

May 23, 1964

Strong Race Statement  
Loses To Softer One

ATLANTIC CITY (BP)—Messengers to the 1964 Southern Baptist Convention here tossed out a strongly worded recommendation on race relations in favor of a less controversial one prepared by deep South ministers.

The vote, taken by secret ballot after a two-hour debate, killed a recommendation to the Convention from its Christian Life Commission, an elected Convention group which deals with Christian ethics issues.

However, messengers approved three other recommendations--on gambling, poverty and capital punishment. They amended the capital punishment statement to delete a call for its complete abolishment.

Efforts to soften the Christian Life Commission's race relations recommendations with the substitute motion by James W. Middleton of Shreveport, La., had earlier been ruled "lost" following a close standing vote.

Middleton, pastor of First Baptist Church there, presented the motion on behalf of a group of Baptist ministers from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama who held a caucus at a local hotel earlier to plan their strategy.

The substitute motion said the final solution to race problems must come on the local level "with Christians and churches acting under the direction of the Holy Spirit and in the spirit of Jesus Christ. This must be in full recognition of the autonomy of each Baptist church."

It further stated Southern Baptists have not been silent on the race issue, but have opened institutions and agencies to people of all races.

The Christian Life Commission recommendation, however, commended integrated Baptist institutions and churches with "an open door policy for all people regardless of racial origin."

The commission's recommendations pledged support of laws guaranteeing legal rights of Negroes and asked Southern Baptists to go beyond these laws by practicing Christian love. It also urged Southern Baptists to give themselves to the decisive defeat of racism for the glory of God.

Middleton contended the commission's version might imply endorsement of the civil rights bill now in Congress. "That is beyond the province of this Convention," he said.

Both Middleton and Vernon Simpson of Theodore, Ala., urged passage of the softened down substitute to avoid dividing the Convention on a controversial issue.

J. R. White of Montgomery, Ala., opposed the strongly worded recommendation, stating "we can solve these tremendous problems without sweeping declarations from the denomination."

Others objected to section commending churches which have dropped their racial bars and upheld an "open door policy." "Are we going to form a list of approved churches, and by implication a list of disapproved churches?" asked John Hamrick of Charleston, S. C.

Delmore Olsen, pastor in San Mateo, Calif., said, however, "Thank God for those who are men enough to lead their churches to accept Negro members."

A pastor from Rockville, Md., John Laney, also praised churches which accept Negro members. "We send our missionaries to Africa and yet people object when we try to commend churches which accept converts from these countries," he said.

Bill Sherman, pastor of University Heights Baptist Church, Stillwater, Okla., told the Convention his integrated church, with all races represented, had no problems. "We all love one another," he said.

An effort to delete the entire capital punishment recommendation failed, but a later motion passed, killing the last two statements which called for abolition of capital punishment and affirmed it "is contrary to the teachings of Christ."

The remaining portion of the capital punishment recommendation urged legislators and public officials to study the facts and enact constructive legislation which would "alleviate abuses where they exist."

The poverty recommendation asked Baptist churches and individuals to be alert to the blight of poverty, to be compassionate toward the poor, and to try to give them "new life through Jesus Christ."

The recommendation on gambling restated Baptist opposition to legalized gambling, challenged Baptists to work diligently to awaken public officials to the fallacy of government financing from gambling, and urged Baptist people to "forthright action against gambling."

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Dehoney Doesn't Favor  
Change To Amendment

(5-23-64)

ATLANTIC CITY (BP)—The new president of the Southern Baptist Convention said here he would not personally favor a change in the first amendment to the U. S. Constitution, allowing prescribed prayers in public schools.

"If we have legislation that seeks to require prayer, who is going to write it?" asked President-elect Wayne Dehoney, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Jackson, Tenn.

Dehoney, 45, told a press conference he agrees with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and most of the state Baptist editors on the prayer issue.

"I think the conflict arises out of a misunderstanding of the action the Supreme Court took. It said you cannot prescribe prayer in public schools."

Dehoney was elected president of the 10 million member Southern Baptist Convention, receiving 4,024 votes to 3,223 for Theodore F. Adams, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Richmond. The new president is the immediate past president of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference.

Dehoney said he blames himself and others for the defeat of a proposal for a North American Baptist Fellowship. He was a member of the Executive Committee that brought the recommendation to the Convention.

"I am afraid that we did not adequately express the nature of this vehicle. Baptists are afraid of a superstructure, and I believe they were opposed to the vehicle in question, not the end result."

Messengers earlier opposed the proposal for the fellowship by a vote of 2,771 to 2,738. A two-thirds majority is required to approve such a recommendation.

The new SBC president declined to comment on a reporter's question about statements in the Christian Life Commission report that there is a "thunderous silence among Southern Baptists in the racial issue."

"I prefer not to make a statement on any issue now before the Convention," he said. (The commission's recommendation was defeated in favor of a softer statement.)

On accepting Negroes as church members, Dehoney said no Negroes had ever applied for membership in his home church in Jackson, Tenn., but the church has no restrictions against admitting Negro members.

"Through the years, many Negroes have worshipped in our church," he said, "though none recently. There is a fine Negro church, newer and better equipped than our own, about a block away."

He feels the issue is one of brotherhood and said his church has always tried to express brotherhood and Christian fellowship.

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Dehoney, who describes himself as a "moderate" and a "middle-of-the-roader," ("I'm not a theologian, I'm a pastor") says he is interested in relevant issues at the "cutting edge" and is willing to leave "hair splitting" to the theologians.

