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June 26, 1969

Editorials See SBC As Too Big,
Conservative, Anti-Establishment

By the Baptist Press

Editorials in two dozen Baptist state papers interpreted the Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans recently in almost two-dozen different ways, but nearly a dozen each saw the convention as too big attendance-wise, strongly conservative, and as a slap against "the establishment."

"It was a convention, at least in part, of liberals vs. conservatives, and you can define the terms any way you like," observed Editor John Hurt of the Baptist Standard of Texas, largest of the 29 Baptist state papers.

Almost all of the editorials said that the conservatives came out on top at the New Orleans convention.

A dozen editorials said that the convention has become too big for its own good, and a half-dozen papers argued in favor of some changes in order to overcome the problems of 17,000 registered messengers jamming into an auditorium that seats only 12,250, and the problems of maintaining democratic process with such crowds.

Not quite a dozen state papers editorialized about the vote of the convention calling "unsuitable" the name of "Quest" as the new name for the Sunday night Training Union program, and a half-dozen saw the convention's action as criticism of "the establishment."

"It was not hard to detect an 'anit-establishment' feeling, or least a feeling of distrust of the establishment," wrote Editor Terry Young of the California Southern Baptist.

An editorial in the Biblical Recorder of North Carolina by Marse Grant put it more bluntly. He called it "rebellion against The Establishment--in this case, Nashville, and more particulary the Sunday School Board." The North Carolina editor said that lack of confidence in agency and institution trustees in the SBC is distressing.

Editorials in Alabama, Mississippi, Colorado and Oklahoma state papers saw the convention as a grass-roots demonstration of the fact that the people want a stronger voice in convention affairs.

"Some of them had come to New Orleans pretty well determined to crack somebody over the head if they got a chance--the 'liberals', the students, the establishment--or whomever they could whack," observed Editor Jack Gritz in the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger.

Editor James O. Duncan of the Capital Baptist in Washington, D.C., predicted that "this convention may well mark the beginning of some severe attacks on the boards and agencies (of the SBC). What was once holy and sacred now is open for criticism."

Some of the editorials cited as an example of "anit-establishment" action the convention's action repudiating "Quest" as the new name for Training Union. A half-dozen or more editorials said that perhaps the major reason the name was rejected was because of the "secrecy" surrounding adoption of the name last year, and a decision by the Sunday School Board not to announce the new name until the New Orleans convention.

"Baptists don't like secrets, particulary when it involves them, and whatever impact hoped for with the announcement of the name at the convention has been completely lost," observed the Maryland Baptist in an editorial by Gene Puckett.

Only one editor indicated that he liked the name, saying it symbolized the new life and spirit Baptists are seeking on Sunday nights. Editor Bob Hastings of the Illinois Baptist said that the "Quest fiasco" says that Baptists dislike secrecy, and that they are slow to change, at least with names.

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Some anti-establishment feeling and a desire for more voice in convention control was also shown in the unapproved motion to ask Baptist publication writers and seminary professors to sign a statement on doctrinal beliefs, and the adopted substitute motion to request trustees of the convention to see that their work is done in keeping with the 1963 doctrinal statement on "Baptist Faith and Message," according to several other editorials.

The Maryland Baptist said editorially that the convention was right in rejecting the first motion and accepting the substitute, calling the move to get writers to sign doctrinal statements "an obvious effort of the so-called fundamentalists, more accurately the ultra-fundamentalists, to check the supposed liberal influence in Southern Baptist life."

The Mississippi Baptist Record, in an editorial by Joe T. Odle, interpreted the vote in favor of the substitute vigorously urging trustees to see that programs are consistent with the 1963 statement as "more of a mandate" to the SBC agencies than was the "Statement Concerning the Crisis in Our Nation" adopted by the SBC last year.

At least nine editorials in the state paper mentioned that the convention was dominated by conservatives, even though several pointed out that liberals were more vocal at the New Orleans convention than ever before.

"The conservative stance of the convention was clearly evidenced in that the liberal elements present did not win approval of a single one of the causes they were espousing, such as support of conscientious objectors, offering better sex education materials, taking away SBC membership from churches with racial discrimination policies, or a less rigid stance against the black manifesto demands," said the Mississippi Baptist Record. "All of these were soundly defeated."

The Texas Baptist Standard said it was a "polarized convention" and the Maryland Baptist observed that the presence of a group of students called Baptist Students Concerned and another group called the E. Y. Mullins Fellowship was what polarized things.

"Efforts of the E. Y. Mullins Fellowship all but fizzled," said the Maryland editorial. "They made their presence known, and that was their intent, but they made no headway in their program of moving the convention toward a more liberal position."

Strong criticism of the students and Mullins Fellowship "liberals" came from the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger, which said "their personal egotism is enormous and their religious snobbery at times in downright disgusting." Editor Gritz suggested that the SBC would be better off if they left the convention and joined other denominations where they would be more at home.

The Capital Baptist, however, said editorially that the Baptist students made a contribution to the convention. "They had thought through many issues and several of their proposed resolutions came out in the report of the resolutions committee and were adopted."

The Baptist New Mexican, edited by Eugene Whitlow, countered that the student group "is little more than a youth mouthpiece" for the Mullins Fellowship and that it "does not indicate a fair sampling of Baptist college youth as a whole."

Editor James Lester of the Tennessee Baptist and Reflector said editorially that the student and Mullins groups received an undue amount of press coverage for informal, unofficial groups.

The Baptist Standard of Texas said the two groups "had less influence than a Southern Baptist evangelist at the Vatican."

Nearly a half-dozen editorials expressed gratitide that Black Militant Leader James Forman did not show up to confront the SBC with demands for reparations, and several expressed approval of a resolution adopted by the SBC calling such demands "outrageous" and rejecting them "in total."

