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## Texas Baptist leader issues call to 'redefine' relationship with SBC

By Bob Allen

DALLAS (ABP) -- Texas Baptists should "redefine" their relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention in light of revisions to the denomination's statement of faith, but not cut all ties or form an alternative national body, the state's top Baptist leader said June 26.

Charles Wade, executive director of the 2.7 million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas, issued a statement amid media reports that Texas Baptist leaders are "openly discussing" severing ties with the national body.

Speculating about whether Texas Baptists might reduce or stop funding to the SBC at their annual meeting this fall, BGCT president Clyde Glazener told the Dallas Morning News, "We're not interested in siphoning off a lot of funds from Texas to fund a Jerry Falwell-clone church."

Such a scenario could have a major impact on the SBC. One of every six Southern Baptists lives in Texas. The BGCT forwarded \$45 million from Texas churches to the SBC in 1999, 14 percent of its budget.

A June 26 story in Baptist Press quoted responses of several Southern Baptist leaders to the report.

SBC president James Merritt said, "this is a time for Baptists to pull together," rather than to divide.

Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas, said he was not surprised by the story. "It's something that we've been saying for a good while; that the BGCT is moving away from the SBC. Now it's on the table, more publicly, and frankly, we're not surprised."

Wade, however, echoing remarks he made to Texas directors of associational missions in April, said talk of a split is premature.

"Though there are those who would like to draw a dividing line as deep as the Grand Canyon, this is a time for redefining the relationship, not severing it," Wade said.

Wade noted that the state and national conventions have always been independent entities working in voluntary cooperation.

"The BGCT will work with those who share our vision, our values and our commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible," he said. "We will cooperate with Southern Baptists where we can, and we will do missions and theological education together where we can."

He added, however, that Texas Baptists will "also cooperate with other Baptist bodies and other Christian bodies" to spread the gospel.

Wade said Texas Baptist churches would continue to be able to give to Southern Baptist programs through the state office, or to bypass them.

The state convention currently has committees studying its relationship with seminaries and missionary-sending agencies. It also is considering a constitutional amendment that for the first time would allow churches from other states to join as full members.

The Texas convention has already taken several steps declaring greater independence from the SBC, but talk of a schism has heated up since the national body updated its "Baptist Faith and Message" to espouse more conservative views.

Last year Texas Baptists refused to accept a new article on the family that declares in part that wives are to "submit graciously" to their husbands. In June, Wade unsuccessfully petitioned the SBC to keep language specifying that Christ, and not Scripture, is Baptists' highest authority.

Wade said the new statement violates Baptist tradition by imposing church teachings in the form of a creed. He said it would be "wrong" should the statement be used to coerce any seminary professor or missionary to adhere to its views.

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## **Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children keeps state money and kids for now**

By David Winfrey

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children will renew its contract to care for children assigned by the state despite stricter language required by state officials.

Renewal of the contract, which was set to expire this summer, was in question after the Baptist agency and the state were named in a lawsuit by a former children's home employee who was fired because she is lesbian.

The basic agreement, hammered out for more than a month and announced June 24, will maintain two key aspects, according to KBHC President Bill Smithwick:

First, troubled children who are under the protective wing of state agencies will continue to be referred to KBHC homes and foster parents for care.

Second, the contract does not require the Baptist agency to change its policy that prevents employment of people involved in homosexual activity.

Smithwick said that during a conference call, KBHC trustees' five-member executive board voted unanimously to accept the new contract. "Really, in essence, nothing's changed," he said.

But the contract does spell out two issues regarding KBHC's relationship with Kentucky's Department of Child and Family Services and the Department of Juvenile Justice.

In one, KBHC agrees to pay for the state's legal defense in the current lawsuit filed by former employee Alicia Pedreira.

"There's always been 'hold harmless' language in the contract," Smithwick said. "It was our employment practices that got the state into court, and we have agreed to indemnify them." He added that the bulk of legal costs up to this point have been paid for by insurance.

The other more specific area of the contract spells out for state employees that they don't have to refer children to KBHC if they disagree with the Baptist agency's employment policy

"If certain state employees feel that this is in violation of any code of ethics that they have, they don't have to refer to us," Smithwick said.

During the initial controversy after Pedreira's firing, Smithwick said, several state employees in the Louisville area stopped referring children to KBHC facilities and foster parents.

