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News Analysis

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State Conventions Grapple With Education Questions

By Jim Newton
Baptist Press Staff Writer

Like the proverbial witch's brew, problems relating to adequate financing of Baptist schools and hospitals, along with the correlative question of federal aid, continued to boil during many of the 30 Baptist state conventions meeting this fall.

Although the pot is still boiling, it now appears that most of the state conventions which own schools and hospitals have made one thing clear concerning federal aid.

Federal grants for building construction are not going to be allowed generally at Baptist schools and hospitals.

Although 1967 does not seem to be as significant a year of decision-making with regard to federal aid as was 1966, at least three state conventions flatly rejected federal grants this year. Six conventions took such stands last year.

In two of the most significant state conventions, almost opposite actions were taken, but the net result was about the same.

In South Carolina, the convention rejected by a two-to-one vote a committee recommendation that the trustees of each school be allowed to determine what kinds of federal aid to accept, including federal grants.

In Virginia, a motion was approved asking the trustees of each school to decide what types of federal funds they felt they could accept, with the exception of federal grants. The action was especially significant for Virginia, which historically has taken a strict church-state separationist stand with no forms of federal aid allowed.

In both cases, the door is left open for the schools to accept federal loans, but not grants, except perhaps on a research services-rendered basis.

This year, most of the conventions, however, seemed to move from the federal aid question to the much broader spectrum of the total education scene--facing realistically the problems of financing 54 Southern Baptist colleges and universities.

Four conventions took actions which seem to indicate that no new Baptist schools will be established in the future, and that plans to start new conventions may be shelved before they can get rolling.

Maryland Baptists voted to request the trustees of the embryonic Maryland Baptist College to dissolve the corporation and turn the assets and liabilities over to the convention, instead of freeing the school in Walkersville, Md., to become a private Christian institution.

In Florida, plans for a Baptist college in Palm Beach Gardens near West Palm Beach were shelved until Billy Graham decides whether to build a school there, or until further study is made concerning plans for a state-supported junior college in West Palm Beach.

And in Kentucky, messengers to the conventions authorized a committee to study their moral and legal obligations to Kentucky Southern College which two weeks earlier had merged with the University of Louisville. The convention had pledged \$77,000 per year for five years to Kentucky Southern last March when Kentucky Southern severed its ties with the convention to become a private, Christian college, which now no longer exists.

Many believe that although it is regrettable to lose these schools, it is more realistic for them to die quickly by convention actions than to starve to death because of lack of financial support.

In order to realistically face the problems of higher education, the conventions are more and more turning to the use of "blue-ribbon" study committees which delve into the questions in depth and seek to come up with intelligent, well-thought-out recommendations.

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Such committees were created for special education studies in Alabama, Arkansas and North Carolina; and current study committees were continued in California and Georgia.

In North Carolina and California, the committees will devote special attention to the question of federal aid. For California, this was considered highly significant since the convention has taken a strict separationist stand in the past.

Total convention study committees, requested to delve into all aspects of the convention's programs and institutions (including education) were created in Arizona, South Carolina and Virginia, and Texas is continuing its Committee of 100 study.

The big question now seems to be whether or not the convention messengers will listen to the committees and accept their recommendations.

In South Carolina, for example, the two-year study of federal aid was rejected by a vote of 1,423 to 643, primarily because the door was left open for federal grants. Three of the committee members told the convention that they had opposed federal aid when they were appointed to the committee, but after studying all the facts had changed their viewpoint, feeling now that federal aid was not an infringement of religious liberty.

In Mississippi, where a long-range committee on Christian education brought a lengthy study report with 16 recommendations, the convention voted only to "receive" the report, rather than adopt it as its own statement, and to ask the schools and its Education Commission to study and use the report "for whatever good they can get out of it."

In Louisiana, where the convention last year adopted lengthy committee report allowing the trustees to decide what forms, except construction grants, of federal funds could be used, a motion was adopted this year which in effect reverses last year's action by denying the hospitals federal aid in any form, except Medicare and Medi-aid.

The Florida convention, which continued its church-state separation study committee after last year approving loans but not grants, referred for further study three recommendations from the committee which in effect called for more financial support of the schools from the convention.

Thus, in at least four states this year, the committee studies were either rejected or referred for more study.

