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I'm a Southern Baptist and I Believe...

Theology and politics run deep
as people of faith struggle to work together

By Amy Andrews
JOURNAL REPORTER

Baptists have been engaged in a fierce struggle since conservatives started taking control of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979. The struggle is now filtering down to many of the state conventions, including the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, which will hold its annual meeting Friday and Saturday at Joel Coliseum.

The differences between so-called moderates and conservatives are real for Southern Baptists. And the debate touches on a wide range of issues, from interpreting the Bible, to abortion and the role of women in society and the church.

But many Baptists don't even understand — or care — what it is their leaders are fighting about. "Many of them know something's going on but are just not interested in getting involved in a controversy," said the Rev. Amis Daniel, the moderator of the Pilot Mountain Baptist Association, a collection of local Southern Baptist churches.

Neither the Rev. Paul S. Kennedy of United Baptist nor the Rev. Charles H. Martin of Cornerstone Baptist has been in the forefront in the battle for control. But each has watched the political maneuverings for seminaries and other Baptist institutions and agreed to talk about the split in the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

The comments of these two pastors — Martin a conservative, Kennedy a moderate — aren't meant to be the official "party line" for the two sides. As with secular politics, talking with a dozen people can yield a dozen different opinions. But there is wide agreement on this: The battle among the Southern Baptists has at times diverted attention from their central mission of cooperative ministry.

"It's disturbing," said Daniel, the interim pastor at First Baptist Church in King. "Conflict doesn't do any good for the Christian faith. The world looks at it and laughs. We're fighting the wrong enemies. The enemy isn't us, it's the devil."

Q & A

Q: What does it mean to you to be a Southern Baptist?

Kennedy: Theologically, it just fits me — the belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, salvation through faith, belief in the scripture as the word of God, and baptism as a symbol, not as necessary to salvation.

Martin: It means being a people who love the Lord and God's word, whose lives are guided by the Bible as our ultimate source of authority, who are independent and who are strong believers in the Great Commission, where Jesus tells us we are to be witnesses.

Q: How would you define what this controversy between so-called moderates and conservatives is about?

Martin: It's not anything new. Anybody that's familiar with Southern Baptist history knows that there's been controversy between parties going all the way back into the 1800s. If I were to try to boil it down, I would say it tends to focus on people's views of the scriptures. Those of us who call ourselves conservative Southern Baptists regard the Bible to be the inerrant word of God, totally in-

spired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the way that we develop our views on issues — social, ethical issues — come from that interpretation of the scriptures. Whereas those Southern Baptists who are labeled — and I don't like labels, but it's just a given right now — those who are moderate Southern Baptists maybe don't share our views regarding the inerrancy of the scripture.

Kennedy: It was about control and power — which group, in particular which individuals, will be in control of the convention. At the state level, that's still true. At the Southern Baptist Convention level, it's about how to do church.

There were the Sandy Creek and Charleston associations back in 1845, and the Charleston group was fairly high church — with educated ministers, fairly formal worship style, somewhat liturgical for Baptists. Whereas the Sandy Creek association was very free-flowing, ministers were not very well educated and came out of the church. There was a lot of revivalistic spirit, it was certainly

TWO VOICES



JOURNAL PHOTO BY MIKE DIRKS

Paul S. Kennedy

The Rev. Paul S. Kennedy has been the pastor of the 129-member United Baptist Church on N.C. 65 near Rural Hall since October 1991.

The congregation at Forest Hill Baptist Church, where he had served since May 1989, divided then and joined with members of Bethania Baptist Church to create United Baptist.

Some of the members at Forest Hill had wanted the church to relocate. But about one-third of the reason for merging, according to Kennedy's estimate, was over theological differences.

Kennedy, 60, is an engineer who grew up in West

Virginia in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and became a Baptist in 1972 when his family moved to Hickory. He said he was called to the ministry in March 1978, the same year he left a job with General Electric.

The family sold its home, and Kennedy entered Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He graduated from Southeastern in 1981 with a masters degree in divinity and in 1986 with a doctorate in ministry.

