



News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

---FEATURES

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NEWS ANALYSIS

1968 State Conventions Emphasize Crusade, SBC Crisis Statement

By Jim Newton
For the Baptist Press

It was the year of both the Crusade of the Americas and the "Statement Concerning the Crisis in the Nation" at the majority of the 29 Baptist state conventions during a 30-day period in October and November when the annual sessions met.

Concern for both evangelism through the Crusade of the Americas, and for social action through dealing with the "Crisis in the Nation" were the two major chords blending into solid harmony during most of the state conventions.

The actions of the state conventions raise a key question: Have Southern Baptists turned the corner on the division and debate so obvious this year between advocates of evangelism and social action, with a ground-swell of support on the state level for "both-and" instead of "either-or?"

The answer probably will differ depending on which Baptist is talking, but we probably have turned a corner.

More than a dozen different conventions passed resolutions or held special emphases on the Crusade of the Americas this year, according to reports filed by correspondents in each state for Baptist Press, news service of the denomination.

At least eight conventions adopted as their own concern the "Statement Concerning the Crisis in the Nation" approved last June by the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston.

The statement among other things declared commitment to obtain equal human and legal rights for all people, refusal to be a part of racism, and acceptance of every Christian regardless of race as a brother welcome in church fellowship.

According to the Baptist Press reports, some special action or emphasis on the Crusade of the Americas was held in Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, South Carolina, Alabama, Colorado, California, Mississippi, Arizona, Tennessee, and Hawaii. Probably other states in some way emphasized the hemisphere-wide crusade, but the reports did not indicate it.

The crisis statement was adopted in Missouri, Indiana, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Virginia, Hawaii, California, and Utah-Idaho. There was no organized effort to get the state conventions to adopt the SBC-drafted and approved statement.

Tennessee Baptists did not adopt the crisis statement, referring it back to its Executive Board for re-wording to make the statement apply to Tennessee Baptists instead of Southern Baptists.

Although it did not adopt the crisis statement, the spirit that prevailed at the Alabama convention in a related action seemed especially significant.

After an Alabama pastor presented a statement highly critical of Southern Baptist trends toward "social and political involvements which deteriorate our strength" and away from "Evangelism and Missions," the convention referred the statement to the resolutions committee.

The committee's report reversed the critical tone of the original statement and called instead for "proper balance" between evangelism and missions, and social and political issues.

The resolution was adopted unanimously by the Alabama convention. Said the finally-approved resolution: "There are differences of opinion about the issues and the problems of our times and the Christian approach to these problems. But we believe that Baptists in Alabama, as in other areas of our convention, are making a sincere effort to make the gospel of Christ relevant."

In Texas, biggest of the 29 state conventions, the report of their Christian Life Commission included a statement on evangelism and ethics, which commended both the Crusade of the Americas and the "Statement Concerning the Crisis in Our Nation." Said the report: "In reality, these challenges are one. Personal redemption and Christian social action belong together."

In a nutshell, this was the spirit that seemed to characterize the majority of the 1968 conventions.

Evangelism and concern for social issues were not the only items of concern for the state conventions.

Four states expressed concern about the war in Vietnam and peace. Six conventions dealt with various aspects of the old problem of federal aid to Baptist institutions.

Eight conventions adopted resolutions or took actions relating to improved race relations. Seven states dealt with internal convention structure or reorganization studies. Five sent congratulations or assurances of prayer to President-elect Richard Nixon.

A big debate over doctrinal issues cropped up in Arkansas where four churches were ejected from the convention for practices of "alien immersion" and "open communion." In Kentucky, the major issue was dancing at a Baptist college.

The most frequent state convention issue--federal aid--cropped up this year in Missouri, North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Kentucky, and Virginia.

Missouri adopted a four-point policy which forbids federal grants and allows loans at the lowest interest rate available provided the institution's board of trustees feels there is no tax subsidy involved.

When a detailed study of the Christian Education program of the Georgia convention was presented, an amendment was promptly passed forbidding Baptist schools for receiving "tax funds," without identifying just what constitutes a tax subsidy.

