



BAPTIST PRESS

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June 5, 1968

Outspoken W. A. Criswell
Elected SBC President

By Dallas Lee and Jim Newton

HOUSTON (BP)--W. A. Criswell, 59-year-old outspoken pastor of the huge First Baptist Church of Dallas, was elected on first ballot here as president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Winning over Owen Cooper, later elected as first vice-president, Criswell succeeds H. Franklin Paschall of Nashville as president of the 11 million-member denomination. Cooper is president of the Mississippi Chemical Corp., Yazoo City, Miss.

In his first press conference as president, Criswell, pastor of the 15,000-member church--largest in the SBC--declared that his church is open to anyone "who came sincerely."

When questioned by reporters, he first avoided giving the number of Negroes who are members of the 15,000-member church, but later said three of the church's members are colored.

Treating every question emotionally, the silver-haired preacher said he supported a strong statement on race opposed by some Southern Baptist messengers earlier. The statement was passed after it was slightly amended.

"Every Christian in the world ought to say amen to the spirit of the statement," Criswell said.

Referring to a speech he made almost 10 years ago which was printed by White Citizens Councils as segregationist fodder, Criswell said:

"I did not feel that those people in South Chicago or Harlem should come down here to tell us how to solve our racial problems. They should solve the race problems in South Chicago and Harlem and then come tell us."

In his first press conference, Criswell also dealt with earlier statements attributed to him about Roman Catholics and politics.

Criswell said he never made statements saying that Roman Catholics should not be allowed to hold public office.

"That would be a violation of the constitution," he said.

Asked if he thought his election signaled a conservative bent in the convention, due to his conservative reputation, Criswell stated:

"I am a Bible preacher. I believe that is why I was elected."

He said that as late as six days ago he had decided not to allow his name to be presented for nomination.

Describing the ministries of his own church, Criswell said it has Chinese, Japanese, silent language, and Spanish departments and spends \$100,000 a year in ministries to economically-deprived people.

Questioned about old speeches interpreted by many to be anti-Catholic and segregationist in viewpoint, Criswell said that he did not consider himself to be either anti-Catholic or segregationist.

When asked if he had changed since a 1956 speech in South Carolina in which he said that "segregation is natural," and that "integrationists are dead from the neck up," Criswell said he wished he could go back and compare what he had really said to how he feels now, but he did not have time to read his past texts.

"But for my own heart, I've increased my sympathy for the colored people," he said.

He added that he thought that the church could be integrated, "and you'd still have a dead church. It may be right racially, but it might be dead spiritually."

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Concerning the poor, he said:

"These people are illiterate. You can educate them, and they'll still be lost (spiritually). You can make them all rich and they'll still be lost. Man has got to be changed. If he is a thief in the slums, he'll be a thief in Harvard if you try to educate him without changing his heart."

When asked if he would fight liberalism in the denomination Criswell said liberalism "is hard to get your hands on," or hard to define.

Instead of fighting anything, he said he would rather try to lead the convention into a tremendous evangelistic and missionary effort.

When asked about the proper relationship between evangelism and social action, Criswell commended an earlier speech by Foy Valentine, executive secretary of the denomination's social action agency.

"You cannot divorce faith and works," Criswell said. "You cannot divorce morality and ethics from evangelism and missions. You can't put a man's head over here and his heart over there."

Asked if he would lead the denomination in a balanced effort in both social action and evangelism, he said, "I don't know my capabilities in that area."

He said he felt he was an evangelist, and that others would have to lead in the social action efforts.

Asked about his views on the civil rights movement and Resurrection City in Washington, D.C., Criswell said he wanted the poor people "to be blessed," but that he wasn't sure that was the way to do it.

Asked about his views on the Bible, Criswell said he takes every word of the Bible literally.

"I believe that a fish literally swallowed Jonah. And if there isn't a fish big enough to do that, I believe that God could have made a fish for that purpose. If he'd wanted to, he could have made it big enough to have a whole suite of rooms in his belly for Jonah."

On the assassination attempt on Sen. Robert Kennedy, Criswell said that it broke his heart to learn of the shooting. "I can't imagine that. This is a sad, sad day."

Much of the press conference was spent in an exchange of quotes from daily newspapers on past statements Criswell has made, and in attempts by the outspoken new Baptist president to clarify his earlier statements.

Criswell was elected over industrialist Cooper after Memphis pastor Gerald Martin, past president of the SBC Pastors' Conference, withdrew in his support.

Criswell is a native of Eldorado, Okla., and a graduate of two Southern Baptist schools, Baylor University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He has been pastor of First Church, Dallas since 1944.

