



El Centinela Bautista

Special Edition

January 2008

In Response to Dr. Samuel Chetti



To the Hispanic Baptist Churches, in response to the letter from Dr. Samuel Chetti.

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Mark 1:3, NRSV)

John the Baptist's message is still relevant in

our days. There are times when what is crooked needs straightening even when the one calling for such action may be just a voice crying out in the wilderness. As president of the Hispanic Baptist Churches Convention, I am responding to the recent letter Dr. Samuel Chetti wrote to all the Hispanic Baptist churches.

Such letter makes sev-

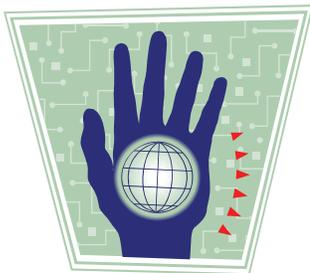
eral unfounded assertions that portray our *Convention* as the perpetrator of some egregious fault against the American Baptist Churches. I will respond to some of those declarations invoking our history that some ignore and others choose to forget.

In his letter, written in Spanish, Dr. Chetti says, "Recently, the Hispanic Baptist Convention and

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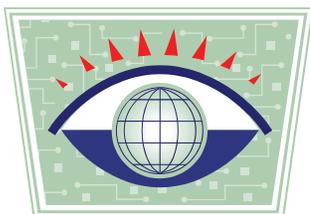


**There are times when
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The only representative American Baptist entity in existence in our midst is called American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles.

In the history of our *Convention*, there was only once an effort to become an American Baptist entity.



After the collapse of the Strategy...

its leadership decided to declare itself independent of the body of American Baptist churches defining itself as a non American Baptist entity.”

Our Response.

An organization like ours cannot declare itself independent from an entity from which never was dependent.

There is no such a thing called “body of American Baptist churches”. That is only a fabrication. The only representative American Baptist entity in existence in our midst is called American Baptist Churches of Los Angeles. Only a local church can be a member of ABCLA. Only a Region, as ABCLA can be part o ABCUSA. Only ABCLA can represent the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

Our *Convention* has never represented ABCLA or ABCUSA. The only Hispanic American Baptist organization that ABCLA recognizes as such is the Hispanic Caucus, as Dr. Chetti has repeated to us in several occasions.

A church which joins our *Convention* does not join the American Baptist Churches. If our *Convention* had ever been part of American Baptist Churches, any church joining our *Convention* would have also joined the American Baptist Churches.

In the history of our *Convention*, there was only once an effort to become an American Baptist entity. Such effort was led by our dear brother Dr. Eduardo Font during the years 1977 – 1978, when he was the president of our *Convention*.

This period in our history is known as “the Strategy.” That name described the project to turn our *Convention* into an American Baptist entity (as a Hispanic Region of ABCUSA). This effort collapsed due to different factors. The American Baptist Regions of the time, the American Baptist Churches of the Pacific Southwest and the Los Angeles Baptist City Mission Society were successful in ending the aspirations of the *Convention* of becoming an

American Baptist organization.

After the collapse of “the Strategy,” those Regions —with different degrees of intensity— have perceived and portrayed our *Convention* as an adversary (depending on who happens to be the Hispanic regional ministers at the time).

Our *Convention* is not, and has never been the Hispanic Department of ABCLA. Even if we wanted to be such, we could not. We are two distinct corporations with different purposes.

For these reasons, to say that “the *Convention* and its leadership decided to declare itself independent of the body of American Baptist churches...” is to affirm the obvious. Since 1923, we have been an independent organization.

To say that our *Convention* is “defining itself as a non American Baptist entity,” is absurd. Since the beginning we have been a non American Baptist entity, and when we wanted to become such, we were not allowed to become Ameri-

can Baptist.

In his letter, Dr. Chetti says, “with this decision, the [*Convention*] has turned itself into an independent Baptist organization without denominational links with ABCLA, American Baptist Churches of Southern California, Arizona, South Nevada, Hawaii (ABCOSH) or American Baptist Churches USA in general.”

Our Response

Sadly, what is said in this letter is read as an anathema pronounced against us. It is not our *Convention* that broke the fellowship. It is ABCLA. Our *Convention* has always wanted to continue the historic fellowship of churches in which we have been together for almost a century. Some of them have ceased to be American Baptist, others not.

The desire of ABCLA is that the historic fellowship of our *Convention* to be exclusive for those churches that are American Baptist.

It seems that ABCLA is confused about what it is the fellowship of almost a century of our

member churches and the more recent fellowship between our *Convention* and ABCLA. The one that is almost a century old is the fellowship of our *Convention*. This is quite a different fellowship that our *Convention* has had with ABCLA.

There is popular saying, “you can’t have your cake and eat it too.” In all honesty, ABCLA cannot say that the *Convention* is part of American Baptist Churches and at the same time never give her any legal standing that would define our relationship as anything more than a fraternal one. What defines “fraternal” may have many interpretations, but not what defines “legal standing”. Either you have legal standing or you do not.

Only an entity that has legal standing can declare itself independent from ABCUSA. That is what ABCPSW did. It declared itself independent and chose a new name. Our *Convention* cannot declare itself independent from ABCUSA because it neither is a Region nor has legal

standing (legal recognition conferred by the denomination).

Erroneously, ABCLA has pretended to cut the *Convention* with the same scissors it used to cut ABCPSW. Not only that, but ABCLA projects unwarranted feelings and fears against our *Convention*. ABCLA has made a flawed analysis of the current situation. Our *Convention* is neither a danger nor a threat to ABCLA.

The bonds between our *Convention* and ABCLA have always been fraternal (whatever it is understood by that term) and nothing more.

To conclude, our *Convention* is not a denomination. It has never been part of a denomination. Anyone who could prove the opposite can show me at least an official document (proof of standing) that attest denominational links and I will retract myself publicly.

The *Convention* is only an association of Baptist churches and it does not pretend to compete nor replace any denominational entity. But, with-



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The best is yet to come!

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¡Juntos Somos Más!



The churches from ABCLA or Transformation Ministries do not need to be members of our *Convention* to participate in any of these ministries.

out a doubt, we long for good fraternal relations with all of them.

Our *Convention* has two purposes: to promote the fellowship among our churches and to further the advancement of the Kingdom of God. To attain these purposes, the departments of our *Convention* continue further with their charge.

The Ministry of Hispanic Baptist women is the *Hispanic Baptist Churches Convention* ministering the women; the Men's Convention is the HBCC ministering the men; the Youth Hispanic Convention is

the *HBCC* ministering the youth; and the Ministerial Alliance of the Convention is the *HBCC* ministering the pastors.

The churches from ABCLA or Transformation Ministries do not need to be members of our *Convention* to participate in any of these ministries. The ministerial students can continue applying for scholarships from our *Convention* (we offer a total of \$21,000 annually). The churches will continue to benefit from the ministry of the Baptist Social Service Center.

The best is yet to come!

In the service of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Rev. José Ricardo Hernández