

THE STATE OF THE ALLIANCE

A Report to the Southern Baptist Alliance
By Stan Hastey, Executive Director
Fifth Anniversary Convocation (Sixth Annual)
March 6, 1992

When the Alliance was formed five years ago in the church where we have gathered for this sixth annual convocation, our founders had no way of knowing whether what they had decided to create would observe a first birthday, let alone a fifth. Since that February day when formation of the Alliance was announced, this much can be said of our freedom movement -- the SBA has had an impact far greater than our numbers would indicate.

Often during my three years as your executive director I've noted in speeches, sermons and interviews that the best thing the Alliance had going for it from Day One was the vision of our founders. And while none of us has any desire that this fifth anniversary convocation turn into an orgy of self-congratulation, I believe it appropriate and needed to say again that the Alliance has had such an effect primarily because those men and women who gave birth to this movement stated its purpose and principles clearly and succinctly. They had the courage and insight to address plainly yet eloquently the main issues at stake in the context of a troubled convention. And they did so by reaffirming those historic distinctives that have made Baptists Baptist. In short, we are indebted to them for a covenant of principles that has made our message coherent and cohesive.

No one knew five years ago, of course, whether ^{or} ~~and~~ to what extent the Alliance would catch on. Some of the founders no doubt had visions of a movement of hundreds of affiliated churches and many thousands of individual members. Surely it can be said that all of us underestimated the fierceness with which the vast majority of Southern Baptists would cling to a body they truly came to believe was "God's last and only hope" on earth.

Nor did those founders -- or the rest of us -- know that all too many denominational administrators would aid and abet the takeover of the convention by pretending there was no crisis or trying to wish it away or, worst of all, by collaborating, however unintentionally, with the very persons whose avowed objective was and is the destruction of academic and church freedom.

Permit me to say parenthetically that these are the persons my recent column in **Baptists TODAY** was meant to stir. I have heard since the piece was published that some seminary professors have taken offense at my "profiles in courage" list, concluding that because they were not named I have accused them of collaboration with trustees who have destroyed, or are in the process of destroying, their institutions. I heard earlier this week that one such teacher was so angered he decided not to come to this meeting. While I could try to defend the article by pointing to the qualifying words and phrases that journalists learn to use in order to write a hard-hitting piece, let me simply say here and now that the listing of those who have been

the most conspicuous victims of the brutal takeover of SBC agencies and institutions was not meant in any way to ^{diminish, let alone} denigrate those who have chosen to stay in their posts for reasons of conscience, reasons they alone know fully, reasons they need not justify to me or anyone else.

Although parenthetical, this is hardly irrelevant to the larger issue. At our five-year milepost, I believe we must face the fact that our movement's growth has stalled. Since we last met, our growth has been statistically insignificant. Several months have elapsed with our count of affiliated congregations at 133, our overall membership at around 73,000. Please do not hear this as moaning or complaining; it is simply the way it is. I believe there are reasons for this plateau, reasons I will turn to shortly.

Before leaving the statistical side, however, I want to report as well the good news that our financial base remains solid. For each of the three years Jeanette Holt and I have staffed the office in Washington, we have [REDACTED] ^{had a surplus} Our operating budget for each of those years, 1992 included, has hovered around \$300,000, of which nearly 20 percent goes to our regular mission projects.

Even better news is the fact that our overall income continues to increase because of your increasingly generous giving to the Global Mission Offering. The Board of Directors inaugurated this offering in 1990 in the hope of being able to provide grants to worthy applicants beyond the constraints of the

regular budget. That year, with very little advance warning, you responded by giving \$25,000. Last year you more than doubled your GMO gifts. And already this year, with the promotional materials only now being sent out to churches, we have received \$20,000 toward the 1992 goal of \$73,780. These funds will provide much needed grants for a wide range of projects, both in this country and abroad.

These include grants to the Fraternity of Cuban Baptist Churches, the Baptist Convention of Nicaragua and the Moscow Baptist Church. We will be supporting both Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond and Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, a school we gave to even before the crisis of last October erupted. We will continue to support a variety of creative social ministries in this country, as well as Southern Baptist Women in Ministry and the Baptist Center for Ethics.

Let me challenge you to return to your church and find a way to promote and receive this offering. I am convinced there is no better model available to free Baptists today of a special offering that seeks to meet the needs of the whole person with the whole gospel.

At the same time, you don't need me to inform you that the Alliance no longer is the only game in town. The formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship last May inevitably has resulted in an intense discussion, inside and outside the Alliance, as to how the two groups ought to relate to one another. Specifically, the question has to do with

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wording of the question depends on one's predisposition. It may be asked something like, "When are the Alliance and the Fellowship going to get together?" Or, it is asked, "Do the Alliance and Fellowship have to get together?"

Before offering you my perspective on the matter, let's look at some simple facts. According to a report just released by the Fellowship, of the 495 churches giving to and through the Fellowship, 43 are churches affiliated with the Alliance. In addition, all 12 churches that currently contribute regularly to the Alliance but are not formally affiliated likewise are giving to the Fellowship. In other words, nearly one-third of our own congregations already are, de facto, churches affiliated as well with the Fellowship, as are 100 percent of our supporting congregations.