More than any other subject, the editorials commented on the record attendance at the convention, and the inadequacy of facilities in New Orleans and most other cities in the nation to host the convention. Several also criticized "outlandish" and "exorbitant" prices of hotel rooms and meals at the convention.

Editorials in Kentucky, Arkansas and New Mexico statepapers offered suggestions to the SBC Executive Committee which was asked to study the problem.

"It's only a myth--the SBC under the present plan cannot be deliberative," said Editor C. R. Daley of the Kentucky Western Recorder. "There is simply no way 15,000 or more Baptists in one gathering can debate issues or do business in an orderly fashion."

The Kentucky paper offered several alternatives, including: (1) reducing the number of messengers from each church, (2) regional conventions in four or more areas with a national convention every year or every two years, (3) meeting in May rather than in June, (4) separating the convention from all auxiliary meetings, (5) holding the convention in cities far from the center of the SBC population, and (6) changing the method of representation at the convention.

The Baptist New Mexican favored a plan whereby the various state conventions would be assigned a maximum number of messengers, with each state convention naming its own messengers from among its constitutions.

Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine Editor Erwin McDonald suggested six regional conventions, with each regional convention electing its own officers and its representatives to the SBC executive committee and various SBC agencies.

The Executive Committee could be enlarged to two or three hundred members and changed with conducting the business of the convention, the Arkansas editorial proposed.

More than a half-dozen editorials had high praise for Convention President W. A. Criswell, and most said his re-election was a strong indication of conservative trend in the 1969 convention. Criswell won by a vote of 7,482 to 450 over "liberal" candidate William Smith of Richmond.

Several other papers editorially praised the balance between social action and evangelism in both Criswell's address and throughout the convention. "Tension over the relation of evangelism and Christian social responsibility appears to be lessening," said the California Southern Baptist.

Several papers pointed out inconsistencies in the convention actions. The California Southern Baptist said the SBC refused to adopt recommendations deploring extremism of the left and right, but nevertheless adopted a resolution denouncing the extreme demands of Forman and the Black Manifesto.

The Indiana Baptist pointed out that the SBC refused to reaffirm a 1940 statement on conscientious objectors, but then passed without debate a resolution saying Baptists should oppose war, calling the Vietnam war "a tragic conflict."

On and on the editorials went, commenting on such other matters as the music at the convention, the pre-convention sessions, the need for more time for business, etc. The diversity of the editorial comments seemed characteristic of the diversity of the SBC itself.

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Indiana Baptist Paper
To Use Tabloid Format

6/26/69

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. (BP)--The Indiana Baptist will assume a new format in July, doubling the amount of space by changing to eight-page tabloid size.

The change to the 11½ x 16 inch format begins with the July 2 issue, almost exactly 11 years after the state paper was founded.

The state paper is not only changing size, but also its printing process, said Editor Alvin C. Shackelford. It will be printed by offset presses by The Daily Journal of Franklin, Ind., rather than by letterpress process in Plainfield, Ind.

Shackelford became editor in 1965, when the paper was then a semi-monthly. It began weekly publication in 1966.

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Adjectives Describing SBC
Range From Great To Lousey

6/26/69

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Adjectives used to describe the Southern Baptist Convention by editorials in a dozen Baptist state papers throughout the SBC ranged from "great" to "the lousiest," with all sorts of descriptive phrases in between.

It was not the "best" nor the "worst" convention in SBC history, commented the Baptist Standard of Texas, which added that there was more good than bad at the convention.

"Rambunctious" was the word used by the Oklahoma Baptist Messenger to describe the proceedings.

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The Biblical Recorder of North Carolina called it a "strange" convention, saying "it certainly was not a great convention, hardly a good one, and maybe it is best to say that it could have been worse."

Even stronger words were used by the North Carolina journal to describe the convention messengers. They were "rowdy, unruly, discourteous, and disrespectful," said the editorial.

The Mississippi Baptist Record argued that in a number of ways it was a "great convention."

But the Alabama Baptist quoted in an editorial one man who called it "the lousiest convention I've ever attended." The editorial did not say that the paper necessarily agreed but neither did it disagree.

Several papers called it a "good" convention, including the Tennessee Baptist and Reflector which also described it as "a hot convention" and a "crowded convention."

The South Carolina Baptist Courier said it was "big" and "unwieldly," and the Indiana Baptist concluded that the sessions were "almost as hot and sticky as the humid Gulf Coast weather."

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Radio-TV Commission
Organizes Choral Group

6/26/69

FORT WORTH (BP)--The Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission is auditioning singers for membership in a new 100-voice male choral group similar to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

Joe Ann Shelton, director of program music for the commission, has issued a call to all Baptist ministers of music to audition for the new choir, to be called Southern Baptist Singing Churchmen.

As she described the choir, it will represent the Southern Baptist Convention in much the same manner as the Mormon Tabernacle Choir represents its denomination.

Miss Shelton said that about 1,800 full-time, paid Southern Baptist ministers of music had been invited to audition for the 100-voice choir, but that other full-time paid ministers of music who might not have received a written invitation are also welcome to try out for the choir.

The Singing Churchmen will represent Southern Baptists on network radio and television, record music for the radio and television programs produced by the commission, and travel abroad on music mission projects, Miss Shelton said. The group will be pared to 50 voices for tours, with the members rotating so all will have an opportunity to travel.

Miss Shelton said that music ministers may make a recording of their singing voices in order to audition, and send it to the commission at P. O. Box 12157, Fort Worth, Texas, 76116. Tape recordings should be made at 7½ inches-per-second on quarter-inch tape, and should not exceed two minutes in length, she said.

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