

STATE and NATIONAL

Biblical interpretations spark dissention between SBC groups

Editor's note: This is the second in a three-part series examining the crisis in the Southern Baptist Convention.

By PETER THUESEN
Staff Writer

At the Southern Baptist Convention's 1991 meeting June 4-6 in Atlanta, a special room will be reserved for what might be called a Bible read-a-thon. For three solid days, the faithful will take turns in a non-stop, out-loud reading of all 66 books of the Scriptures. "Hopefully, this symbolic gesture will inspire us all the more to read the Bible to which we pledge our allegiance," said fundamentalist SBC President Morris Chapman during a speech in September. To many SBC moderates, Chapman's "symbolic gesture" may seem loaded with painful irony. For more than a decade, the Bible has been the primary battleground in their power struggle with the Convention's firmly entrenched fundamentalist leadership.

But is the Bible really the main issue separating the two sides? "Absolutely," declared Chapman during a recent phone interview. "It is the single issue. The nature and authority of God's word is the single issue." "If you're willing to accept anything less than the Bible being God's perfect word, then you have given yourself the freedom to choose any passage of scripture that you want to believe or to dismiss any portion of scripture." In their 12 years at the helm of the Southern Baptist Convention, fundamentalists have succeeded in establishing literal interpretation of the Bible as the primary requirement for participation in the SBC power structure. But an often obscured fact has been that fundamentalists and moderates disagree over more than scripture. "They differ on a whole range of things — the separation of church and state, the role of the pastor, whether women should be ordained," said Nancy Ammerman, Emory University soci-

ologist and author of "Baptist Battles." Nevertheless, fundamentalists have painted the conflict in black and white. "They have framed it as a battle over the Bible," Ammerman said. "And moderates have never been successful in reframing it as being a battle over anything else." While some moderates, including defeated SBC presidential candidate Daniel Vestal, identify themselves as Biblical inerrantists, many are unwilling to make inerrancy a litmus test for orthodoxy. Fundamentalists, however, insist the Bible is an inerrant record meant to be understood literally. The Bible's writers, they say, were guided by God. "God in his inspiration in effect protected these people, even though they wrote in the thought forms of their day," said conservative Baptist author James Hefley. That is not to say the Bible's writers avoided "literary forms," Hefley added. "For example, Jesus said, 'I am the

door,'" Hefley said. "We know that is not literal." "I believe, though, that there were two primeval persons, Adam and Eve. I believe there was a flood and that there was a miraculous crossing of the Red Sea," he said. In the eyes of fundamentalists, it is blasphemous to interpret the Biblical creation story as allegory or to attribute the parting of the Red Sea to natural phenomena. Chapman explained this in no uncertain terms during a September meeting of the SBC Executive Committee. "I wish to restate the issue," Chapman said. "The Bible is God's perfect word which means that it is not errant in any area of reality." "When the Bible speaks, it speaks the truth and nothing but the truth, historically, scientifically, philosophically and spiritually," he said. But the Rev. Mitchell Simpson, newly-installed pastor of University

Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, said the idea of Biblical inerrancy was ludicrous. "Interestingly, inerrancy is not a word which the Bible ever uses about itself," Simpson said. "The people at the head of the fundamentalist movement are bibliolaters. They have made an icon — an idol — of the Bible." "There are no infallible books. There is an infallible God. Unfortunately, the infallible God has to deal with very fallible people." Far worse than fundamentalists' belief in Biblical inerrancy, however, is their insistence that all Southern Baptists must interpret the Bible literally, Simpson said. "Fundamentalists are people who are so mean-spirited in their insistence that their way is the only way to believe that they would deny other people the right of expression," he said. "They're like pit bulldogs. When's the last time you had an intelligent conversation with a pit bulldog? Pit bulldogs attack."

The six Southern Baptist seminaries were among the earliest objects of the fundamentalist offensive. Insisting that seminary professors had no right to deny the inerrancy of the Bible, fundamentalists gradually cleaned the SBC of moderate instructors and administrators. Today, all six seminary boards of trustees are in fundamentalist hands. Hefley insisted the dismissal of moderates, while sad, was not unfair. "There is a difference between religious institutions and state institutions as far as freedom is concerned," he said. "A religious institution exists for more than academic freedom." But Simpson contended the fundamentalists' takeover of the seminaries, while premised on their demands for Biblical literalism, was part of a larger quest for power. "It's not a Biblical issue," he said. "What's at stake is the control of a major corporate group. I think there's some evil stuff going down in the name of the Bible."