Kennedy has also served churches in Swansboro and Dunn. He and his wife, Sandra, have three adult sons and four foster children.

Charles H. Martin

The Rev. Charles H. Martin has been the pastor of the 274-member Cornerstone Baptist Church on N.C. 109 just inside Forsyth County since it began eight years ago. Before that, he was the associate minister of education and youth at Antioch Baptist on Palmer Lane.

Martin, 42, is a lifelong Southern Baptist who grew up in a rural Cherokee-Powhatan Indian community that straddles the North Carolina-Virginia border near Roxboro. It was in that community and in a strong conservative, traditional Southern Baptist church there that his beliefs developed.

He graduated from Wake Forest University in 1974 with a bachelor of arts degree in sociology. Before going into the ministry, he worked for the Forsyth County Department of Social Services investigating cases of child abuse and neglect.

He received his master's degree in divinity in December 1984 from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He and his wife, Jann, have two teen-age children.



JOURNAL PHOTO BY ALLEN AYCOCK

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flamboyant. Those two streams have been in the Southern Baptist Convention since.

Part of what's happening now is that those two streams are dividing, whereas previously before 1979 there was a concerted effort to try to keep those together for what was a common purpose.

Q: *So is inerrancy the root of all the dissension?*

Kennedy: I don't think it is. I think the inerrancy issue was an issue which was politically attractive for those who either wanted to gain control or felt uneasy about some aspect of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Martin: That seems to be the central issue out of which all the other issues emerge.

Q: *How do you define "inerrancy" and what is your view of the issue?*

Kennedy: Inerrancy means that the Bible as written in the original manuscripts is exactly as God wanted it written, and since God cannot make an error, the original manuscripts do not contain any errors.

A group of inerrantists met in Chicago a few years back and were dealing with this very issue. Different books tell the history a different way. Even in the New Testament you can read the Gospel of John and the synoptics and you'll find Jesus traveling entirely different paths, and so on. There are just all kinds of those situations, and there are some things that are just plain wrong. Not many, but there's a few. What they did (in Chicago) is affirmed inerrancy but then developed a set of exceptions. For example, they say that we must allow for hyperbole. We must allow for the fact that this Bible was written over a thousand years and one person saw history one way and a later writer would see it a different way. And some of it is poetry, and on goes the list.

When you put all these conditions on it, I'm an inerrantist. The problem is, most people do not understand the list of conditions.

What I understand the Bible to be is a written record of God's interface with man, pointing particularly to the Jesus Christ event and how he related to the disciples and how the apostles related to the church. As I read those stories, I get moral guidance and I gain a knowledge of who Jesus Christ is. And I must be willing and able to understand and know enough about who wrote them and to whom they wrote them, the situation, in order to correctly interpret what that means for today.

The problem with the inerrant view is what they're really speaking of is taking the Bible literally and applying it to today. What happens is, is they take portions of the scripture and say, "That's applicable to today" and leave out the others. Somebody's making that judgment.

Martin: Well, when I look at the scripture, I regard the scripture to be without error.

I'm not a biblical scholar. Let me just qualify that right up front. I'm certainly aware that there are other conservatives who probably could address that issue much better than I. I acknowledge as a pastor, a Christian, a Southern Baptist, that sure there are scriptures that maybe we can't reconcile. There may be differences between the views of,

say the writer of the Gospel of Matthew as opposed to say, the writer of the Gospel of Mark. They maybe share different viewpoints of the same incident. Then there are maybe incidents in the scriptures that go beyond our understanding. I don't feel like as a Christian that I need to be able to explain or rationalize those difficult passages. That's where faith comes in, to me. In Hebrews 11:1 it says faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. So maybe where my understanding may stop, my faith takes me beyond to believe that it's still true.

I try not to wear that label "inerrantist" because it's so confining. It's like pigeonholing. Certainly I'm unabashedly a conservative. I make no apologies for that. But if I've got to have a label attached to me, I'd rather people around me in the community attach the label "Christian." I'm not concerned that people know me as Charlie Martin The

relationship between a husband and wife, he clearly says that the husband is the head of his wife and the wife is to be in submission to the husband, as the church is to the Lord. And I look at the I Timothy passage about the qualifications of a pastor, a deacon, as just being an extension of that blueprint that God has laid out for the organization of the church. And I accept that because God is the ultimate architect.