Of the remaining two-thirds Alliance churches, the presumption is that nearly all of them still today are sending the bulk of their mission monies beyond the local community to their state conventions. Of these, only two or three, most notably Virginia, have altered significantly the traditional pattern of sending, on average, about 35 percent of these mission gifts on to the SBC for distribution through the Executive Committee. Jeanette Holt told me this week that based on her evaluation of the Fellowship report and our own financial data it appears that fewer than 10 Alliance churches are giving the bulk of their mission monies through the Alliance rather than through either the Fellowship or the SBC.

The CBF report also underscores what we know full well -- that despite our disclaimers and explanations, the Alliance remains a largely regional group. Seventy-one percent of our membership resides in the three ^{contiguous} states of North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland, plus the District of Columbia. Although we have pockets of strength elsewhere, this middle Atlantic region is the Alliance heartland.

Taken together, these facts signal to me that the questions concerning ^{the Alliance/fellowship relationship,} [REDACTED] questions asked either in eagerness or dread, are perfectly understandable. These questions are, to be sure, foreboding in a sense in that they raise the specter of dissolution ^{of existing structures,} [REDACTED]

What I want to propose today is that we confront directly our situation and set ourselves on a course that will lead to an intentional decision about our own future. I don't want to predict the outcome of such a process outright. What is important, it seems to me, is that we take charge of our fate, that we determine our future with intentionality and purposefulness. To state the proposal negatively, what I want us to avoid is a slow death, degree by painful degree, as ^{in the prospect,} your own churches ^{might} withdraw their support to participate ^{were} fully in the larger body.

My thinking along these lines has been shaped considerably by the recent real-life experience of University Baptist Church in College Park, Md., the church to which Jeanette Holt belongs and whose recently discharged pastor search committee she

chaired. The University congregation had the great good fortune of having available as its interim pastor one of their own, Lee Hein, a distinguished church historian. In one of his first sermons as interim pastor, Dr. Hein laid out for the church its primary and most essential task, one more important even than searching for a new pastor. Essentially, what he said was that University Baptist had the following options: (1) It could choose to continue its current course; (2) it could decide to die; or (3) it could determine to make a new beginning. But what was most important, he told the church that day, was that the people claim responsibility for their decision and pursue it intentionally. I'm convinced there is much wisdom in that approach to the basic, life-and-death questions about institutional survival.

Concerning the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Alliance has participated intentionally in forming and helping get *it* started. This has been done both officially through repeated actions of the Board of Directors, as well as more informally on the part of individual Alliance members, some of whom ^{by now} ~~are~~ are in fact more invested now in the Fellowship than they are ~~invested~~ any longer in the Alliance.

Large numbers of Alliance people were present in Atlanta in August of 1990 for what some have dubbed "Atlanta I," the initial gathering of what since has become the CBF. We were among the 3,100 who overwhelmed a meeting hall intended for two-thirds that number. And immediately upon adjournment of that gathering,

several hundred of us retreated for a debriefing to an adjoining theater. We began then and there the first of our discussions about the relationship between the Alliance and the Fellowship.

Nine months later, the required incubation period for the Fellowship ended, we convened again in Atlanta, all 6,000 of us, collectively playing the role of midwife as the new creature was born, at times with predictable kicks and screams. Some Alliance people were delighted; others were disquieted; still others left disgruntled. Whatever our attitudes and outlooks, what is undeniable is that Alliance people were present at both Atlanta gatherings in disproportionate numbers.

Beyond our presence, our influence within both the Interim Steering Committee that functioned as the governing body of the Fellowship between August 1990 and May 1991 and the more permanent Coordinating Council that has so functioned since last May likewise has been disproportionate to our raw numbers. That this has been so has not been the result of caucusing or otherwise conspiring to influence how the Fellowship takes shape in its earliest stages of development. Rather, I believe it represents the natural instinct of Alliance people I first discovered upon being elected to my position despite the fact I was not even a member -- an instinct of openness and magnanimity based on the lively hope that what began in the Alliance as a tiny mustard seed might indeed take root and grow and flourish as a fully developed tree that bears much fruit.

As stated earlier, I am not yet prepared to make an outright

the two groups will formally dissolve and come together
prediction that [REDACTED] Yet this I do know. It cannot and will not happen without a large measure of good will all around. For our part in the Alliance, it cannot and will not happen unless we are willing for that seed planted by our founders five years ago to die in order to produce a new tree. And yes, from the Fellowship side, it cannot and will not happen unless that kernel of high purpose and principles the Alliance planted is allowed to become part and parcel, sum and substance, the roots, branches and bark of that new tree.