Although problems of education and questions of federal aid clearly dominated the state conventions this year as last, other issues emerged capturing the spotlight in some states.

The conventions grappled with such issues as the war in Vietnam, the racial crisis in America and how Baptists can improve race relations, and financial support of world missions through the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program, and adequate financial support of state convention programs.

At least six conventions adopted resolutions which leaned in the "dove" direction concerning the Vietnam war, most of them calling for prayer, and for negotiation toward a just and honorable peace as soon as possible. North Carolina defeated a resolution calling for an immediate withdrawal of U. S. troops in Vietnam, and passed instead a more moderate resolution, which still leaned in the "dove" direction.

New Mexico, Louisiana and Tennessee adopted resolutions which were more "hawkish," calling for support of U. S. armed forces in Vietnam; but none called for escalation of the war.

In the area of race several conventions adopted resolutions which both condemned anarchy and rioting, but also expressed sympathy for the racially-oppressed and called for Baptists to do more to solve the nation's racial problems.

In Kentucky, Negro and white Baptist conventions met together in joint sessions that some observers called "the dawning of a new day" in race relations in that state.

The Kentucky convention adopted a committee recommendation urging churches in white and Negro conventions to seek "dual alignment" in both conventions as a major step towards closer cooperation.

Negro speakers were featured in major addresses in the Kentucky, Arkansas and California conventions.

A possible trend toward decreasing the percentage of state convention budgets going to support Southern Baptist world missions to allow more support of state programs, especially education, may have been started, but the actions are a little unclear and contradictory. Most conventions kept the division at the present level.

In Virginia, however, convention messengers strongly defeated a recommendation from their General Board to reduce the percentage to SBC causes from 38 to 33½ per cent; instead keeping the current 62-38 per cent ratio.

But in at least four states, the percentage of the budget to SBC causes was reduced to keep more funds in the state.

Percentage reductions to SBC causes were approved this fall by North Carolina (from 33.5 to 33.34 per cent); Kentucky, (32 to 31 per cent); Michigan (25 to 20 per cent); and Arizona (21 to 18 per cent).

The conventions in Arizona, Kansas and Michigan all reduced their budgets in the face of financial problems, but Kansas kept the same percentage even though the amount to SBC causes decreases.

Conversely, at least two conventions--Colorado and Oregon-Washington--increased the percentage they contribute to SBC causes, and Florida re-affirmed its intention to increase the percentage to SBC causes by one per cent each year until a 50-50 division is reached.

Although two conventions--Arkansas and New Mexico---dealt with the question of alien immersion as a criterion for refusing to seat messengers from churches which do not re-baptize members from other denominations, the issue did not come up in North Carolina where two associations took actions this fall rejecting churches with these practices.

After taking a total look at the actions of all the 30 state conventions, the only obvious conclusion is that each one is different, and although the pot is boiling in some, the majority this year seemed to be harmonious and calm.

Perhaps 1967 will be a year of transition for Southern Baptists on a state level.

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Jim Newton is assistant director of the Baptist Press, news service of the Southern Baptist Convention, which covered each of the 30 state conventions this fall.



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November 22, 1967

Baptists In Capital City 1103
Support War In Vietnam

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptists in the nation's capital voiced strong support during their annual convention for the administration's position on the war in Vietnam.

While declaring that they "vigorously oppose indiscriminate use of military might," the convention adopted a resolution that said:

"We support our nation and those allied with us in the heroic efforts to prevent aggression against South Vietnam, to prevent the suppression of life and liberty of the South Vietnamese and the multitude of refugees who fled from the Communist regime of North Vietnam, and to establish a viable, self-determined rule by the people of South Vietnam."

Asserting that the threat of wider war seems to be increased the longer the war in Vietnam continues, the adopted resolution urged that efforts to negotiate a just and honorable peace be continued with "added zeal."

Opposition to the resolution was voiced by John W. Laney, pastor of Rockville's Twinbrook Baptist Church who told the delegates that it would be a "tragic mistake to put the name of Christ and the church on a position that "some of the most responsible men in government have not endorsed."

In another action the D. C. Convention voiced overwhelming support for home rule for the District of Columbia and pledged support to the new mayor, Negro Walter E. Washington, and the new city council form of government.