"But there are many, many others across the state that have very high remarks to say about our quality of care and are very glad that we are going to be continuing our services," he said.

"This is probably going to cost us some reduction in referrals, which means reduction in revenues," he added. "We hope Kentucky Baptists will stand up and help make up the difference because of the stand we've taken."

The state reimburses KBHC on a per diem rate for each state-referred child the Baptist agency cares for. Current KBHC facilities still require a minimum number of staff regardless of the number of children served, Smithwick noted, so if the state sends fewer children, the loss in state revenue will increase the average cost per day for children who remain.

Of Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children's \$21 million budget, approximately \$12 million is earmarked as state funds.

Had KBHC's executive board rejected the contract, the agency's contingency plan would have enacted across-the-board reductions in programs that include eight residential facilities and multiple Cornerstone Counseling facilities through the state.

"We'd just be much smaller," Smithwick said, noting that until 30 years ago the agency did not receive state money. The contracts have been as much a "blessing" to the state as to the agency, because "providers like us have been able to take care of the state's children where they didn't have the facilities to do that."

Smith said that despite the issues regarding legal costs and individual agent referrals, the agency ultimately accepted the contract because it would allow KBHC to care for more children and it didn't have to compromise its core values.

"Some state social workers objected to our employment policies, but it was, it is, and it always will be our position that the admitted homosexual lifestyle is contrary to KBHC's core values and it is not in the best interest of the children that we serve," he said. "We will not -- I repeat -- we will not change our core values or change our employment policy regarding homosexuality."

KBHC will continue to take state dollars as long as it doesn't impede the agency's key goals, Smithwick added. "When it gets to the point that we can no longer fulfill our mission, then the state can find somebody else to take care of their children."

That could happen if the Pedreira lawsuit against KBHC and the state is successful. Among its claims is that the state's funding for KBHC and its religious-based employment policy violates the First Amendment call for separation of church and state.

Pedreira was fired in October 1998 when KBHC officials learned she was a lesbian and living with a partner. She told the Louisville Courier-Journal that she told her supervisor during the job interview that she was a lesbian, but the manager said that wouldn't be a problem as long as she didn't discuss her private life at work.

Higher officials in the agency fired Pedreira after learning of her sexuality. A photo of her wearing an "Isle of Lesbos" T-shirt beside her partner during an AIDS walk appeared without her permission at a Kentucky State Fair contest in 1998.

KBHC officials stated at the time of Pedreira's firing that employees know when they are hired that they are expected to live a lifestyle consistent with the agency's Christian mission and purpose.

Smithwick reiterated during a press conference in late June that the agency's emphasis on role models requires that employees be held to a high level of accountability, not only on the issue of homosexuality. "I've told you folks before, if we have employees who are living together outside the covenant of marriage we'll discriminate against them too."

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### **North Carolina divinity school given associate status by ATS**

BUIES CREEK, N.C. (ABP) -- Campbell University's 4-year-old divinity school has been voted an associate member of the Association of Theological Schools.

Michael Cogdill, dean of the Baptist-affiliated divinity school in Buies Creek, N.C., called acceptance by the national accrediting body "a major milestone." Cogdill said he expects the school to be fully accredited by 2002.

The Pittsburgh, Pa.,-based Association of Theological Schools is the accrediting and program agency for graduate theological education in North America. Its 237 member institutions represent the broad spectrum of denominational, ecclesiastical, and theological perspectives evident in North America today. The Association comprises Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox schools of theology, both university-related divinity schools and freestanding seminaries.

The Campbell University Divinity School opened in 1996, with 25 students, one year earlier than planned due to overwhelming demand. The school's charter class graduated this past May. Today there are over 150 students enrolled.

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-- By ABP staff

### **Three join faculty at Central Seminary**

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (ABP) -- Three professors have been elected to the faculty at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan.

Ronald Carlson was named associate professor of evangelism and church growth, Carolyn Gordon associate professor of church and community and Robert Johnson associate professor of church history and missiology by trustees in May, according to a recent announcement.

Carlson has since March 1999 been an interim pastor and consultant for First Baptist Church in Winona, Minn., an American Baptist congregation. He has experience as a church planter both in the United States and abroad.