Texas Baptists voted to sever ties with Baylor University College of Medicine to allow it to become a private institution with academic ties to Baylor University. It allows Baylor Med to receive federal funds and state per-student aid that would enable the school to double its enrollment, although the federal aid question did not seem to be the key factor.

Virginia Baptists referred back to a special committee of 24 a recommendation that financial support gradually be phased out for five Baptist schools. Although federal aid was not in question, the report will get more study and a recommendation next year.

The report of Virginia's religious liberty committee was partly accepted, partly referred back for more study, but the written statement which said "it seems essential to survival that government assistance be accepted" was received, but not as policy.

In Virginia, perhaps the strongest statement on race relations of any of the states was adopted. In addition to the "Crisis" statement, Virginia Baptists approved a statement by its Christian Life Committee which utterly condemned racism as un-Christian.

Strongly supporting open housing laws, the statement chided "white Americans, many of whom are Christians, (who) have practiced white racism to the extreme that they have created, maintained, and condoned conditions...destructive to their (Negroes') rights as human beings."

Michigan Baptists urged all Baptist churches to open their doors to all races, and Texas Baptists urged segregated churches to end "the unbiblical practice of making race a factor in church membership."

Four conventions--Michigan, California, District of Columbia and Hawaii--adopted resolutions pledging prayer for an end to the war in Vietnam. The D. C. resolution was even more "dovish", deploring "the destruction of men, society, and property" in Vietnam, and urging ratification of the non-proliferation treaty on nuclear weapons.

The issue of aid to conscientious objectors cropped up in North Carolina when a seminary student requested a resolution reaffirming the right of objection and asking for information and counseling for objectors. The motion was referred to the newly-created Council on Christian Life and Public Affairs, after lengthy debate.

Two of the state conventions dealt with the issue of baptism in different ways, contradicting each other in some respects.

Arkansas Baptists withdrew fellowship from four churches in the state for their practices on both "alien immersion" (accepting as church members candidates who have been baptized by immersion by a church of another denomination) and "open communion" (allowing other-than-Baptists to partake of the Lord's Supper).

In New Mexico, however, a committee appointed last year to study the question of a policy on seating messengers from churches that practice alien immersion recommended that the present bylaws, which state that a church must be a member of a Baptist association, are adequate and should not be changed. This means that the "alien immersion" battle would be fought on the associational level in New Mexico instead of on the state level.

The issue cropped up in an oblique way in Texas, when a messenger called for clarification of the convention's constitution concerning what is meant by a "regular, missionary church." The convention's credentials committee was assigned to study the matter and bring a report next year.

This definition was the crucial point in the debate in Arkansas, where it was argued that on the basis of past convention resolutions, a church which practices "alien immersion" is not a "regular" Baptist church.

The issue of dancing at a Baptist college dominated the sessions of the Kentucky convention, where on two occasions the convention took a slap at trustees of Georgetown College for voting to allow on-campus dancing. The debate was vocal, and the votes were close--11 votes on one motion and 20 votes on another--in censoring the trustees.

In two states, Georgia and Texas, efforts to establish a committee or procedure for helping pastorless churches and churchless pastors get together were defeated, apparently out of fear that such a program would be too kin to the influence a bishop has in other churches in the appointment of ministers for local churches.

Financial problems facing schools or state convention agencies were faced by four states. In Kansas, the convention asked the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board to help rescue the state Baptist Church Loan Association from a "hopeless and insolvent condition."

In Texas, problems with their Church Loan Association were cited. The convention asked its Executive Board to re-study the audits of the association in the light of "certain omissions" which were mentioned but not identified.

During the Georgia convention, Norman Junior College in Norman Park, Ga., was granted permission for a fund drive to help meet a \$250,000 deficit, and it was reported in South Carolina that North Greenville Baptist College was in danger of losing its accreditation because of financial difficulties.

Other issues which confronted the state conventions included such things as traffic safety and drinking, traditional resolutions reaffirming support of separation of church and state, law and order, liquor by-the-drink legislation, use of narcotics and hallucinatory drugs, alienation of youth, relations with other church groups, obscenity, mental illness, juvenile delinquency, and support of Baptist schools.

