

Moderates need to re-emphasize evangelism, pastoral leadership Shurden says_30705

March 8, 2005

Posted: 3/8/05

Moderates need to re-emphasize evangelism, pastoral leadership Shurden says

By John Pierce

Baptists Today

ATLANTA (ABP)—Baptists need to recover their commitment to evangelism, preaching and pastoral leadership, which were de-emphasized during the conflict over fundamentalism in the Southern Baptist Convention, said historian Walter Shurden.

“Baptists will not see a new day until we reassert the centrality of preaching,” said Shurden, executive director of Mercer University's Center for Baptist Studies. “Good preaching makes a difference in a local church.”

Shurden, speaking to the annual convocation of the Mainstream Baptist Network in Atlanta, said many moderate Baptists have overreacted to dictatorial pastoral-leadership styles associated with fundamentalism.

“I believe moderate Baptists came out (of the SBC) with a bias against leadership,” he said. “The priesthood of the believer has never meant the

elimination of the leadership of some believers.”

“We need to hear more in moderate Baptist life about beginnings,” added Shurden. Moderate Baptists, he said, focus well on spiritual growth but need to give more attention to “start-up faith.”

The Bible must be at the central point of our church's life, he continued. “We must be unashamed of ... the Bible as the Word of God,” he said. “We have been 'out-Bibled' and need to return to that.”

One of the themes Shurden detected and affirmed during the two-day Mainstream meeting was that “theology matters.” He quoted the late Baptist missiologist Alan Neely as saying the whole Baptist controversy that reshaped the SBC over the past 25 years is “an argument about God.” Non-fundamentalist Baptists must convey “a biblical vision of God,” said Shurden.

He echoed other themes he heard throughout the conference, including freedom of conscience, the centrality of local congregations, affirmation of women and a commitment to ecumenical participation.

Concerning the latter, Shurden said: “I have long hoped that we would become bigger than Baptists—and stay Baptist.”

He also urged a recommitment to the “hard-earned freedom” of religious liberty. “We cannot relax,” he said, or the First Amendment “will go down.”

Shurden said the fundamentalist shift in the Southern Baptist Convention that began in 1979 is now at the local church level. “Now it's at the hard place,” he said. “We are seeing our churches torn apart by it.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.