

May 16, 1963

1963 Kansas City Summary

Convention Activity  
Surprises Messengers

By Roy Jennings

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--The 106th annual session of the Southern Baptist Convention here proved to be one of surprises. Messengers chose a Texas conservative as their president, elected a woman vice-president, adopted a revised statement of faith and gave trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary a vote of confidence.

The messengers also adopted a \$19,248,500 Cooperative Program budget for 1964.

Registration of 12,971 messengers made the 1963 Convention the third largest in its 118-year history. The 1960 Convention at Miami Beach, Fla., was the largest with 13,612.

Election of K. Owen White, pastor of First Baptist Church, Houston, Tex., and leader of conservatives forces, as Convention president was the first shocker of the four-day Convention.

Carl E. Bates, pastor of First Baptist Church, Charlotte, N. C., and the Convention favorite, stunned messengers when he dramatically withdrew his name from consideration after piling up a huge lead over White and eight other nominees on the first ballot.

Bates said later he would have accepted the presidency if he had won it on the first ballot. He said he was hesitant about permitting his name to be considered in the first place.

White went on to win the presidency by a narrow margin over W. O. Vaught, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church, Little Rock, Ark.

The second surprise was the election of Mrs. R. L. Mathis of Waco, Tex., outgoing president of the Woman's Missionary Union, as second vice-president of the Convention.

Mrs. Mathis is the first woman ever elected to one of the top three Convention offices. At the next business session a messenger tried to push through a motion to exclude women from consideration as officers but it lost.

The office of first vice-president went to Paul S. James of New York City, pastor of Manhattan Baptist Church and director of the SBC Home Mission Board's work in the greater New York area.

Adoption of the new statement of faith without a single amendment and so easily was a mild surprise to many Convention messengers.

The recommendation of the Committee on Statement of Faith and Message appointed last year at the annual meeting in San Francisco contained two statements that provoked intense reaction by the messengers.

The first was in a section on "education." It declared "the freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists."

The other point that opened prolonged debate was a statement on the nature of the church beyond the local congregation. The controversial sentence says, "The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages."

At the height of the discussion, one messenger accused last year's Executive Committee of heresy for proposing that the committee be named to prepare a statement of faith. He was ruled out of order.

The Committee on Statement of Faith and Message was composed of the presidents of each of the state conventions with Convention President Hobbs as the chairman.

It replaced the 1925 statement of faith, prepared by Baptist scholars at the request of the Convention during a controversy over evolution.

The 1963 statement of faith contains 17 articles on the Scriptures, God, man, salvation, God's purpose of grace, the church, baptism and the Lord's supper, the Lord's day, the kingdom, last things, evangelism and missions, education, stewardship, cooperation, the church and the social order, peace and war, and religious liberty.

The work of trustees of Midwestern Seminary to investigate complaints of liberalism among the faculty was applauded by messengers after trustee President Malcolm B. Knight of Jacksonville, Fla., gave a progress report.

Charges of liberalism were made against the Midwestern faculty after Ralph H. Elliott, the institution's professor of Old Testament interpretation, wrote "The Message of Genesis," a theological interpretation of the first book of the Bible.

Elliott treated as symbolic certain scripture passages that conservative Baptists interpret as literal.

Midwestern trustees later dismissed Elliott, not for liberalism but for refusing to bow to a request not to reprint the book.

The book precipitated a request by last year's Convention for all agency trustees to stamp out views in their institutions which threatened the historic Baptist position.

Knight, in his statement, said the trustees were aware of the Convention's desires and had, along with the Midwestern faculty, committed themselves to a nine-point statement of aims.

The aims affirmed a "belief in the inspiration of the Bible and all parts thereof." They also said the Bible contains accounts of the miraculous and supernatural which do not depend upon the ability of man to understand.

In addition, the aims also affirmed that teachers should present various views in teaching and reject anything that refers to the Bible as mythology.

Knight also reported the trustees have developed an orderly system of procedures dealing with faculty matters including election, tenure and problem-handling.

While the messengers liked the Knight statement, White, the new president, indicated he wasn't convinced all liberalism had been removed.

"There are still areas within our schools that have liberal tendencies," White said. He specifically named Midwestern and said he would use his influence as head of the largest evangelical body in the United States to eliminate this problem.

Asked his objection to liberalism, he replied, "I feel that liberalism weakens the Christian. It causes a person to lose his strength of conviction and evangelistic fire."

White defined liberalism as "an attitude which may cast doubt on the reliability, dependability and authority of God."

The Convention also went on record as opposing direct or indirect advertising of alcoholic beverages on television and the use of vulgar language in political campaigns and everyday conversation. One loud dissenting "no" rang out when the messengers voted on the profanity motion.

Six resolutions were adopted on subjects ranging from human freedom to Christian responsibility.

When introduced, one resolution resolved that Southern Baptist messengers send a message to Negro demonstrators in Birmingham, Ala., jails which read, "You are free in there, pray for us who are in prison out here."

When adopted by the messengers, it read in part, "Be it resolved that this... Convention state again its firm belief that such problems are not solved except in the framework of Christian love, compassion, mutual confidence, and prayer, and that we offer our hope and prayer that all concerned shall maintain open communications...."

A resolution dealing with religious freedom in public schools was referred to the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs at Washington, D. C.

In other action, messengers voted down a motion to refuse at future Conventions to seat messengers from churches which are related to national bodies which are connected with the National Council of Churches.

The messengers referred to the SBC Christian Life Commission a motion that Convention agencies, when portraying the United Nations as an instrument of Peace, give equal space to documented claims the organization is an instrument of war.

Several marks of progress were significant in reports from denominational committees and agencies.

The Executive Committee reported a total Convention membership of 10,193,052 in 32,892 churches.

The report of the Foreign Mission Board said Southern Baptists now have 1,687 missionaries in 53 countries, triple the number 15 years ago. Goal is 1,800 by this time next year.

The missions report also pointed out the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions hit a record \$10,323,591 in 1962.

The Annie Armstrong Offering for home missions reached \$2,891,184.

M. E. Ramay, pastor of First Baptist Church, Edmond, Okla., asked that SBC agencies bring a progress report to the Convention on how they are following a directive of the 1962 Convention. Ramay's motion was passed by messengers.

In 1962, a motion passed at San Francisco "courteously" requested agencies "to take such steps as shall be necessary to remedy at once those situations where such (theological) views now threaten our historic position."

In a final action, the messengers voted to meet in 1968 on May 21-24 in Jacksonville, Fla. The Convention chooses a meeting site five years in advance.

Next year's Convention will be in Atlantic City, N. J., on May 18-24. E. C. Brown of Columbia, S. C., was chosen to preach the annual sermon next year. Alternate is Warren Hultgren of Tulsa, Okla.

The most distinguished visitor to the Convention was Harry S. Truman, greeted with a chorus of "happy birthday" by the messengers when he made his appearance. The former president of the United States, a Baptist, was observing his 79th birthday.

-30-

Folks and Facts.....

(5-16-63)

.....Brooks Ramsey, pastor of First Baptist Church, Albany, Ga., has resigned to accept a call from the Second Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., effective June 15. He will be the first pastor for Second Church, which started about nine months ago with most of its members coming from the Bellevue Baptist Church. Ramsey is a native of Memphis and was associate pastor at Bellevue at one time. Ramsey received national attention in 1962 for his efforts to mediate Albany's racial troubles, for which efforts he was given a vote of confidence by Albany First Church last August. (BP)

-30-