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SBC Votes Unofficially
To Keep Present Name

6/5/68

HOUSTON (BP)--In an unofficial straw vote, messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention overwhelmingly approved retaining the present name of the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Although the vote is not binding on the SBC Executive Committee which is continuing its long-range study of the possibility of changing the convention's name, the vote was about five to three in favor of the current name.

Two other names on the ballot split votes almost evenly. Ranking second in number was a group of messengers which preferred a new name, but not one of the two new names listed on the ballot.

Results of the straw vote were as follows: Southern Baptist Convention, 4,996; Baptist General Convention, 702; United Baptist Convention, 611; and some other name, 956.

When the results were announced, it was pointed out that the vote was not binding on the Executive Committee, but was for its information as it continued its study.

SBC Adopts Strong
Racial Statement

By W. Barry Garrett

HOUSTON (BP)--Southern Baptist messengers voted by a large majority here to call the denomination to far-reaching efforts to help the nation through its racial crisis and to "secure for every person equality of human and legal rights."

This action marked a sharp turn in Southern Baptist policy on social concerns. The 11-million member Protestant denomination had taken actions on race relations and problems related to poverty and human indignity before, but this action went far beyond previous expressions.

The convention messengers asked their Home Mission Board to take the lead in working with the denomination's agencies with the problems relating to the national crisis.

The Home Mission Board is expected to move quickly toward meetings with other agencies to map a course of action. This action program will address both the immediate crisis in the cities and the long term solutions to national problems.

The statement approved by the messengers declared "we are shocked by the potential for anarchy in a land dedicated to democracy and freedom."

The statement was produced in response to the riots in the nation that followed Martin Luther King's assassination and in the face of a prospective "long hot summer" of civil disorder.

The messenger's action climaxed a month-long drive by leaders of Southern Baptist agencies to lead the denomination not only to make a significant statement but to take effective action.

To implement their concern the messengers committed themselves:

--To respect every individual as a person possessing inherent dignity and worth growing out of his creation in the image of God.

--To undertake to secure opportunities in matters of citizenship, public services, education, employment, and personal habitation that every man achieve his highest potential as a person;

--To personally accept every Christian as a brother beloved in the Lord and welcome to the fellowship of faith and worship every person irrespective of race or class;

--To strive to become well informed about public issues, social ills, and divisive movements that are damaging human relationships;

--To recognize their involvement with other Christians and with all others of good will in the obligation to work for righteousness in public life and justice for all persons.

While the denomination confessed its shortcomings and its responsibilities in the emerging national crisis, it called on the nation to respect law and order. It urged minority groups to accept responsibility as well as to express their desires.

The convention appealed to "all leaders and supporters of minority groups to encourage their followers to exercise Christian concern and respect for the person and property of others and to manifest the responsible action commensurated with individual dignity and Christian citizenship."

The controversial statement on the national crisis came to the convention as a recommendation of the Executive Committee. The messengers debated the proposal for an hour. Time and again it voted down crippling amendments and delaying tactics.

The day before the Executive Committee debated the issue four hours but finally approved the statement with only three opposing votes.

More than a month before this meeting, an ad hoc committee of denominational leaders met in Nashville, Tenn., on three consecutive Fridays to work on a proposed statement later released to the public.

When finally presented to the Executive Committee, the document carried the signatures of the heads of 19 Southern Baptist agencies and a large majority of the state convention executive secretaries and editors. There were 79 signers in all.

HOUSTON (BP)--Foy Valentine, a leading exponent of Christian morality, urged Southern Baptists here to fight racism with open minds, hearts and housing.

Speaking to the annual progress report of the Christian Life Commission which he directs, Valentine told messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention there was no cure for racism but Christian brothering.

"There is no way out of the mire of prejudice except by the hard road of a moral ministry that demonstrates repentance."

Valentine called for Southern Baptists to respond with open doors, open hands, open housing, open opportunities, open minds, and open hearts.

Speaking on the topic of "Words and Deeds," the leader of the Nashville-based Christian social action agency said the demands of Christian morality require identification with the alienated, brothering, peacemaking and ministering.

In amplifying the peacemaking role, Valentine hastened to say he felt the church has neither the equipment, mandate, nor the right to dictate details of foreign policy to the state, economic formulas to labor and management, and specific programs for a disordered society.

Valentine encouraged Southern Baptists to avoid the extremes of empty humanism and inane religiosity as they performed Christian ministries among the poor and illiterate.