Congressional race turns to debate about campaign tactics, not issues

By KYLE YORK SPENCER
Staff Writer

North Carolina's 4th District congressional race between Democratic incumbent David Price and Republican John Carrington has evolved into a debate over campaign tactics rather than a clash of ideals. Carrington contends that his television commercials, newsletters and public appearances are telling important truths about his opponent. But Democrats are calling Carrington's campaign tactics dishonest and misleading. Carrington's campaign has focused on the savings and loans crisis, and several of his advertisements accuse Price, a member of the House Banking Committee, of contributing to the problem. "He has a record of voting with the savings and loans lobby. Are the voters not supposed to know that?" said John Evans, his campaign director. Rachel Perry, press secretary for the Price campaign, said the voters were not supposed to know something that is untrue. Price did not vote with

the savings and loans lobby, but has consistently voted to protect the taxpayer and ensure a tougher regulatory structure, she said. "Carrington's entire campaign has been to distort Price's record and to smear his reputation," Perry said. But Evans denies allegations of negative campaigning. "Does negative mean we are not supposed to talk about it?" Evans asked. Price campaigners have criticized Carrington for failing to honor his commitment to appear in public with Price. Carrington canceled two debates and one public appearance scheduled for the two candidates, Perry said. "He has refused to debate the congressman and prefers hiding behind thirty-second ads," Perry said. In an interview Tuesday, Price said his opponent refused to take a stand in areas concerning Chapel Hill voters. "I can't get the man to talk about issues," he said. But Republicans argue that by addressing the need for change in Congress, Carrington was dealing with the most important issue.

Carrington's television advertisements have accused Price of serving his own interests in Congress and of personal gain at the taxpayers' expense. Evans said that during his past two terms Price has wasted taxpayers' money on unlimited junk mailing and has funded his campaigns through money from political action committees (PACs). Perry called these allegations false, saying Price has voted to reduce Congressional newsletters from six to three a year and only sends out two newsletters a year to residents of the 4th District. At the outset of the campaign, Price asked Carrington to sign an agreement limiting the sources, attainment, amount and use of campaign funds, she said. The agreement limited the two candidates to spending no more than \$100,000 and banning any use of independent funds. Carrington refused to sign the agreement. "Carrington has spent half a million dollars of his own money on a media blitz. Price just doesn't have that kind of money," Perry said.

Art censorship may be religiously biased

By DOUG HATCH
Staff Writer

In the face of growing concern over how to define obscenity, proponents of the First Amendment right to free expression are rejoicing over juries' decisions to acquit rap group 2 Live Crew and a Cincinnati, Ohio, museum director in trials concerning controversial works of art. The members of the rap group 2 Live Crew were arrested after performing a concert deemed obscene according to state laws by a Broward County, Fla., sheriff, and a Cincinnati sheriff arrested museum director Dennis Berry for showing controversial works by the late artist Robert Mapplethorpe that depicted homoerotic and other sexual images. "There's a grassroots movement being organized by the religious right to Christianize America," said Skipp Porteus, an expert on the religious right and executive director of the Freedom Writer newsletter. "It's leading to America's darkest hour, to be frank with you," he said. 2 Live Crew's album *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* is still banned from Florida record stores, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal funding agency, has come under attack for its prior monetary support of Mapplethorpe. Alan Caruba, author of *Power Media Selects*, a directory of national media personnel, agreed that groups attempting to define obscenity were generally of a religious nature. "These types of things tend to pop up in times when people are stressed out about other things," he said. He attributes some of the growing action as a backlash from Americans' concerns about the recession and mismanagement in government. Monty Lobb Jr., President of Citizens for Community Values, a "pro-family