Dehoney said there has been little racial turmoil in his home town of Jackson. He has, he said, tried to project himself into racial problems, serving on a governor's committee for human rights and a mayor's committee to reduce racial tensions.

Asked what direction he hoped to steer the Southern Baptist Convention, the SBC president for the coming year joshed, "Have you seen anybody steer it?"

"The office of president is not given to steering, but to sounding certain notes on the platform as he speaks."

He said the urgency of the hour makes it necessary for Southern Baptists to be relevant in their preaching and compulsive in outreach, to reach as many people with the gospel as quickly as possible.

Dehoney said he is slated to receive an honorary doctor of divinity degree from Union University (Baptist), Jackson, Tenn., in about a week. He is a member of the school's trustees.

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Temporary Committee  
Explores Fellowship

(5-23-64)

ATLANTIC CITY (BP)—A temporary committee was authorized here to explore the possibilities of Southern Baptist Convention participation in a North American Baptist Fellowship.

Action came the day following a 2,771 to 2,738 vote against setting up a permanent committee for fellowship between possibly seven Baptist groups.

The committee, nominated by the Convention's Committee on Boards, will study the possibilities and implications of entering the fellowship. It will report at the 1965 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas.

Howard Hovde, pastor in Madison, N. J., presented the motion, saying he was "deeply grieved" over the action the previous day. He also cited an earnest concern of many Convention messengers over the close vote.

In other action, the Convention elected Roy D. Gresham, Baltimore, executive secretary of the Baptist Convention of Maryland, as first vice-president of 10 million member Convention; Joe W. Burton of Nashville, secretary of the family life department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, recording secretary, and W. Fred Kendall of Nashville, executive secretary of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, registration secretary.

During the same business session, messengers approved a constitutional amendment limiting the term of the Convention president to one year, adopted Roberts Rules of Order as the parliamentary authority of the Convention, and referred a resolution on alcoholism and the problems of drinking to its Resolutions Committee.

Most of the business session time was spent debating three items--the motion to authorize a temporary Baptist fellowship committee, the constitutional change limiting the president's term and the rules of parliamentary procedure.

B. D. Vanderslice of Denver, Colo., led opposition to the fellowship committee proposal, stating "we voted on this decisively yesterday and the Convention can't come to a conclusion if decisions are necessary every day."

Charles Simpson of Mobile, Ala., said the fellowship committee was not a matter of unity or diversity, but "the right of every church to decide for itself, not a larger group which makes pronouncements on matters the church might oppose."

Another Alabama pastor, T. R. Amberson of Scottsboro, Ala., favored the motion, stating he had opposed the efforts to establish a permanent committee the previous day because of a "lack of information" on the proposal.

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"This temporary committee can give us the information on the bylaws and constitution of the fellowship group for an informed vote next year," he said.

Another New Jersey pastor, John Raymond of Levittown, favored the fellowship committee, praising the effect of cooperation and communication with other Baptists and Christians in his area.

"We baptize our converts in an American Baptist Convention church," he said.

The Convention approved a motion by W. B. Timberlake of Pomona, Calif., who suggested the switch to Roberts' Rules of Order from Kerfoot's Parliamentary Law, after voting down several efforts to refer the matter for further study to the Convention's Executive Committee, or to the Convention's new president.

E. S. James of Dallas, editor of the Baptist Standard, presented the constitutional amendment to limit the president's term to one year instead of two. Second approval of the proposed constitutional change must come next year.

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Billy Graham Says  
Churches Must Awake

(5-23-64)

ATLANTIC CITY (BP)--Evangelist Billy Graham said churches better wake up and start meeting the spiritual hunger of their laymen.

Here to address the final session of the Southern Baptist Convention, Graham told a press conference there was a revolt by lay people today against the institution of the church.

"Instead of calling people to Jesus Christ, we are calling them to the institution called the church.

"This is what happened when the Methodist movement was born."

Graham said laymen are saying they are not getting what they need in their churches today. He gave this formula for meeting those needs:

"First, the ministers can start preaching the Word of God. And we need discipline in the church. People can live like the devil and still hold office in the church. People say there are hypocrites in the church and they are right," Graham declared.

Asked about religion in Russia today, Graham said, "I'm convinced even Mr. Khrushchev secretly believes there is a God."

On pacifism, Graham said as long as there is sin in the world, a police force will be needed.

Asked to explain the dichotomy or divisions of Baptists, Graham laughed. "I've given up a long time ago. I couldn't possibly settle something that began in 1845."

On the U. S. Supreme Court prayer ruling, Graham said the thing that disturbs him is not what the court has already stated but the reasons given for the decision.

"Neutrality is the word given," he said. "In my opinion, the court was wrong in even tackling this. Now this has opened a whole Pandora's box of problems." He said now the court will even have to rule on the inscription, "In God We Trust," on coins. "In a time of national crisis, we are not going to be able to call on God in classrooms."

Regarding the civil rights bill, Graham said he thinks a third of the senators haven't read it and 99 per cent of the preachers supporting it haven't read it. He cited "a great deal of hypocrisy" in the racial issue and said he doesn't think any part of the country can point to the other as more prejudiced.

"I think if Gov. Wallace (of Alabama) proved anything, he proved it isn't a sectional problem," Graham said. The Alabama governor had just polled about 42 per cent of the votes in a presidential preference election in Maryland.

"I know a lot of preachers in the South who have been very heroic, who have lost their churches and friends because of their stand."

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