"While such involvement in the great moral struggles of the day could lead in the direction of a theologically rootless humanism, the alternative of non-involvement requires a rejection of the incarnation and the adoption of a hocus-pocus, pie-in-the-sky, opiate-of-the-people caricature of Christianity which is absolutely unacceptable to true believers."

Valentine, a former Texas minister, urged the messengers to stop spending their time trying to decide which comes first, word or deed, and to get about their duty of hammering out the moral conflicts of daily life.

The messengers also received annual progress reports from the Brotherhood Commission, Annuity Board and Home Mission Board.

Highlights of the Brotherhood Commission report focused on an expanding program of missionary education for men and boys, specifically the Fourth National Royal Ambassador Congress expected to attract 10,000 boys 9-17 to Oklahoma City Aug. 13-15.

The report of the Annuity Board centered around a 30-minute film on 50 years of service by the agency.

Representatives of the Home Mission Board emphasized the progress of Project 500, an effort to start 500 new churches in strategic parts of the United States where Southern Baptist work is weak.

Earlier Wednesday, the messengers received and referred to a resolutions committee statements on church and state separation, obscene literature, doctrine of the church, and highway safety.

In a short business session they approved a record \$27.6 million operating budget and a five-year capital needs program of \$5 million.

They also voted to hold the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1973 in Portland, Ore.

SBC And Officials Decry
Kennedy Assassination Try

HOUSTON (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President H. Franklin Paschall injected into his address on the good news a note about the bad news of the assassination attempt on Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

Departing from his prepared text which referred to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, H. Franklin Paschall said, "How sad are our hearts today that the brother of the late president was nearly killed last night. It is appropriate for us to be aware of the meaning of this situation."

In the address, sandwiched between two standing ovations, Paschall said "We have good news for today's world," but he also touched on the bad news in the world.

Earlier, the SBC President and the executive secretary of the SBC Executive Committee each expressed sympathy to Sen. Kennedy, his family and others involved in the shooting of the New York Senator.

"The shooting of Robert Kennedy is an unspeakable tragedy," said Paschall in a statement of sympathy to the Kennedy family, "God help our nation that we might turn from our evil ways."

Another Baptist executive, C. Emanuel Carlson of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington, said that "our grief extends to the health of our nation, and to the future of government by and for the people.

"A new commitment to prayer and to active goodwill toward all men is the only national response," said Carlson.

Messengers to the convention stood in a moment of prayer for Sen. Kennedy just six hours after he had been shot. The Rev. Mason Bondurant of Dumas, Ark., led the prayer.

A telegram was sent by action of the convention to Mrs. Kennedy. Signed by Recording Secretary Clifton J. Allen, the telegram stated:

"Fourteen thousand messengers attending the Southern Baptist Convention...are shocked and grieved by the tragic, violent, and despicable attack on your husband's life. By official action, we express to you and your children our deepest sympathy, the assurance of our prayers for Sen. Kennedy's recovery, and the assurance that we pray for a new spirit of righteousness, justice, and freedom to possess our nation."

In his presidential address, Paschall said that the gospel of Christ is always news, relevant to problems of racial strife, hatred, looting, rioting, alcoholism, drug addiction, hunger, poverty, and unemployment.

He called for the convention to refuse to be drowned in a sea of despair.

"Our nation and denomination, in which there is much good, can be destroyed by the pious mouthings of immature, frustrated, and emotionally exhausted leaders," he warned. "A pastor is in serious trouble when he gets a briar in his tongue and knows nothing, sees nothing, and preaches nothing but the negative."

"Social action is an appropriate expression of the Christian faith and life, but alone it is not evangelism." It is exceedingly important for us to balance our evangelistic zeal with our ethics.

Pointing out that Southern Baptists have one main ministry, that of reconciliation, the outgoing SBC president said, "the church should head up the ministry of reconciliation."

"It is our responsibility to preach the everlasting gospel to the poor as well as to all other people," he said.

Paschall also urged Southern Baptists to make more use of radio and television in shaping the lives of people.

Earlier in the session, messengers adopted a recommendation that the SBC Executive Committee study the field of radio and television around the world and report to the 1969 convention how Southern Baptists can make best use of these media.

The recommendation was read by Paul Stevens, executive director of the Radio and Television Commission, during the commission's report to the convention.

The recommendation stated that the Radio-TV Commission is a powerful evangelistic instrument. It pointed out that these media are being used successfully to undermine Christian principles, and that they can also be used for missionary advance.

Stevens said it is wrong for Southern Baptists to invest so little in radio and television. Although the SBC invests approximately a million dollars annually through the Radio-TV Commission, Stevens said that it does not come nearer ~~meeting~~ the possibilities of today than the first \$200 earmarked for radio by the convention in 1938.