I feel like just because we interpret the scripture to say that the role of the pastor and deacon is reserved for a man in the church, that is in no way a put-down for women. I depend greatly upon the women of our church here at Cornerstone, and they occupy some very important positions of leadership that do not violate or attempt to compromise our interpretation of the scriptures.

Q: *How about the role of women as teachers in seminaries or Sunday school, etc., and the scripture references to that?*

Martin: In I Timothy 2:12, Paul is talking about the order of the church and he says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man but to be in silence." That verse right there places a strong conviction on my heart that if men are to be the spiritual leaders in the home and in the church, there should be no exception in the seminaries. I have no concern or problem with a woman who is gifted in education, who is qualified to teach a class where other women are learning issues related to their service in the church and that type of thing.

We have a lot of gifted women teaching in our church in the Sunday school department, our children, our youth. These ladies are very fulfilled Christian women who take very seriously their giftedness in teaching. We rely on them to exercise that where it doesn't conflict with our understanding of the scriptures.

Kennedy: In those days, women were chattel property. They were only educated in the home. The only status they ever had was if they were widows or if their father ever bequeathed something to them, so it makes sense for Paul to say, "Listen, don't violate the culture to the point that you look weird by letting the women do the teaching." But today, thank God, gender is not an issue with who has the education and who has the position of authority or power or so on. It's who is the best for the job. The weird thing about it, this idea that women shouldn't teach or preach, is that any pastor will tell you that the strength of his church is the women.

Q: *How about abortion?*

Kennedy: The Bible is quite clear that life begins at conception. Back in the Levitic Code, there are penalties described for persons who killed children. The penalty for killing a child was much more severe than for causing a miscarriage. So even then, there was a distinction made between already-birthed children and children in the womb.

An unborn child, in Exodus 21, did not have equal value of a child that already was born. So, I find it difficult to automatically equate abortion as the same magnitude as murder. Now, I am opposed to abortion as a means of birth control. But I'm equally opposed to trying to legislate it, to make it a crime. I think that's a job of the

A look at the Baptist groups

✚ Pilot Mountain Baptist Association

- Organized in 1885
- 84 churches and missions
- 37,551 members (1993)
- \$339,000 budget
- The Rev. Amis Daniel, the interim pastor at First Baptist Church of King, became moderator in October 1994.

✚ Baptist State Convention of North Carolina

- Organized in 1830
- 3,562 churches (1993)
- 1.2 million members (1993)
- \$29.4 million budget (proposed 1995)
- The Rev. Alfred Ayscue, the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Mount Airy, was elected president in 1993.

✚ Southern Baptist Convention

- Organized in 1845
- 38,741 churches (1993)
- 15.4 million members (1993)
- \$136.5 million budget (proposed 1995)
- The Rev. Jim Henry, the pastor of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla., was elected president in June 1994.

Source: Pilot Mountain Baptist Association; Baptist State Convention; Southern Baptist Convention

JOURNAL GRAPHIC BY CASSANDRA SHERRILL

Conservative Inerrantist Baptist. I want them to know beyond a shadow of a doubt just by my lifestyle that I am a Christian.

Q: *Can you give examples of scripture passages commonly used to reach positions on certain issues?*

Kennedy: Sure. It's very easy. Most inerrantists do not believe in the ordination of women as ministers and deacons. That's because in Paul's letter to Timothy, he says that deacons can only be "the husband of one wife" (I Timothy 3:2) If that's what they want to believe, that's OK. I will accept that, IF they go back into I Corinthians 11 and make women wear their hats in church and be silent in church, because that's what Paul said. But what happens is they say, 'Oh, that was written for that society'. They're not uniform in how they apply it.

