



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
Telephone (615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Billy Keith, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lynn M. Davis, Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203, Telephone (615) 254-1631
RICHMOND Jesse C. Fletcher, Acting Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (703) 353-0151
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

June 16, 1970

Editorials on SBC Rap "Hostile" Denver Spirit

NASHVILLE (BP)--Editorial reactions to the Southern Baptist Convention in Denver prompted at least 17 Baptist state papers across the nation to question editorially the "unChristian," "bitter," "hostile," "vitriolic," "arrogant," "unforgiving," and "militant" spirit and attitude the editors said some convention messengers exhibited.

Almost as many editorials had observations and comments on the implications of the convention's actions requesting the withdrawal and rewriting of the Genesis Volume of the Broadman Bible Commentary, and the refusal of the SBC to slap down its Christian Life Commission for a controversial seminar it conducted.

Several of the Baptist state paper editors, citing the "hostile" attitude and spirit of the messengers to the convention, questioned the democratic process within the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

The Indiana Baptist commented editorially that the "bitter, unChristian attitudes we saw at Denver" could eventually lead to the destruction of the denomination. "If this spirit is allowed to take over our convention, we will not survive," the editorial said.

Several editors pointed out the hypocrisy of messengers to the convention who defended a literal interpretation of the Bible in debate on the Broadman Bible Commentary, but showed the wrong spirit in doing so.

"Some Baptists who seem to believe they are divinely appointed to save the Bible and defend its inerrant message from all imagined defilers sure don't seem to have read much in that Bible about how Christians are supposed to conduct themselves," observed the Georgia Christian Index.

"The vitriolic, hostile, accusative, unforgiving, prideful, arrogant, and often-down-right-abusive attitudes and words of many of the preachers who spoke in defense of the Bible--and in attack of all who disagreed with their own views about that Bible--seem to this editor to be totally alien to the teachings and spirit of the central person in that Bible," said the Georgia editorial.

In one of the strongest editorials on the subject, the Kentucky Western Recorder charged that "to pray and ask others to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide our deliberations in a convention and then act like children of the devil is blasphemy."

"When will we stop arguing over beliefs about the Bible and start living the truth of the Bible?" the Kentucky editorial asked. "Why while declaring love for the Bible do we employ methods in arguing over a passage in Genesis that disregards the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament on love, and on how to treat one another?"

"Which is the more damaging heresy, the heresy of belief or the heresy of behavior?" the editorial continued. "Which is more destructive to the Bible--to question the literal interpretation of a passage in Genesis or to disregard literal Biblical injunctions on Christian attitude and behavior? Which preaches loudest to the non-Christian world we are trying to win, our orthodoxy on the Bible or our accusation and abuse of each other?" the Kentucky editorial asked.

The North Carolina Biblical Recorder questioned the emotional stability of convention messengers who sought to "embarrass and ridicule President W. A. Criswell as well as the convention at large." The editorial added: "When W. A. Criswell, Herschel Hobbs and Ramsey Pollard are not 'conservative' enough for this group, who can be?"

Both the North Carolina and Maryland Baptist editorials speculated, how those who sought to censor the Broadman Bible Commentary and Christian Life Commission would react if the deacons in their churches sought to "censor and scrutinize their sermons" each week.

The Maryland editorial observed that some messengers were determined "to draw blood and extract a 'pound of flesh' and by Wednesday they had done just that." The editor confessed he wept when he observed the unChristian attitude, and added: "Our prayer now is that God will intervene and save us from self-destruction."

An editorial in the Mississippi Baptist Record, however, disagreed that there was an "unChristian" spirit among the messengers. "It was a meeting of determined action, but of little show of animosity, and the love of Christ prevailed."

"We feel sure that even though there was not agreement on all of the actions taken, that the messengers returned to their homes and churches determined more than ever to help Southern Baptists continue their nationwide and worldwide programs," said the Mississippi editorial.

On the Broadman Bible Commentary action, the editorials in the Kentucky and Maryland papers agreed that the Baptist Sunday School Board would be wise to pay off its commitments to writers and cancel the entire 12-volume series.

"It is quite apparent Southern Baptists are not ready for a commentary that deals in the broad scope of current Biblical scholarship," observed the Maryland editorial. "We seem to still be at the 'study course book' stage and afraid to expose ourselves to any viewpoint that we don't accept."

The Kentucky editorial added that it would not be worth the cost to revise and edit the work of Biblical scholars to make it conform to already accepted interpretations of the majority of the readers.

An editorial in the Mississippi Baptist Record stated that the action "showed clearly that the majority of Southern Baptists...want no part of theological liberalism, and do not want convention-produced literature to bear its stamp.

"We feel," said the Mississippi editorial, "that the action will prove to be a wise one for the convention. It should be an end to the debate on whether the agencies should try to move in a more liberal direction...This act announces to the world that Southern Baptists are going to remain in the conservative path."

At least 15 Baptist state papers commented editorially on the Broadman Commentary action. Only one, the District of Columbia Capital Baptist, called it "a big mistake."