"We could double the number of stations and number of hours we are on," he said, "not to buy or beg time, but to take advantage of it."

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Ministers Wives President
Advocates Race Improvement

Baptist Press

HOUSTON (BP)--The new president of the Southern Baptist Ministers Wives Conference said Wednesday fellow Baptists are "just beginning to touch the hem of the garment" in improving relations between persons of different races.

Mrs. Andrew Hall, wife of the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Ark., was chosen to lead the group of ministers wives at their annual luncheon at the Sheraton Lincoln Hotel. She succeeds Mrs. Herbert Howard, wife of the pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas.

Mrs. Hall said wives could help their preacher-husbands implement the Christian principle of brotherhood by creating friendships with persons of other races and valuing their personhood.

A columnist with the Arkansas Baptist News Magazine, Mrs. Hall said she would like to see women take the lead in their own communities to find the possibilities for involvement with persons of different races and varied economic backgrounds.

She mentioned the possibilities of women working in community action and service programs such as Headstart, in addition to their regular church interests.

Other offices elected included Mrs. G. Avery Lee, New Orleans, La., vice-president; Mrs. Landrum Leavell, Wichita Falls, Tex., secretary-treasurer; and Mrs. John Taylor, Tupelo, Mississippi, corresponding secretary.

The preachers' wives heard five speakers in forty-five minutes.

Mrs. Charles Walker, whose husband is pastor of the First Baptist Church in Jasper, Ga., encouraged the women to look carefully at their responsibility for community involvement. She said she became director of a county Headstart program because she was the only one in the county trained in kindergarten work.

The new Mission Action programs offer Baptist women a good opportunity to work through Headstart and other community service programs, Mrs. Walker told the group.

Mrs. Ollin J. Owens of Columbia, S. C., said she would like to see some Southern Baptists consider joining Negro Baptist churches. "If the Negroes won't come to us, let's go to them, and I'm not talking about taking bundles to them."

Commenting on the racial crisis statement approved by messengers, Mrs. Owens said it is "the most helpful thing we have done...but we're just about 10 years too late."

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Radio-TV Commission
Elects Laughton Head

Baptist Press

HOUSTON (BP)--Fred Laughton of Gainesville, Fla., pastor of University Baptist Church, was reelected president of the board of trustees of the Radio and Television Commission. J. P. Allen of Fort Worth, Tex., pastor of Broadway Baptist Church, was reelected secretary.

Dr. Cecil Knox of Vicksburg, Miss., a medical doctor, was elected vice-president of the Fort Worth-based Southern Baptist agency.

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SBC Adopts Record
Budget, 24 Recommendations

HOUSTON, (BP)--Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention approved without discussion a record budget of \$27,670,480 for 1969, an increase of \$970,480.

The allocations included \$26,561,019 for the Cooperative Program operating budget and \$1,109,461 for capital needs.

In other business, the messengers voted to hold their 1973 convention in Portland, Ore., and to participate in a worldwide evangelistic crusade in 1972-23 "if such is projected."

The actions were taken in response to recommendations to the messengers by its Executive Committee.

There were 24 recommendations, including a strongly worded statement "concerning the crisis in our nation," which was deferred for discussion and a secret ballot later in the day. Votes on six other recommendations concerning SBC agencies were also deferred until later in the convention when the individual agencies present their annual reports. All were later adopted.

Most of the recommendations dealt with "housekeeping business" related to minor changes in convention bylaws and SBC agency charters.

Major increases in the budget included the \$1.1 million allocation for capital needs, \$818,619 additional money for the Foreign Mission Board, and \$700,000 increase for the convention's six seminaries.

The biggest chunk of the capital needs allocation will go to the Home Mission Board, which will receive \$400,00 in 1969.

A minor flurry occurred on the convention floor when the recommendation was made to meet in Portland.

J.G. Green of Indialantic, Fla., opposed the motion. He said:

"There prevails in our convention a desire to travel abroad. Of the 28 churches in our association, 20 could not attend such a meeting. It would be impractical for us to go."

He made a substitute motion to return the recommendation to the Executive Committee for further study.

James Monroe, a member of the Executive Committee from Miami, Fla., spoke against Green's substitute motion. He explained that it would be extremely difficult to secure necessary commitments from any other city in order to change to another site.

A vote was taken, and the substitute motion was then defeated by about a 6 to 4 margin. The Portland site was then approved.

The vote to participate in a world wide evangelistic crusade included a request that the Foreign Mission Board and the Home Mission Board represent Southern Baptists in the planning for such a crusade...in full cooperation with the Inter-Agency Council.