Martin: When we ordain deacons, we look at that I Timothy, chapter 3, passage where it clearly states that the role of a pastor and deacon is that of a man. Paul uses clear terminology to say this is the role a man will hold in the church. And I look at it from a bigger picture: God's word, the Bible, is a blueprint of the organization of, for instance, family structure. In Ephesians 5 where Paul talks about the

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church, of the society, to educate people about the results. I have had enough experience with people party to the conception and abortion of an unborn child to know that it leaves a scar on almost all people.

Martin: As I look at the word of God and as the members of this church look at the word of God, there is a great value placed on the sanctity of life. And no human being has the right to take the life of another human being, irregardless of how young or how old they are. So, to us, abortion is a sin. And we're very strong in our pro-life stance.

Certainly (the Ten Commandments) is a specific reference where God speaks against taking the life of another person. But I'm talking about the overall message of the Bible. It's evident from the beginning to the end that life is precious and sacred.

I support laws that prohibit abortion, just as I support laws that prohibit someone walking out with a .38 and blowing me away.

Q: *How about homosexuality?*

Martin: That's certainly one that's gotten a lot of attention, not just among Southern Baptists but Christendom in general. I, as well as this church, view homosexuality to be a sin. It's blatant, obvious rebellion against the will of God as expressed in the word of God for relationships between the sexes. I look at Romans, chapter 1, and I see where Paul speaks against it, and then there's a passage in Deuteronomy.

In Leviticus 18:22 it says "you shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination."

Kennedy: The typical interpretation is that the Bible describes homosexual intercourse as an abomination. I don't argue with that. The Bible also describes adultery as an abomination. At one point in the Old Testament it says that a man or woman caught in adultery ought to be killed. If we're going to treat homosexual intercourse as an abomination, then let's be consistent and treat heterosexual intercourse out of wedlock in the same way.

When you read the scripture you discover that the only approved sexual intercourse is between husband and wife. My position with regard to homosexuals is the same as it is for a couple living together. It's wrong, but I'm not going to reject the people in either case. If they give me an opportunity, I may try to give them some counseling about their living style. I don't think homosexuals should be discriminated against or given any special status (legally). They are people.

Q: *What else differentiates moderates from conservatives?*

Kennedy: It's hard to define because I have to make assumptions about the other people. For me, being a Baptist means that every believer has his or her own access to God and can interpret scripture for his or her own self. And every believer has an equal voice in the church and that we are accepting other Christians as long as they believe in the very basic fundamentals . . . We stress the blessings of God in this life as contrasted with focusing on the hereafter.

Conservatives will tell you exactly the same thing. There are some differences, however. One is that it's my experience, it's my impression, that conservatives stress the hereafter. Conservatives believe in a very strong pastorate. Conservatives tend to focus on what a Christian should not do, i.e., should not be homosexual, should not have abortions, should not drink . . . whereas I'm much more comfortable in talking about the benefits of being a Christian and how God intersects with our lives to help us with our struggles. There's a second demarcation. Currently the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention is focused heavily on church growth. What I mean by that is, churches should grow numerically.

I am much more focused on the health of the people of the church, and is the church positively impacting the community, is it helping the members to be responsive to the community. So there's a difference in orientation and valuation on what it is to be healthy.

Martin: I think in general, the vast majority of Southern Baptists agree on the Bible. There are some that say, for instance, that Adam and Eve were not historical characters but were given more as figurative examples, and I disagree with that. I think they were indeed historical characters. There are some that question the authorship of the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, and say that Moses couldn't have been the author. I have no problem accepting the fact that he authored that. Let's just take for instance the Book of Jonah. That's always everybody's favorite: How in the world could an individual be swallowed by a whale

and survive three days and then be puked up onto the shore? And sure, it's incredible. I don't deny the incredulous descriptions of some of the miracles of the Bible. But the fact is, if you accept this as the word of God as it says over there in II Timothy, chapter 3, that "all scriptures are given by inspiration of God." It didn't say the believable parts. All scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. So I have no trouble — I didn't as a kid, I don't as an adult — accepting the fact that yes, Jonah was indeed swallowed by a whale. I don't need to explain it. I can't explain how a baby is born. It's a miracle.

Passages like that sometimes will come under attack.