Gordon has since 1998 been director of ministries in higher education for the District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

Johnson, a former missionary to Brazil, has been teaching a year at Central as a visiting professor. A former professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Johnson recently transferred his ordination to the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. He has more than 10 years of pastoral experience and has taught church history more than 15 years.

Officials said the faculty additions would provide new resources for pastors and laypersons in local churches. Central Seminary, which is aligned with both American Baptists and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, is celebrating its 100th year.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Red Cross recognizes American Baptist ministry**

VALLEY FORGE, Pa. (ABP) -- The American Red Cross has recognized a growing ministry of American Baptist Men as a partner in providing relief to disaster victims.

"We are excited about the further opportunities to collaborate in helping those affected by disasters," Red Cross official James Woodson said in a June 13 ceremony recognizing work by the men's ministries department of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Allen Abbott, director of men's ministries for the denomination's National Ministries, said disaster-relief work by American Baptists has grown rapidly in recent years. Since becoming a part of National Ministries two years ago, the fleet of relief units has grown from one to eight in operation or development.

The trailers have been dispatched to various disasters in the United States for cleanup, repair, and initial rebuilding. ABMen volunteers also last year worked with the denomination's International Ministries to travel to Nicaragua in the wake of Hurricane Mitch. That partnership is expected to last into next year.

The disaster-relief ministry is part of a larger effort to "bring holistic, long-term assistance to those affected by disasters," Abbott said.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Bulgarian scholar elected to European seminary faculty**

PRAGUE, Czech Republic (ABP) -- A Bulgarian mathematician who converted to Christianity has been named director of applied theology at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic.

Parush Parushev will join the faculty Aug. 1, seminary officials announced. He will develop programs in applied theology, with special attention to human rights.

A former university lecturer in engineering and mathematics, Parushev converted to Christianity and was baptized by Theo Angelov, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation who at the time was a pastor in Sofia.

Parushev became part-time director of the Bulgarian Theological Institute in 1991 before coming to the United States to earn a master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1996. He is now working toward a Ph.D. at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif.

Keith Jones, rector of the seminary in Prague, said Parushev's experience in Eastern Europe and commitment to developing "contextual theology" is "a great gift to the IBTS team and to the whole European Baptist family."

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-- By ABP staff

## **Debate over confessions and creeds has characterized Baptists from beginning**

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- Some view the newly revised "Baptist Faith and Message" as merely restating what Southern Baptists have always believed -- a needed step in an age of moral relativism and political correctness. Others say it represents a reversal of Baptist polity -- an unprecedented attempt by the Southern Baptist Convention to impose church teaching from the top down.

It's just the latest round in a paradoxical debate that predates the SBC's 19th century origins by 200 years, when the first modern Baptist churches began to appear on European soil.

On one hand, "No creed but the Bible" has been Baptists' mantra from their emergence as a distinctly identifiable group. Yet on the other hand, Baptists from the beginning often have written statements of faith to outline their beliefs.

Springing from the radical wing of the Protestant Reformation, the first Baptists rejected infant baptism that was the norm in Christendom. Refusing to recognize established churches in Rome, England and elsewhere, they likewise dismissed their catechisms, creeds and church hierarchy. Baptists turned instead to the Bible for spiritual instruction and to the local congregation for governance.

The fledgling denomination faced practical concerns, however, of fellowship, producing ministers, resolving doctrinal disputes and cooperation in spreading the faith. Early Baptists wrote "confessions" of faith, intended to affirm, but not prescribe, what the new movement believed.

"When Baptists first emerged ... they needed to identify themselves; they needed to tell who we are and what we stand for," explained Leon McBeth, professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. "The basic purpose of confessions of faith throughout the years has been to say: 'Here we are. We are Baptists. This is what we believe.'"

Yet the very forces that caused Baptists to dissent against state-sanctioned churches in Europe made them wary of adopting even their own confessions of faith, said Alan Lefever, director of the Texas Baptist Historical Collection. Baptists had been persecuted for refusing to acknowledge the authority both of state churches and their creeds.

"Historically, Baptists have shunned creeds," Lefever said. In England, early Baptists "refused to adopt a confession," he added. "They said we need no confession but the Bible."

That sentiment carried over to colonial America as well, where many Baptists came seeking religious freedom. Eighteenth century Baptist preacher John Leland disparagingly called confessions of faith a "Virgin Mary between the souls of men and the Scriptures."

