

October 12, 1961

American, Southern
Opinions Contrasted

NEW YORK (BP)--A survey published by Crusader, American Baptist Convention monthly newspaper here, contrasted the views of Baptist pastors in Pennsylvania and Virginia.

It was an effort to compare the beliefs of American Baptists and Southern Baptists on certain ideas and doctrines. The survey was prepared and compiled by Howard R. Stewart, pastor, First Baptist Church (American Convention), Dover, Del.

Summarizing it, Stewart said:

The survey "would also seem to invalidate two reasons which supposedly keep American and Southern Baptists apart: (1) There is too much of a theological difference between the two conventions. (2) The American Baptist Convention is 'too liberal.'"

The Delaware pastor sent questionnaires to 400 Pennsylvania pastors, serving the 531 American Baptist-affiliated churches there. He sent them to 1140 Virginia pastors serving 1354 churches (Southern Baptist).

He got 253 replies from Pennsylvania and 504 from Virginia.

On questions of theology, the Virginia pastors (by percentage) generally took what might be considered a more conservative or orthodox viewpoint than the Pennsylvanians.

Example: "Do you believe in the virgin birth of Christ?" Yes: Virginia, 87.9 per cent; Pennsylvania, 80.6 per cent.

On two of the 10 questions, the Northerners took the more conservative attitude. One was, "Do you believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God?" Yes: Pennsylvania, 88.9 per cent; Virginia, 84.5 per cent.

There was a wide difference on the polity question: "Do you believe in close membership?" Yes: Virginia, 73.4 per cent; Pennsylvania, 45 per cent.

Stewart felt he could explain this. The use of "close" rather than "closed" membership confused those who replied, he said. "If Baptists are to begin talking about polity, then they first must define their terms."

On another major question, there was wide variance. "Do you believe the American Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention should seek merger?" To the answer, seek it now, Pennsylvania, 54.1 per cent; Virginians, 24.6 per cent. Never seek it, Pennsylvania, 6.3 per cent; Virginia, 12.8 per cent.

Stewart interpreted this and answers to other questions along this vein as being "first of all an overwhelming desire at 'grass roots' level for more cooperation."

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Triennial Convention
Followed New Plan

By Davis C. Woolley
Executive Secretary, SBC Historical Commission

The sesquicentennial celebration in 1964 of the Triennial Convention inspires an appreciation for events prior to the Convention and a knowledge of its plan of organization.

Before 1814 unsuccessful efforts to organize Baptists on a national scale by the Philadelphia, Warren (R. I.) and Virginia associations lacked proper motivation.

The appointment by a Congregationalist board of the first missionaries from America to the Far East led to Baptist missionary participation. Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice were two of the five appointed on Feb. 6, 1812.

Arriving in India in September, 1812, Adoniram and Ann Judson became Baptists. Rice, arriving later, also became a Baptist. Advised by William Carey to seek support from Baptists of America, Rice returned to stir up support of 70,000 Baptists.

Some churches were supporting foreign missions through gifts to the English Baptist Missionary Society for Carey and others. However, American Baptists were advised to support their own missionaries, the Judsons.

After his arrival in 1813, Rice went to work immediately to organize Baptists, visiting associations and appealing for more missionary societies and for support of the Judsons.

Early in his travels, he visited Richard Furman in Charleston and William Bullein Johnson in Savannah. They encouraged his dream for a national missionary organization and helped him formulate a procedure.

The General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions was organized May 18, 1814 by 33 delegates representing missionary societies and churches from 11 states and Washington, D. C.

The Southern states from Virginia to Georgia sent six delegates. Richard Furman was elected president.

The first national organization of Baptists was a significant departure in American missions.

It was missionary. The call for the meeting was plain: to organize an "efficient and practical plan...for sending the word of life to idolatrous lands." The convention title also illustrated this.

It was a convention. This is the first time this plan of organization was used, a convention to be made up of delegates from each of the several missionary societies. All previous missionary organizations of individuals, churches and associations had been societies.

Because the convention was to meet every third year, it was called the Triennial Convention. It elected "The Baptist Board of Foreign Missions."

It was a Baptist movement. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which sent out Rice and the Judsons, was largely non-sectarian. On the other hand, the Triennial Convention was to be sectarian. All its missionary appointees must be Baptists.

It was a denominational effort. The organization of the convention was in effect the beginning of the Baptist denomination in America. Luther Rice has been credited with changing the "scattered Baptist churches into a Baptist denomination."

Unlike previous societies, the convention adopted specific qualifications for its missionaries. The constitution stated only those persons in "full communion with some regular church of our Denomination, and who furnish satisfactory evidence of genuine piety, good talents, and fervent zeal for the Redeemer's cause, are to be appointed as missionaries."

The principle of a board appointing missionaries and determining their fields of service and compensations continues to be used in appointments today.

The first action of the board was to appoint Luther Rice as missionary, continuing his services in the United States for "a reasonable time." The next action recognized Adoniram Judson as a missionary under the board's direction, and provided support for the Judson family.

In 1817, the Triennial constitution was changed to include home missions. This fulfilled the early desires of many Baptists to work among the American Indians and westward pioneers.

The plan of the Convention was further enlarged in 1817 to include a "classical and theological seminary for the purpose of aiding pious young men," but no mission funds were to be used.

Also, at this meeting, the Convention adopted The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine as its official organ. It began to publish it as the American Baptist Magazine.

By 1826, the Convention--which had been in a measure sponsoring and supporting foreign missions, domestic missions, education and publication--now was changed. It confined its activities to foreign missions and work with the American Indians.

Columbian College was separated entirely. In 1832, the American Baptist Home Mission Society was established. The Triennial Convention thus became essentially "a society for foreign missions."

This change indicates the conflict between the convention idea and the society method. The trend away from centralized convention organization helped lead to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Some of the more prominent personalities among the 33 participating in the Convention's beginnings were: Richard Furman (1755-1825), its first president; Thomas Baldwin (1753-1825), first convention recording secretary and president of the board of foreign missions; William Staughton (1751-1824), first corresponding secretary.

Henry Holcombe (1762-1824), first vice-president of the mission board; William Bullein Johnson (1782-1862), fourth president of the Convention; Robert B. Semple (1769-1831), second president.

Luther Rice (1783-1836), the first missionary elected by the board continued to work in the United States "to assist in originating societies, or institutions for carrying the missionary design into execution."

He devoted the remaining 10 years of his life to promoting Columbian College, literally working himself to death. He did not live to see his vision of a missionary Convention realized.

In 1836, his body was buried near Newberry, S. C.