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April 1, 1966

Editorials Clamor  
 For SBC Name Change

1400

By the Baptist Press

Should the Southern Baptist Convention change its name, dropping the "Southern" tag it has carried for 121 years?

Editorials in Baptist state convention weekly newspapers have in the past year said, with only a few exceptions, that a change is in order.

Now, for the first time, a publication of a Southern Baptist Convention agency has editorially endorsed changing the name of the nation's largest evangelical-Protestant body.

An editorial in Home Missions magazine, publication of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, has endorsed an article appearing in the publication proposing the name "United States Baptist Convention" (U.S.B.C.).

The article was written by Charles Chaney of Palatine, Ill., who made a motion at the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas last year proposing a change in the convention's name. The motion was referred to the SBC Executive Committee for study and later report to the convention.

Chaney's motion prompted numerous editorials in Baptist state convention newspapers last summer. Most of the publication's heralded the proposal as long overdue.

Since then, at least nine Baptist state convention publications have editorially endorsed changing the convention's name, a spot poll by the Baptist Press, news service of the Southern Baptist Convention, has revealed.

The biggest state Baptist paper of all, the 370,000-circulation Baptist Standard in Texas, however, strongly opposed any change in name.

The poll revealed that editorials in Baptist state papers published in Colorado, California, Maryland, Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, North Carolina, Georgia and Maryland have supported some kind of name change.

The arguments, pro and con, are many.

Editorials in favor of a change, in brief, have argued that the present name is not descriptive, it is misleading, it has provincial connotations that are out of date, it is a misnomer, it has offensive connotations in some sections of the country, it is not consistent to national Baptist strategy, and it has racial segregationist overtones.

Those who want to keep the present name argue, in brief, that changing the name will not change the nature of the convention, that the name describes the denomination's theological position rather than geographic location, that the name can be helpful in some sections of the country, and that legal and technical difficulties would be raised by changing the convention's name.

None of the arguments are really that simple. In each case, the editorials amplify and expound their reasons in an effort to build a case for their conclusions.

Editorials in state Baptist publications where Southern Baptists are not as strong numerically are generally much stronger in presenting a case for a name change than editorials in state Baptist papers where Southern Baptists are well entrenched.

"It is no doubt difficult for some churches and denominational leaders in the deep South to understand the problem we present," said an editorial in the Rocky Mountain Baptist in Denver, Col.

"Churches in the Colorado Baptist General Convention which took unto themselves the name "----- Southern Baptist Church" found witnessing to lost people and growing a church most

difficult, in some cases almost impossible," the Rocky Mountain Baptist said. "Changing a church name to one which did not carry a 'Southern' connotation immediately opened doors of prospects and resulted in easier and more effective work in goselizing a community."

The California Southern Baptist charged that the word "Southern" has a provincial, regional connotation that is out of date. "In the newer states of the convention, our people have to explain why 'Southern' Baptists are in the North, East and West."

"To many people, the word Southern is an offensive thing," said the Ohio Baptist Messenger. "Why should Baptists flaunt a sociologically offensive term before those they are trying to reach?"

The Baptist New Mexican advocated, not only dropping the word 'Southern' which does not describe the denomination's geographical nature, but also urged discontinue of the word 'Convention,' which, it said, just meets four days a year. "Let's change two-thirds of the name," the editorial said.

Arguments in some "deep South" state Baptist papers have been just as strong, and in some cases stronger, as editorials in some of the newer Baptist state conventions.

Editorials in Baptist state papers published in such deep South states as Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky, and North Carolina have in the past year urged the demise of the "Southern" designation.

Said the Kentucky Western Recorder: "The old name is overdue in going. It has served its day well and will always have precious sentimental meaning. It was doomed, however, when we decided to become national instead of sectional, and (it) should have been changed then."

The Baptist Standard in Texas, however, staunchly opposed any change in name.