Not surprisingly, when the SBC formed in 1845 to carry on missionary activity without regard to the divisive issue of slavery, no statement of doctrine was adopted. W.B. Johnson, the convention's first president, explained: "We have constructed for our basis no new creed, acting in this manner upon a Baptist aversion for all creeds but the Bible."

Johnson's sentiment notwithstanding, Baptist associations, churches and individuals had written numerous confessions of faith by the mid-19th century. In fact, in the early days, Baptist churches and prospective pastors would exchange statements of faith as part of the process of calling a minister, McBeth said.

Tension over confessions of faith surfaced in early America as the so-called Regular Baptists -- the Calvinist-influenced strand that emphasized order and intellect -- and Separate Baptists -- those who split from cold and lifeless Congregationalists in New England and focused on religion of the heart -- eventually merged. "The Separates insisted that there be no confession, but the Regulars had a confession," McBeth said.

To resolve the difference, both groups agreed the confession of faith would be "advisory only" and that no one would be required to subscribe to every point, McBeth said.

The SBC existed for 80 years -- more than half its current life -- before adopting its first confession of faith.

That changed as the denomination became larger and more centralized and in response to specific controversies that threatened to undermine confidence in convention agencies.

The SBC's Foreign Mission Board in 1920 adopted a statement of faith its missionaries were required to sign. The move responded to "doctrinal agitation" and concerns about ecumenism, McBeth reports in his "Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage."

Historians likewise agree that the 1925 "Baptist Faith and Message" arose out of the modernist controversies of the day, with many Baptists suspicious that evolution was being taught in Baptist colleges.

Major revisions to the "Baptist Faith and Message" in 1963 arose from another controversy, at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Professor Ralph Elliott's 1961 book, "The Message of Genesis," used methods of scholarship that many Baptists deemed too liberal, leading to his dismissal.

Crises like these helped Southern Baptists forget, or at least put aside, their qualms about confessional statements, Lefever said. "When we finally have adopted statements of faith, they usually have been in response to something."

But even then, he said, such statements were intended "only to clarify basic statements of belief."

"If you read the preamble to the (1925) 'Baptist Faith and Message,' it basically says you can disagree with all this and it is OK," he said. "The preamble is the safety valve for Southern Baptists."

By the time Southern Baptists this year debated the latest revisions to the "Baptist Faith and Message," however, concern had shifted away from whether Baptists should have a confession to what it would say. Much attention focused on the preamble.

The committee that drafted this year's changes offered a last-minute addition to include the phrases "soul competency" and "priesthood of believers" after widespread criticism over that language being dropped from the 1963 statement.

Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Director Charles Wade also attempted to amend the committee's new preamble to insert two paragraphs from the 1963 preamble affirming the lordship of Christ. Among his suggested insertions were statements that Jesus Christ is "the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists" and that Baptist statements of faith never have been regarded as "complete, infallible statements of faith nor as official creeds carrying mandatory authority."

Wade's proposal was overwhelmingly rejected by the SBC after members of the study committee insisted the old language wrongly elevated Jesus above the Bible.

In his June 19 column in the Baptist Standard, Wade said the committee's new preamble moves the statement of faith from a confession to a creed. The new language describes confessions of faith as "instruments of doctrinal accountability" outlining "essential" doctrines.

"Baptists always have believed we are accountable to God and to Holy Scripture. But never have we believed we were accountable to a confession of faith," Wade wrote. "That is the very definition of a creed.

"The Scriptures are enough," he declared. "Baptists have no creed but the Bible."

From his vantagepoint as a historian, McBeth sees this year's changes as further evidence of the SBC moving toward a more creedal stance, a trend he noted in his 1987 book "The Baptist Heritage."

"Southern Baptists in recent years have shown a distinct trend toward creedalism," he wrote in the book. "What they adopted in 1963 was a confession; but the way that document has been used has gone far toward hardening it into a creed."

One of McBeth's counterparts at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., sees the matter differently, though.

That last half of the 20th century brought about deeper divides between Southern Baptist progressives and conservatives, said Greg Wills, assistant professor of church history and director of the seminary's Center for the Study of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Those who moved toward a more progressive view in their theology also have tended to be anti-confessional," Wills said. "Those who have been more conservative in their theology have tended to see the adoption of confessions as one way to stem this rising tide of progressivism. They have rekindled a commitment to endorsing confessions of faith."

