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Criswell Says Liberal Critics Prompted Second Term Election

DALLAS (EP)--W. A. Criswell, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said he would not be serving his second term as president of the 11.4 million member convention had it not been for criticism of his preaching and writing by "liberals."

Criswell, pastor of the 15,000 member First Baptist Church here, made the comment at a news conference introducing his newest book, Look Up Brother, which already has drawn criticism from some of the same persons critical of his book the previous year, Why I Preach That The Bible Is Literally True.

"What those liberals in the SBC don't know is if they had left me alone, I would not be serving a second term as president of the convention," Criswell said in the press conference.

"Had they (the critics) kept their mouths shut, none of this would have come about," the Dallas Times Herald quoted Criswell as saying regarding his decision to accept another term as president.

Criswell said he originally had intended to serve only one term as president and had so informed the men who backed him for the first year.

But in February of 1969, the Association of Baptist Professors of Religion adopted a resolution taking exception with Criswell's book on the literal interpretation of the Bible, saying it denied the "historical critical" method of biblical interpretation. It was also critical of the publicity surrounding the book, published by Broadman Press, the general books publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

In his second book, Look Up, Brother, Criswell devotes two chapters to the book controversy, saying he first was baffled by the criticism and was "blue and downhearted" for a week after reading of the professors' resolution.

"After the criticism of my book, I couldn't turn my back on the whole thing," he said in the press conference, explaining why he decided to allow his name to be nominated for re-election.

Criswell was re-elected president of the convention for a second term at New Orleans last June by a margin of 7,482 to 450 votes over William C. Smith, professor at the University of Richmond, Va., one of the officers of the Association of Baptist Professors of Religion.

He told the news reporters that the future of the denomination is in its outreach for missions, its evangelism and its church ministries. He said he was seeking to "forward these things during my second year as president."

In his book, Look Up, Brother, Criswell wrote of the future: "Our Southern Baptist Convention will remain a conservative, Bible-centered association of churches," and "our...convention will become more acutely aware of our mission responsibilities to the world."

He added that many denominations and churches have chosen "to go down the road outlined by the liberals," and many have been "lost to any real missionary and evangelistic outreach because of the wrong kind of liberalism."

"By God's grace I shall not go down that road," Criswell wrote. "With the help of the Lord I shall do all in my power to help our denomination and its institutions from falling into that dismal abyss. Cadavers have no appeal to me...."

Virginia Editorial, Review
 Rap Criswell's Latest Book

RICHMOND (BP)--An editorial and a review in the Religious Herald, Virginia Baptist weekly newspaper, have criticized the latest book by Southern Baptist Convention President W. A. Criswell and the SBC Sunday School Board for publishing it.

"The Sunday School Board made a grievous mistake by allowing itself to become an instrument for stirring already troubled waters and for widening the breach between groups within the convention," said the editorial, written by editor Reuben Alley.

The review, written by University of Richmond Professor Robert Alley, the editor's son, called Criswell's book, "both sad and pathetic."

Both the editor and the professor had been vocal critics of Criswell's earlier book, Why I Preach That The Bible Is Literally True. The younger Alley was chairman of the resolutions committee of the Association of Baptist Professors of Religion which adopted a resolution almost exactly a year ago critical of Criswell's earlier book.

After giving a lengthy historical background for support of the historical-critical method of biblical study, the editorial listed three weakness of Look Up, Brother, the latest book written by Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas.

In one of the three points, the editorial claimed that Criswell had "maligned two fellow Baptists, one of them the highly regarded pastor of a flourishing church in Richmond..." and the other "a scholar and professor in a Baptist university."

Neither person was identified in the editorial or the book by Criswell, but a report in the Richmond Times Dispatch said that the book was referring to the younger Alley.

Asked for reaction to the book by the Richmond newspaper, Alley said that Criswell had used "smear tactics" that are "rather scurrilous."

The editorial in the Religious Herald said that it was an "unworthy attack upon the two young men," and "is a pitiable display of emotionalism."

"Obviously, the Sunday School Board made a deplorable mistake in publishing a book which contains unworthy personal attacks upon members of the denomination..." the editorial continued.

"Broadman Press (the book publishing arm of the Sunday School Board) moved to a low level when it shared in the publication of these abusive and falacious remarks about fellow Baptists," said the editorial. "We suggest that the Sunday School Board may make proper amends by a public apology and a retraction," the editor wrote.

Officials at the Sunday School Board, however, had no comment concerning the editorial. Criswell was in Africa on a month-long preaching tour, and was not available for comment.

In the book, Look Up, Brother, one paragraph mentions that one of the professors is going to write a book on "Why I Preach That The Bible Is Not Literally True." (J. B. Lippincott & Co. has engaged Alley to write a book on the historical-critical method, according to a report in Newsweek magazine).

"But I have some advice for him," Criswell wrote in the book. "He had better stay in that endowed institution to receive his salary. There are not many people in a vibrant congregation who are wanting to hear a so-called man of God who does not believe the Bible. These men preside over dying churches...."

In another chapter, Criswell gives his reactions to a "scorching, blistering review" of his earlier book written by the pastor of a church which had only six baptisms in one year. "This is a strange thing," wrote Criswell. "Our heavenly assignment is to make disciples, to win people to Christ, to baptize them in the name of the Triune God and to teach them the mind of God that was in Christ Jesus.... And how many did he baptize that year...? Six!"

In his review of Look Up, Brother published in the Religious Herald, Alley wrote: "Whether he (Criswell) is calling a professor a 'so called man of God' or damning a fellow minister for having only six baptisms in a year, the Dallas oracle demonstrates an inability to grapple with issues above the personal level. Again, that is sad."

The review also panned Criswell's book for failure to make a case for the position of biblical inerrancy, and for affirming that "in spite of all, Southern Baptists are in good condition" because of "increased numbers."

The review was also critical of Criswell's chapter on race for placing "the blame upon the black militants for all the present racial strife."

"All in all, it is a book with no intrinsic worth, presenting the pathetic picture of a man attacking the character of others while calling upon one and all to 'Look Up,' concluded the review. "Perhaps we would all be better served if we merely looked away."

Both the editorial and the review argued that Criswell's plea for those who do not accept the 1963 Statement of Baptist Faith and Message to leave the denomination ignores the introduction to that statement which emphasizes that the statement is not final or infallible, but rather is a guide to interpretation. Rather, the introduction states "that the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments."

In another section, the 1963 Statement says of the Bible: "We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired...that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error for its matter."

The Religious Herald editorial, in one of its three main points, stated: "We utterly reject both the plea that the meaning of this abstruse language is plain and interpretations of the statement that another man (Criswell) strives to impose."

The editorial, in another main point, rejected "the assumption that a person can pursue a search for truth when he conditions that search by a prior hypothesis. To say that a person must hold fast to the infallibility of the Bible as a prior condition for the use of the historical-critical method in search of biblical truth is an absurdity."

The editorial was also critical of "lack of consistency" by the Sunday School Board, which earlier this year published the Broadman Bible Commentary which says the writers of the Bible were "finite and fallible," favoring what is called the "dynamic view of inspiration."

In the foreward of Look Up, Brother, Criswell points out that his book does not reflect the official position of "any board, any agency, any commission, any association of churches, or any conventions...least of all...the publishing company that distributes it. The volume represents me only."

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