Arguing that the name is a good one which has served Southern Baptists well, the editorial said that Southern Baptist work could be improved in some respects, but changing the name of their convention is not one of them.

Replying to the argument that the name causes problems to Baptists in the North and West, the Baptist Standard answered: "If the term 'Southern' is so obnoxious that they can't live with it up there, why didn't they forget it and organize some other brand of churches and join some other convention?"

"Multitudes who move north seek out Southern Baptist churches because they are Southern Baptist. To them the name is significant. Where will they turn if our convention changes its name simply because some folks don't like it?" the Standard said.

"If we have to drop the name 'Southern' in order to appeal to some, then how long will it be before others will want us to drop the name 'Christian'? Perhaps we could just drop the word 'church' and call our organizations clubs," the Texas paper said.

Public opinion among Baptists appears (statistically), however, to be in favor of a change.

At the SBC meeting in Dallas last June, an electronic opinionnaire conducted in the exhibit hall revealed that 58.6 per cent of the people who participated expressed opinions that the name should be changed.

A survey conducted in connection with developing the denomination's emphases for the years following 1970 revealed that about 77 per cent of 715 denominational leaders agreed that the SBC Executive Committee should continue to explore the possibilities of "a change in the name of our convention until a suitable name is found."

A second survey among 1,000 pastors, laymen and women, however, resulted in approval of the above statement by only 43 per cent.

The Executive Committee meeting in February authorized another public opinion poll on the proposed name change, aimed for quick completion before the Southern Baptist Convention meets in Detroit, May 24-27.

The opinion survey would be one of the first steps in a long-range study, which probably will not be completed before the May convention. It appears doubtful that there will be any official proposal that the convention change its name from the Executive Committee.

Meanwhile, editorial comments and articles continue to appear, advocating a name change.

Chaney's article, endorsed by the editor of Home Missions, is perhaps one of the strongest and most comprehensive pleas for a change thus far published.

He argued that the current name is misleading and detrimental, and that it is inadequate and inaccurate.

"It just does not describe us. We have churches in all 50 states of the United States, and the word 'Southern' does not define our nationwide character," Chaney wrote.

"The word (Southern) brings to mind the old comic strip character 'Snuffy Smith,' living on a lonely mountain peak, miles from civilization, in a run-down shack, fighting 'reverurers.' In religious terms, this means guitar playing, snake-handling, anti-intellectualism, and emotionalism," he wrote.

"Other people associate the word 'southern' with racial prejudice," wrote Chaney, who cited as an example a Southern Baptist church in Chicago which had a problem in buying property because the developer thought the church would not welcome 32 Negro families living in the area.

Chaney argued that if Southern Baptists are to seek to evangelize the entire nation, then the name should be national in character.

If the convention eventually does go along with the proposal to change the name of the SBC, what would the new name be?

Again, the proposals are numerous and varied.

Chaney suggests the name, United States Baptist Convention. "With this name, we could properly call ourselves "U. S. Baptists," he said.

Another editor quipped that such a name could also allow references to "Us Baptists," and would allow some die-hards to preserve the letters SBC by tacking on a "U" in front.

Other names proposed have included United Baptists, United Baptist Convention, United Baptists of America, Cooperative Baptists of the United States, Baptist Convention of the United States of America (U.S.A.), Continental Baptist Convention, Baptist Union of America, Union of Cooperating Baptists, and even World Baptist Convention.

The list of possible names, like the arguments for changing or not changing the name, goes on and on.

It appears that the subject will be discussed for a long time.

By Jim Newton

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Baptists To Observe  
Jewish Fellowship Week

70  
4-1-66

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist churches will place a special emphasis on becoming acquainted with their Jewish neighbors April 11-17 during the annual Jewish Fellowship Week.

"We are encouraging churches to invite Jewish neighbors and friends to worship services during the week to illustrate to them what Southern Baptists believe," William B. Mitchell, Jewish work director for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board said.

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