He added: "Often the reason people oppose confessions is they oppose enforcing doctrinal standards."

McBeth concedes there is value in adopting a confession of faith. "I personally believe a group is better off with a confession than without one," he explained. "Without a confession, you don't know where you stand. But with a confession, you know what people generally believe.

"The risk is that it will become creedal. Our Southern Baptist confessions have become more creedal in the 20th century than ever before."

## **Historians take varied views on differences between confessions of faith and creeds**

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- Baptists historically have made much of the distinction between having a confession of faith and a creed. But what is the difference?

Plenty, some Baptist historians say. Others say: "Nothing at all."

The question has gained new attention since the Southern Baptist Convention adopted an updated version of its "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement June 14.

While revisions from the version of the statement adopted in 1963 are subtle, some critics say the document now crosses an important line between representing a loose consensus of commonly held beliefs and a binding statement of what one must believe in order to be a Southern Baptist.

"Baptists have always been a confessional people and not a credal people," said Leon McBeth, distinguished professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. "A creed excludes, and a confession includes. A creed tells you what you must believe, and a confession affirms what you do believe."

Others, however, counter that narrower language in the new document is needed to guarantee doctrinal fidelity in SBC seminaries and missions agencies.

Greg Wills, assistant professor of church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., said Baptists ought to get over their aversion to the word "creed."

"Throughout Baptist history, Baptists have used the terms 'creed,' 'confession of faith,' 'articles of faith,' 'summary of doctrines' and 'abstract of principles' synonymously," said Wills, director of the seminary's Center for the Study of the Southern Baptist Convention. "You find all those terms or phrases used to describe a summary of doctrine."

Others, meanwhile, draw a middle line, asserting that the difference is not so much in the document itself but in how it is used.

"A confession and a creed can be worded exactly the same way. The thing that determines whether it's a confession or a creed is how it's used," said Charles Deweese, executive director of the Southern Baptist Historical Society in Brentwood, Tenn.

"A confession is a document to which there is a voluntary response," he added. "A creed is a statement of belief which is in a sense forced on a body -- there is an attempt to achieve a level of uniformity or conformity."

Alan Lefever, director of the Texas Baptist Historical Collection, agreed the difference between a confession of faith and a creed is in the application.

"A confession is something you use to find common ground," he said. "A creed is something you use to force agreement or uniformity. That's the difference in a nutshell."

Those who want to enforce a creed often fail to see the distinction between creeds and confessions, Lefever asserted. "If you think there's no difference between a confession and a creed, you're not going to treat them differently. When you're using a confession as a creed, you can't differentiate between the two."

In modern terminology, "we can define a creed any way we want," said Wills, the Southern Seminary professor. "What is the 'Baptist Faith and Message'? It is whatever we say it is as a denomination.

"Many Baptist leaders say a creed has coercive authority but a confession of faith does not. It's true that the Southern Baptist Convention does not coerce the associations or the state convention or individuals to agree with this confession of faith. The convention controls its own agencies."

Given that understanding, the true issue is one of Baptist polity rather than of defining what is a creed and what is a confession of faith, Wills said. "What authority does a convention have? What authority does it

have over its agencies?"

While no creed or confession of faith can be used to require conformity among other autonomous Baptist bodies, any convention or association or church adopting a doctrinal statement has the right to require its employees to conform to that statement, Wills said.

"There are some Southern Baptists, who tend to be in the more progressive wing, who oppose erecting any doctrinal standards as a hiring criterion in Southern Baptist agencies. On the one hand, that's naive," he said. "They themselves would recognize certain doctrinal criteria. The real question is, 'How narrowly are we going to define our doctrinal standards?'"

At this point, Deweese of the Southern Baptist Historical Society agrees with Wills.

"An institution has the right to create its own confessional statement," he said, citing Southern Seminary's Abstract of Principles as an example. "As I understand it, each professor who has taught there from day one has signed that statement of faith. But then they have taken different positions on what the implications of that statement are for their ability to teach freely."

And that is the point of departure, he explained.

"What has happened in recent years is efforts to determine very precisely what position each professor must take on each doctrine. The issue here is academic freedom, which has suffered in serious ways."