For the Alliance has much to offer the larger yet newer group -- those strong sentiments and statements of high purpose and principles we call our Covenant, along with the demonstrated experience of five years' worth of trial and error in the establishment of intra-Baptist and ecumenical relationships, in a philosophy of mission, in creative experimentation in theological education, in ministry to and placement of displaced clergy, in the development of church literature and, perhaps above all else, in our determination to recognize and experience the vitality that has come from a genuine inclusiveness of women and laypeople in our governance and in our worship.

Concerning this last issue, we have been brought a very long way over these past five years. At the same time, it should be both humbling and instructive to remember that the inclusion of women and laypersons in our group was not a given in the beginning, that a handful of courageous women in particular held our feet to the fire in order to make us do the right thing and

that a good deal of converting of men -- primarily preachers -- long accustomed to wielding power had to happen. This should be humbling, I suggest, by reminding us of how recently some of us had our own conversions, and instructive in that we must not allow ourselves to think God's Spirit is incapable of converting yet many others.

And speaking of humility, let us also never lose sight of the fact that when it comes to what matters most ~~to~~ women whose calling is to be pastors of churches, the progress of even the most enlightened churches has been painfully slow and that even now most of our so-called progressive congregations will not seriously entertain the possibility of calling women as pastors.

There is another hard issue we must acknowledge as well. It may turn out to be even harder to deal with, particularly in the context of ~~the present~~ discussions, than those issues surrounding inclusiveness of women. I refer to our relationships outside our immediate denominational family.

Let me be blunt about this. One of my negative memories of Atlanta II, the gathering last May in which we birthed the Fellowship, was the short shrift received by a woman who rose to address the need from the very outset to send a reconciling gesture to American Baptists. She was not heard from again. And although I must confess to an ongoing reevaluation of my earlier and strongly stated view that the last thing on earth needed is another ~~body~~ ^{formally constituted} of white Baptists in the South, I still believe that if what we are about in the Alliance and the Fellowship results

in the creation of such a body, it is essential that we do so in consultation with and with the blessing of other kinds of Baptists.

For I am utterly convinced that it would be wrong -- indeed sinful -- for a new body of Baptists to form that would proceed to operate in the kind of self-sufficient isolationism and arrogant exclusivity that came to characterize the Southern Baptist Convention. If what we are about turns out to be the creation of a new Baptist body, we must and surely can do better -- with God's help.

Accordingly, I challenge us to consider for the future a confederation or commonwealth of Baptist bodies in this country that would be in a formal state of continuous consultation on a wide range of issues, including a common philosophy and theology of global mission; as well as collaboration in other areas such as theological education and publishing, with the Alliance as

To this end, our Board of Directors this week has approved co-sponsoring a series of get-acquainted sessions with the top leadership of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. to be held in strategically located cities later this year and early in 1993. Personally, I am committed to encouraging Alliance churches to explore the prospect of dual affiliation with ABC/USA.

Our Board of Directors also has heard a progress report on and endorsed the continuing involvement in a new dialogue with the Progressive National Baptist Convention, a process that

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contains within it enormously energizing potential as we seek, even in modest ways, to begin addressing seriously issues of racism in our society and try to build bridges over waters troubled far too long by racism in the churches.

These ideas are offered in the context of our own continuing development and growth in the Alliance and of our deliberate participation in the Fellowship and ^{our possible future relationships} [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As you know, the framework for ^{our discussions} [REDACTED] came during an initial session last July in Raleigh ^{between our two teams} [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] These teams [REDACTED] agreed unanimously that the framework for the ongoing talks would include seven items put on the table by the Alliance, including those "hard" issues I have addressed today. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] ^{2 - 10 - 1980} Prospects for [REDACTED] may depend in some measure on factors external to the discussions themselves. Most notably, if the trustees of the Foreign Mission Board were to dismiss Keith Parks or should he choose to resign his post as president in protest of the new policies of the FMB, the fallout in the churches very well could be immediate and extensive, leading as many as several hundred key churches to alter drastically their pattern of mission support as early as next January, if not sooner. Such developments, in turn, could lead to an early

schism from the SBC.

Although on one level, such a prospect might be enormously energizing, it might also create enormous pressure to re-create some modified version of the old SBC in the pragmatic interest of a quick fix. Such a course would be, in my judgment, ill-advised if not tragic. Better, I believe, that we should pursue a more deliberate course so as not to squander the truly unique opportunity before us.

Specifically for the Alliance, in my judgment, such a prospect makes all the more imperative that we continue to play an active role in the process, all the while recognizing that sooner or later we may be faced with ~~hard choices~~ ^{hard choices}. Let me assure you in the strongest possible terms that your negotiating team seeks to do what is right. We have no intention of selling Alliance principles down the river. Nor do I believe negotiators from the Fellowship will expect or want us to abandon our principles.

With your permission and blessing, we will continue to participate in this process in good faith and in the hope and expectation that what might result would be in the best interests not only of both parties to the discussions but of the larger church.

And with all this in mind, let me offer one final challenge, namely, that we avoid -- indeed, that we reject -- an unwarranted "us against them" mind set. I dare to remind us that the larger church is watching what we do, as are more than a few ~~people~~ ^{outside the door} who