The delegates also strongly endorsed a resolution on open housing, and appealed for stricter enforcement of housing codes in dwellings owned by slum landlords. They reaffirmed a desire "to welcome as neighbors persons of other races and religions and to welcome such persons as members of our churches on the same bases as all others."

In another action the convention called on Congress to provide adequate funds for educational and work programs to raise the standard of living in poverty-stricken areas.

A change in the convention's bylaws was adopted to establish a joint committee on cooperation between the D. C. and Maryland conventions. The committee will advise on the establishment of missions and the relocation of churches in the area and will suggest ways for further cooperation between the two conventions.

The committee was also instructed to explore "the requirements, advantages and disadvantages of merger" of the Maryland and D. C. conventions.

Earlier D. C. Convention President John A. Holt, pastor of the Luther Rice Baptist Church, called for adoption of the bylaw establishing the joint committee on cooperation. Calling the bylaw a "compromise," Holt said that merger with the Maryland Convention "would be a tremendous mistake."

"Tampering with our dual alignment (with American and Southern Baptist Conventions) will not touch our problems and joining another state convention will gain us only the loss of our identity," Holt said in his presidential address.

After some debate the D. C. delegates voted to ask the convention's Missions and Executives Committees to consider a policy not to give mission investors funds to aid any church or churches relocating beyond the District of Columbia. This action was interpreted by the convention's leadership as a cooperative step with the Maryland convention.

Richard L. Jenkins Jr., a layman, was elected president of the convention. Jenkins is a member of the Cresthill Baptist Church.

A budget of \$566,600 was adopted for 1968. Of this figure, \$218,000 will be given to national and international missions through the American and Southern Baptist Conventions.

There are 63 churches and chapels in the D. C. convention, with a total membership of 39,396.

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Mrs. Perry Crouch Dies
After Long Cancer Bout

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ASHEVILLE, N.C. (BP)--The wife of the general secretary-treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Mrs. W. Perry (Floy Mae) Crouch died here Nov. 22 after a two-year bout with cancer. She was 57.

Funeral services were scheduled Friday, Nov. 24, at the First Baptist Church of Asheville where her husband had been pastor for 19 years before becoming state executive secretary.

Participating in the funeral services were Cecil Sherman, pastor of First Baptist Church in Asheville; T. L. Cashwell Jr., pastor of Hays Barton Baptist Church in Raleigh where Mrs. Crouch was a member; and Robert Bruhn, administrative assistant to Crouch.

The family requested that a memorial library shelf be established at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., in lieu of flowers. The memorial fund is being collected at the state convention office in Raleigh at 301 Hillsboro St.

A native of Hickory, N.C., Mrs. Crouch, the former Floy Mae Havnaer, and her husband were married in 1926. They attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth together.

Survivors include her husband of Raleigh; three sons, W. Henry Crouch, a Baptist pastor in Winston-Salem, N.C.; Dr. Robert P. Crouch, an Asheville physician; and Dan Crouch, an electrical engineer also in Asheville; a daughter, Mrs. Allen Patterson of Asheville; six brothers, three sisters, and 14 grandchildren.

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Eisenhower Invited
To Hardin-Simmons

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ABILENE, Tex. (BP)--Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower has tentatively accepted an invitation to be principal speaker at dedication ceremonies of Hardin-Simmons University's Sid W. Richardson Science Center, Elwin Skiles, the school's president, said.

The program is scheduled in late April or May, 1968.

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Hardin-Simmons Plans
Scholarship Program

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ABILENE, Tex. (BP)--The Hardin-Simmons University board of trustees has adopted a new scholarship program especially designed to attract and hold top-flight academic students.

A \$1,000 scholarship to be used over a period of eight semesters will be offered students graduating from any accredited high school who is in the upper 10 percent of the graduating class and who has a total score of at least 1350 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test.

In other action, trustees announced that baseball will be added to the school's varsity athletic program in the 1969 season, replacing track as the school's major spring sport.

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Two Texas Baptist Schools
Benefit From Trust Fund

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JACKSONVILLE, Tex. (BP)--Two Texas Baptist colleges have been included in a trust fund valued at \$130,000 established by Mr. and Mrs. T. L. Gary here.

The trust will be divided two-thirds to Howard Payne College in Brownwood, Tex., and one-third to Mary Hardin-Baylor College in Belton, Tex., after the death of the couple, who retain income from the trust during their lifetimes.

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