But the big, over-riding issue that seemed to thread its way through the majority of the conventions was the relationship between evangelism and social issues. If Southern Baptists have truly turned the corner on this debate, it may be the last year it is an issue in the state conventions.

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Governor Attacks Baptist
Official Calling Him Liar

(11-22-68)

ATLANTA (BP)--The governor of Georgia, Lester Maddox, who earlier this year appointed and official of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board to a special study commission on the state's penal system has now attacked the Baptist leader personally.

T. Edwin Carter, director of the department of Christian social concern for the Home Mission Board, was appointed along with three other Baptist ministers to the Citizens' Penal Reform Commission last spring by Gov. Maddox.

After Carter prepared a subcommittee report strongly attacking the operations of the Jefferson County Public Works Camp, the governor appeared before the commission to argue against the report.

The meeting developed into a personal attack on Carter. Gov. Maddox, himself a Baptist layman who speaks in Georgia churches almost every Sunday, called Carter a liar.

The subcommittee report said that John Stanley, warden at the Jefferson County Public Works Camp, should be fired either as warden, or as chairman of the state board of corrections because of a conflict of interest.

Gov. Maddox defended Stanley, and said that Carter had applied for the job of director of the state department of corrections when that job was vacant last summer.

Carter replied that a governor's aide had approached him about the job, that the governor had called him in to discuss it, but that he had expressed no interest whatever in the post.

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Gov. Maddox loudly denied Carter's statement and repeatedly called him a liar. Commission Chairman Dillard Munford, another Baptist layman from Atlanta, had to break off the verbal battle.

Later, the commission gave Carter a unanimous vote of confidence "as a truthful person."

In a called press conference the next day Carter said: "I do not need to defend myself as a truthful person. I will not even dignify such a charge by replying to it."

He added: "I do wonder, however, why the governor should be so concerned and angry over a person he considers to be such a liar. Could it be that this is a diversion from the main issue of the day?"

"We were talking about the investigation of the Jefferson Public Works Camp when this came up. That still seems to be the main issue of the moment," Carter said.

Carter added: "Georgia can and must have a better prison system. But the political element must be replaced by concerned and knowledgeable people."

The Citizens' Penal Reform Commission is expected to make its full report public on Dec. 20.

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Georgia Official Advocates
Church Exemption Limitation

(11-22-68)

WAYCROSS, Ga. (BP)--The Lt. Governor of Georgia has stated that Georgia must soon consider placing a limitation on the amount of tax free property which churches may own.

Lt. Governor George T. Smith, long prominent layman in Georgia Baptist affairs, made the charge during a pre-legislative forum here. He got scattered applause from dozens of businessmen present.

The Lt. Governor said he is not proposing an outright end to church property tax exemptions. But he did say: "The longer I live, the more convinced I become that we must put a limit on the amount of exemptions allowed."

He said churches "are getting more and more property, most of it downtown and commercial." He jokingly added that he would "probably get written out of the Baptist church" for his statement.

Lt. Governor Smith is a trustee of the Georgia Baptist Children's Home and has held many posts in the First Baptist Church in Cairo, Ga., and the Grady County Baptist Association.

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INSERT

(11-22-68)

Editors, please insert the following graphs to become part of the story headlined, "Arkansas Accepts Baptist College, Rejects Four Churches on Doctrine," dated 11-20-68. The following should be inserted following graph 24 (second from last graphs of story):

The president of Ouachita Baptist College, Ralph Phelps, strongly opposed the plan which was adopted by the convention.

Phelps told the convention that he might not stand before the convention again as president of the school, and that "unless more money and more intangible support are given to Ouachita, you are going to lose this school."

He added that no man can serve as president and be answerable at the same time to an unofficial board or trustees or to an unseen super board.

Earlier during the convention, four persons eligible for re-election as trustees for Ouachita University were not recommended by the nominating committee, and the chairman declined to say why for he would have to "deal in personalities." A motion to amend the nominating committee's report to reinstate the trustees was defeated by the convention.

(pickup last two graphs of story)



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