Q: *How about seminaries, and the control over them? Why is that such a sticky issue?*

Kennedy: The control of seminaries is absolutely vital. That's where the whole fight is. Because if

you control the institutions and the training of the leadership, then you control the destiny of the organization. Conservatives have been consistent about hiring one kind of trustee with one viewpoint, hiring professors with one viewpoint, so that what they are creating is a group of seminaries who are going to be very narrow and out of touch with society because they don't have the diversity or represent the culture. That's one of the tragedies. The loss of Southeastern seminary to the conservatives is a very personal loss for us. It was almost like somebody came into our house and took it over while we were still living there.

Martin: It fits in the context of what has been happening on the leadership level of the convention itself. I feel like the leaders of the convention should reflect the theological views of the majority of Southern Baptists. The Southern Baptists have come to the conven-

tion as messengers in the past 15 years and have voted consistently to elect men who uphold the conservative views. The transition that we see taking place in the leadership of the seminaries is a continuation of that movement. I feel personally as a Southern Baptist that our seminaries should reflect the theological views of the majority of southern baptists, and for some time they did not.

Q: *What do you think is the future of the Southern Baptist Convention, and also of the newer moderate group, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship?*

Kennedy: I think the SBC is going to be very much out of phase with 21st century American culture. I think the SBC is turning conservative, large-church minded, and authoritarian right at the time when the culture is going to de-

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mand a more open-minded, small-church mentality, and more democratic church. That's based on the fact that we're now at the end of the millenium. Always at the end of the millenium, society turns paranoid. Then there's an upturn in confidence.

The Southern Baptist Convention will grow another three to five years in numbers of churches and members, then it will begin to trail off and diminish. If the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship survives, it will survive on a slow-growth pattern and will pick up disaffected Southern Baptists.

I'm not sure about the future of the CBF. I'm hopeful that it will survive, but I'm not sure.

People have a strong association with being Southern Baptists. They just can't imagine themselves being anything else. That's probably the main reason that a third of the churches haven't left the convention.

Martin: I feel like the people have spoken as a majority in the Southern Baptist Convention. I think we are at the crossroads or fast approaching the crossroads where there very well may be a parting of ways where those who are moderate Baptists don't share the views of the conservative Baptists. They may continue on the process of developing the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which I regard to be a separate convention anyway. I think it's almost inevitable at this time that is going to happen. It's sad because I think about the history of all these churches working together over the years, but barring a miracle from God, I just don't see the two groups of Baptists reconciling. I would not be surprised to see within this decade a complete division and a formation of two separate conventions. I think the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will continue to grow. As more people who

are aligned with their views on the scriptures and their views on sexual and ethical issues such as abortion and homosexuality, things like that, I think there'll be fewer middle of the roaders and more people saying, "Yes, I'm a Southern Baptist," or "I'm a moderate Baptist."

Q: *How do you think all of this is going to affect the state convention and local association?*

Martin: At the state level, I'm really not sure. And I say that in all honesty. I find myself wondering how what's happening on the Southern Baptist Convention level is going to affect our N.C. Baptist State Convention. We have our differences, the churches making up the state convention. When the SBC and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship part, I don't see how the state convention will be able to maintain itself as one body. Now, relations are somewhat strained and you hear rumblings on the state level that you didn't hear before.

On the associational level, it is really amazing how we have been able to weather the storm with a strong degree of unity and mutual respect. I give a lot of credit to our director of missions, Jim Hamblen, who is able to blend us as an association by keeping us focused on the major issues such as ministering to the local community, being mission oriented and promoting the kingdom of God here.

Kennedy: Within the Pilot Mountain Baptist Association, we have been blessed that this controversy has not significantly impacted the fellowship of churches and pastors. Part of it is the director of missions Jim Hamblen's leadership. Another part of it is the mindset that permeates us.

This problem is there, but the SBC churches in this immediate area are not really torn apart by it at all, or if they are affected, it's insignificant. Leadership and the desire of all of us is strong not to let it separate us.

I don't think it's there on the state level. There's a definite struggle.