

**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
Telephone (615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Jim Newton, Assistant Director**REGIONAL OFFICES**ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Editor, 1350 Spring Street, N.W., Atlanta, Georgia 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Billy Keith, Editor, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) RI 1-1996
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Editor, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226**BUREAU**BAPTIST SUNDAY SCHOOL BOARD Lynn M. Davis, Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203,
Telephone (615) 254-1631

November 20, 1968

Arkansas Accepts Baptist College,
Rejects Four Churches On Doctrine

HOT SPRINGS, Ark. (BP)--The Arkansas Baptist State Convention here, after lengthy debate, accepted as an institution of the convention a Baptist junior college and voted to withdraw fellowship from four churches which practice either or both "alien immersion" or "open communion."

Southern Baptist College in Walnut Ridge, Ark., was accepted as an institution of the state convention. The college, with 937 students and property valued at \$4 million, has received convention financial support for many years but has been a local, private institution.

Fellowship was withdrawn from University Baptist Church of Little Rock, First Baptist Church of Malvern, Ark., Lake Village Baptist Church in Lake Village, Ark., and First Baptist Church, Russellville, Ark.

The move to withdraw fellowship from the four churches was almost a repeat of the 1965 convention when it voted to refuse to seat messengers from the Russellville church because it did not rebaptize membership candidates who had been members of other denominations.

Leading the action to withdraw fellowship from the four churches was Carl Overton, associational missionary of Ashley County Baptist Association, Hamburg, Ark.

Overton pointed out that the convention constitution requires that the convention be composed of "messengers from regular Baptist churches which are in sympathy with the principles and purposes" of the convention.

The point of contention was the definition of what constitutes a "regular" Baptist church. Overton cited resolutions of the convention passed previously defining churches that practice "open communion" and "alien immersion" as not being "regular."

Merle A. Johnson Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church, Malvern, one of the ousted churches, attempted to show that the Overton proposal violated the constitution, arguing that the convention is composed of "messengers, not churches."

Johnson also argued that it is neither legal nor constitutional for the convention "to sit in judgment on messengers for practices of the churches," and that the fundamental question was "not one of the practices of the churches in question" but of the messengers present.

He contended that if there was to be a test of orthodoxy, the messengers should be the ones questioned, pointing out that it was possible for individual messengers to disagree with their churches on the question at hand.

Johnson proposed that each messenger of each church in question be taken to a room and interrogated before the credentials committee, and that the committee confine its duties to messengers, not churches.

He further proposed that not only the messengers from the churches in question should be subject to discipline, but that to be legally fair, each messenger who believes in communion with Christians other than Baptists and in believer's baptism administered by other than a Baptist church be unseated as well, regardless of from which church he comes.

John McClanahan, pastor of First of First Baptist Church in Pine Bluff, Ark., questioned whether the line should be drawn just on churches that have voted to observe "open communion", or on those which have no such formal policy but which practice it.

He named several churches in Arkansas of which he had been a member or had served as pastor, including his present pastorate, all of which practice open communion not restricting participation in the Lord's Supper to just Baptists.

The vote to "withdraw fellowship" from the churches was adopted by a margin of 491 to 312 after the president ruled this was not the question before the convention.

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Following the vote, a motion to instruct the convention executive secretary not to accept gifts from the excluded churches was ruled out of order because the convention constitution says the "convention shall never exert any authority over any church...."

The next day, a motion was adopted unanimously which would open the way for reconciliation of the excluded churches next year. The convention president was asked to name a "reconciliatory committee" to help on request deal with "current frictional situations in churches where fellowship has been withdrawn."

The committee would function only when and if approached by one of the churches in question and would then "counsel within the framework of the apparent wishes expressed by majority vote in the 1968 convention concerning the modes and manners of observing the Lord's Supper and receiving members into local churches."

The motion was made by Alfred R. Cullum, pastor of South McGehee Baptist Church, McGehee, Ark., who said the expressed intent of the motion is "to make available an open door for restoration of fellowship."

Action on the proposal to make Southern Baptist College in Walnut Ridge, Ark., also drew debate from the convention floor.

The committee making the report recommending the action proposed that Southern Baptist College and Ouachita Baptist College in Arkadelphia, Ark., be operated under one board of trustees to be known as the Board of Christian Education, which would coordinate a "unified education program" and prevent "divisive competition between the institutions."

W. O. Vaught Jr., pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, offered an amendment to the motion which carried calling for separate boards of trustees for the two institutions.

Southern Baptist College will have its own 24-member board of trustees elected by the convention under the same procedure that trustees are elected for Ouachita University.

