

Baptist ethicist Foy Valentine dies: "A 20th-century prophet"

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Pioneer southern ethicist Foy Valentine, who embraced civil rights long before many fellow Southern Baptists did, died January 7 of an apparent heart attack in Dallas at the age of 82.

A native Texan, Valentine was executive director of the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission in Nashville from 1960 to 1987, before the conservative resurgence began to transform the denomination.

"He was legitimately a 20th-century prophet," said Jimmy Allen, the last moderate president of the SBC and a lifelong friend. "He was a pioneer in Christian ethics, civil rights and religious liberty."

W. C. Fields, a longtime director of Baptist Press, said that during the "dark days when civil rights was such an explosive issue, Foy always was well informed, sure of the Christian approach, and he had the courage to follow through on his convictions."

Late in his career, Valentine was a favorite target of SBC conservatives because of his progressive stance on abortion and other volatile issues. In 1971 he was instrumental in the SBC's adoption of a resolution affirming a right to abortion in some cases.

Allen said Valentine's critics "overstated" his affirmation of abortion. "His position was that abortion was an evil but allowable for the health of the mother," said Allen, who succeeded Valentine at the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission after Valentine began service on the national commission.

After retiring from the national CLC, later renamed the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Valentine founded the Center for Christian Ethics, now attached to Baylor University. He was the founding editor of the journal *Christian Ethics Today* in 1995 and a trustee of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. –