While academic institutions have the right to adopt statements of belief, trouble arises when those statements get narrower and narrower, Deweese said. "Is this statement of faith intended to be a general understanding of the doctrinal sentiment of this academic community, or is it intended to be a set of legalistic rules by which this institution is going to be run? That will determine the degree of academic freedom in that community."

Deweese, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the subject of church covenants, said he has made an extensive study of various Baptist confessions of faith from the 16th century to the present.

"One of the lessons I have learned is that these confessions vary widely in their content from generation to generation," he explained. "That raises a flag of caution about taking any specific set of doctrine and hammering it down as though it has some canonical status."

"They are literally man-made words that reflect the views of the person or persons who wrote it."

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## **'Baptist Faith and Message' has become a creed, Wade says, vowing Texas Baptists won't be coerced**

By Marv Knox

DALLAS (ABP) -- Contrary to recent developments in the Southern Baptist Convention, no confession of faith will become a creed for Texas Baptists, pledged Charles Wade, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Wade discussed the nature of confessions and creeds in remarks to employees of the state convention's executive board June 21 in Dallas.

Wade's remarks followed by exactly a week the SBC's adoption of a new version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" statement, which he said has become a creed for the national convention. Last fall, the BGCT reaffirmed the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message," which he said is used confessionally.

"Confessions are brief distillations of what is believed to be most significant and helpful," he explained. "They have been used to be a witness and a guide for teaching."

Creeds, on the other hand, are religious statements that become binding upon Christians and replace the Bible as the authoritative guide for religious faith and practice, he said.

"Baptists have always been reluctant regarding confessions of faith," he conceded. The first such statement for Baptists, the First London Confession, was drafted in the 17th century, "as Baptists tried to give a witness to a state church that all too quickly called them heretics."

Baptists have adopted confessions of faith, particularly to define and explain their distinctive doctrines and principles, such as believer's baptism by immersion and religious liberty, Wade said.

"But Baptists also have been very wary of them, because they can be so easily mistaken for creeds," he added.

"There are always people who would like to volunteer to be the approved interpreter of Scripture for your conscience," he warned. "And Baptists have been so reluctant to do that because they have feared what creeds have been used to do -- to manipulate conformity -- and they have feared ecclesiastical control."

Baptists' historic proclamation is "No creed but the Bible," he said.

"We have been confident that truth is always God's truth and that it will win out," he explained. "And if men and women will faithfully live the Scripture, proclaim the truth of the Bible, proclaim the truth the Bible presents, then all will be well.

"We need no creed to define what the Bible says, and we need no confession of faith if it is going to be used as a creed. That's been the Baptist position since we've been Baptists."

Although Texas Baptists specifically affirmed the 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message," neither it nor the 2000 statement will be imposed upon Texas Baptists, Wade promised.

"I'm not trying in reverse to say you've got to ascribe to the 1963 statement," he told the Baptist Building audience. "And if any of you love the 2000 statement after you've studied it, then I honor that; I'm OK with that.

"We didn't ask you to sign (a statement of faith) when you started working here. We just want you to love Jesus, believe the Bible, be faithful in church, try to win people to faith in Jesus. We just want you to be what Baptists have always been."

Such freedom also carries responsibility, Wade acknowledged.

"Before God, you and every other believer have the privilege and expectation of God that as you read or hear Scripture you are expected to call on the Holy Spirit to help you understand it in the deep places of your heart and soul. Others may help you, but you are responsible. That's what makes Baptists Baptists."

This stand does not imply lack of reverence for the Bible or lack of faith in the Bible, Wade insisted. "The Bible is the norm. It's inspired and divine. It's true."

"It's a painful thing when people try to dismiss you because you don't, quote, 'believe the Bible,'" he said. "I challenge anybody to make that charge stick against Texas Baptists. But I want you to understand we do not worship the Bible. We worship God revealed in Jesus Christ, recorded in Scripture so that we might know him."

Live up to the Baptist heritage, Wade urged.

"You are Baptists," he said. "That means, first of all, you are Christians. You have been given a gift to see something most Christians don't, and that is Jesus has set us free. His Holy Spirit will work on your heart, and he will help you understand Scripture.

"People who keep telling you what you can't do have not paid attention to the way Jesus set people free, men and women, to speak up, to ask questions, to be taken seriously."

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