Arguments espoused by Vaught for the separate boards included: the colleges are 200 miles apart, one is a junior college while the other is a university, the "divisive competition" argument would not hold up, and that it would give Arkansas the "dubious distinction of having the only Baptist colleges in the Southern Baptist Convention without their own boards of trustees."

A record budget of \$2.6 million was adopted by the convention. The budget allocates \$883,897 to Southern Baptist Convention world mission causes, and \$1.7 million for state convention causes.

Re-elected president of the convention was Thomas A. Hinson, pastor of First Baptist Church West Memphis. Next year the convention will meet Nov. 16-18, at Ft. Smith, Ark.

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Fire Damages Chapel
At Southern Seminary

(11-20-68)

LOUISVILLE (BP)--A five-alarm fire here heavily damaged the rear portion of Alumni Memorial Chapel on the campus of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Flames gutted a choir robing room on the second floor, destroying approximately 100 robes and cracking plaster and windows in adjoining rooms. Severe smoke and soot damage was evident throughout the 1,600-seat chapel and its classroom wing.

The fire was contained in an area adjacent to a chamber holding pipes for the seminary's Aeolian-Skinner organ, the largest of its kind in the South and Midwest. It was not immediately known whether the intense heat and smoke had damaged the 113-rank instrument.

A student practicing at the organ console first noticed the fire and summoned help. She also reported having heard someone in the rear section of the chapel near the scene of the blaze. Authorities are investigating the possibility of arson or vandalism in connection with the incident.

The chapel has been closed for an indefinite period, and daily chapel services have been moved to a 250-seat auditorium elsewhere on the campus. No damage costs have been estimated, but officials indicate that an almost complete renovation may be necessary.

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Capital Baptists Face
Larger Church Ministry

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptists in the nation's capital looked at inner city tensions and the alienation of youth during their annual convention here.

Amid reports and dramatizations that sought to "tell it like it is" among young people and in the ghetto, the messengers pledged new efforts to understand and work on the problems they found both within and surrounding their churches.

The two-day meeting of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention was held in the First Baptist Church of Wheaton, Md. The convention is dually aligned with both the American and Southern Baptist Conventions.

In business session the messengers spoke with an overwhelming voice to request president-elect Richard Nixon to continue Negro Major Walter E. Washington in office at the top appointed official of the nation's capital.

The messengers praised the work of Mayor Washington for his leadership in developing community programs for social and economic rehabilitation. The convention urged churches to support such programs and to develop ministries which meet the needs of its own inner city communities.

With very little opposition the convention voted approval of efforts of the black community toward self-determination. It called upon white communities and individuals to lend support to these efforts while concentrating upon "educating white communities in the principles of justice, mercy and humility."

In considering the tensions of metropolitan Washington, the messengers debated and finally passed, a strong resolution on community and police relations. The statement suggested that police officers be hired from a constituency within the community already familiar with the problems of the area.

It further urged that there be more policing walking the beat in order to develop personal relationships between police and community residents.

In a resolution on the churches and youth, the messengers rejected the idea that the alienation of young people from the churches is due to "hypocrisy" among churches in regard to evangelism and missions.

Instead, the convention admitted that youthful disaffection could be charged to "inconsistencies" within the church and the church's "refusal" to apply Christian principles to social and economic concerns of the day.

Calling indifference of young people a "just indictment for failure to be the body of Christ in the world," the convention pledged to listen to youth and to appoint a committee to meet with young people and develop ways to involve youth in innovative church programs.

In further actions, the D. C. Baptists passed resolutions on world peace and inter-Baptist and ecumenical relations.

The statement on peace deplored the destruction of men, society and property taking place in Vietnam and commended the inclusion of "representatives from all involved factions" in the Paris negotiations.

It also urged the ratification by the Senate of the Treaty for Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and voiced support for a comprehensive test-ban treaty.

In considering means to strengthen the Christian witness in the nation's capital, the D.C. Baptist messengers urged that more of the churches seek dual alignment with both the American and Southern Baptist Conventions.

The messengers also encouraged the enlistment of churches in other Baptist Conventions to affiliate with the D. C. Convention. They especially recommended that churches work together with Baptists in other conventions and fellow-Christians of other communions toward the common goal of the redemption of man and his society.

The D. C. Convention, composed of 61 churches, adopted a budget of \$573,878 for 1969. Of this amount, 39 per cent will go to the world mission programs of the American and Southern Baptist Conventions.

The new president of the convention is James A. Langley, pastor of the Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church. Carl W. Tiller, former president of the American Baptist Convention, was elected vice president.

The 1969 convention will meet at the Upper Room Baptist Church, one of the two Progressive National Baptist Convention (Negro) churches affiliated with the convention.



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