group" in Cincinnati, Ohio, said the prosecution bungled the Mapplethorpe trial so that jurors had no choice but to acquit Berry. Lobb added that he thought the jurors' trial in the Mapplethorpe case was not indicative of the general mood of America regarding obscenity. "If anything, afterwards we heard the jurors wanted to vote to judge (Mapplethorpe's art works) obscene," he said. "I think Americans are almost invariably angered when someone tries to impose a point of view on them," Caruba said. He explained art as symbolic representations of everyday life as the artist saw it. Religious groups find sexual images in art "particularly disturbing," according to Caruba. "Simply banning such things doesn't change the reality of the fact that the majority of the population is sexually active," he said. He cited the growing rate of sexually transmitted diseases in the past 40 years as evidence of this activity. But Phylis Schlafly, a noted anti-feminist leader, concurred. "There's no question that Mapplethorpe's works... are far beyond whatever the definition (of obscenity) is," she said. She went on to say that she thought taxpayers should not have to finance artists through the NEA. One of Schlafly's areas of contention is the fact that the NEA only funds certain artists, not all those who apply for aid. "The NEA is engaging in a kind of censorship every day it exists," she said. Schlafly said she thought jurors' decisions in favor of defendants of some art works were attributable to courtroom finesse on their parts. "I think the pornographers have the highest paid lawyers in the country,"

she said. Lobb said the verdict in the recent Mapplethorpe case was not a major setback for his and other similar groups. "The victory lies where you have consistent prosecution," he said. He added that his group had made several advances in combating the proliferation of some materials, such as hard-core pornography. Porteus said he thought some Christian organizations were going too far in their crusade against pornography and what they considered decent behavior. He said this crusade had led in part to the formation of the Coalition on Revival in California, which includes 112 churches nationally and believes in basing American law completely on the Bible. Porteus also said the coalition believed in the death penalty for abortionists and homosexuals and was attempting to gain control of local governments. At North Carolina State University, a related controversy has arisen regarding a photograph by Dutch artist Anthon Beeke in an exhibit that was to be displayed in an art gallery open to the public. The photograph depicts a woman's backside festooned with leather straps and a fake horse tail. The woman's genitals are exposed. The exhibit has been removed pending a decision by the School of Design on when and where to show it because of its questionable acceptability for public display. Beeke refuses to let the exhibit run without the controversial photograph. Questions have arisen about whether the dean of the school is holding his decision until after the North Carolina U.S. Senate election is over.

Prayer fanatics to exorcise San Francisco

From Associated Press reports
SAN FRANCISCO—Two ministers and 7,500 "prayer warriors" hoped to exorcise San Francisco of its "evil immorality" on Halloween, but militant gays and pagans in the city said they were ready for spiritual warfare. "They'll end up in the hell they deserve with their narrow-minded views," said Sister Missionary DeLight, founder of the 11-year-old Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in San Francisco. "I think it's scary that they think we're a real threat to society." DeLight, who is a man, was dressed

in a nun's habit and curled fairy shoes and held a wand during a pagan ceremony Tuesday across from Brooks Hall where the prayer warriors will meet. Texas evangelist Larry Lea and San Jose minister Dick Bernal planned to lead a "Prayer Breakthrough" for the city they say is plagued by immoral homosexuals, crime, witchcraft and general sin. "We're praying to God for people, all people, and against the powers of darkness," Bernal said. "The ultimate goal is to save the fallen angels of the city from Satan, from evil immorality."

Lea, who distributes "prayer Army dog tags" and has donned military fatigues in previous crusades, said Halloween night was selected to launch his three-day assault on evil and sin because, according to legend, demons are strongest at that time. "This is not just kids having fun. There is actual worship of the devil." On Halloween, police close off the primarily gay Castro District, where a street party — a New Year's Eve-like celebration for the homosexual community — continues into the night. This year, gay-rights groups plan to protest outside Brooks Hall against the praying masses inside and then march several blocks to the Castro District. A group called Grand Homosexual Outrage at Sickening Televangelists (GHOST) was formed to engage in the spiritual warfare with Lea and Bernal. "Lea's characterization of the city as being ruled by spirits of perversity and witchcraft is nothing but thinly veiled homophobia and fear-mongering," said GHOST member Mark Pritchard. "We intend to show that San Francisco is a diverse community of people who love peace and freedom."

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