The California Southern Baptist called the commentary action "a hollow victory" because banning the book gave it the best possible sales promotion. The editorial pointed out that though the commentary was considered "liberal" by most SBC messengers, it is conservative when compared to the full spectrum of theological thought. "Oddly, banning this moderately conservative commentary may hasten rather than retard the trend towards a more moderate version of conservative theology," the editorial observed.

Several editorials observed that the convention was somewhat contradictory, slapping the writers of the SBC Sunday School Board for its commentary, but refusing to chide the Christian Life Commission for inviting a Playboy philosophy and a situation ethics advocate to speak at a seminar on morality.

"It appeared that the messengers viewed the Christian Life Commission's program as an error in judgment, but the Sunday School Board's commentary as an error in doctrine," said the Indiana Baptists. "Mistakes in judgment are forgivable; mistakes in doctrine are not."

Many of the 16 Baptist state papers that editorialized on the Christian Life Commission action by the convention indicated belief that the social action agency "got the message" and would "not hold any more such controversial conferences."

The South Carolina Baptist Courier observed that though motions which would have reprimanded the commission for the seminar were tabled and the SBC refused to cut the budget allocation to the agency, the closeness of some of the votes amounted to a stern reprimand.

Added the Rocky Mountain Baptist, "A continued affront to the convention (by the commission) can result in surgical efforts being carried out."

The Baptist New Mexican charged that the issue was not resolved, and was left "a hotbed of contention, dissatisfaction and strife. Disgruntled messengers went back home to disgruntled churches, both unchanged and unsatisfied."

An editorial in the Alabama Baptist pointed out that dissent at the SBC indicates that the people on the local level are determined to have a voice in denominational affairs. The editorial added, however, that the "persistent charges and counter charges showed that some people have not learned the fundamental principles of debate."

The District of Columbia Capital Baptist called for "a better way of dealing with resolutions and items of business" at the convention, saying "it is a waste of time to hear one crazy proposal after another brought before the entire convention in the name of democracy."

The Rocky Mountain Baptist in Colorado added that "democracy in action can be a bad thing--when you see how crowds of people can be manipulated by persuasive oratory or argument--yet we would not trade it for any other form of government." The Ohio Baptist Messenger observed that often arguments and voting had more emotional overtones than logic.

The Texas Baptist Standard, largest of the papers, pointed out the convention, with 13,500 messengers in Denver, is not really "a deliberative body, nor can we be because of size."

The Kentucky paper wrote that there was more freedom in debate at Denver than at previous conventions, but the messengers should be "mature enough and Christian enough to exercise self-restraint."

Adding that the messengers in the future will not tolerate some of the behavior seen at Denver, the Kentucky paper outlined two choices: "Either we can employ self-control or we can make imposed control a necessity."

At least four of the editorials praised the self-control of the messengers, when about 15 black students from a Denver college insisted on speaking to the convention. The messengers voted to give them 10 minutes, and later turned down a proposal which would prohibit such appearances in the future.

Several editorials agreed with the action of the SBC in refusing to adopt a motion to require all SBC employees to sign a doctrinal statement, or to add to the current statement of Baptist Faith and Message.

"The Southern Baptist Convention doesn't need after all these years to start manufacturing creedal straight jackets now for the employees of its agencies to wear," quipped the Florida Baptist Witness.

At least nine of the state papers commended editorially the presiding of Criswell, the Dallas pastor and outgoing president. Likewise, as many papers praised the election of Carl Bates, pastor of First Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C., as the new president. Many said it was the best action of the convention.

Eight papers commented on the inspiration of the convention, especially the film presentations, but the Maryland paper pointed out that the 125th anniversary celebration of the convention was overshadowed completely by controversy. Most of the papers also liked Denver as a meeting site, but disliked the 200 yard long auditorium.

The Maryland and D. C. papers said that the Affirming the Bible Conference held before the SBC contributed to the unruly behavior of some messengers, while the Tennessee paper countered that the conference "provided opportunity for some relaxation of tensions prior to the actual sessions of the convention."

There was also disagreement among the editors on whether the convention actions would cause an exodus of youth unhappy with the stands taken, or conservatives who felt the SBC didn't go far enough.

Observed the Ohio paper, "Southern Baptists are still together--except for the extremist, both left and right, who are never satisfied until everyone moves to their position."

Several papers commended the resolutions adopted by the SBC, one calling them "relevant" and the Pacific Coast Baptist observing concern for "environment, extremism, peace, war, race, government, church-state relations, law and order, education, space travel, and other special issues."

In final evaluation, the editorials, like the messengers, were not in agreement. The Georgia paper called it a "troubled" convention and the Indiana paper described it as a "bitter, hostile meeting."

In contrast, the Mississippi Baptist Record thought it was a "good convention," using the words "declaration, determination, demonstration, direction, and dedication" to describe the actions.

Concluded the California Southern Baptist: "When all is considered, it would seem that our convention is undergoing a gradual broadening of viewpoint, but that very process of gradual change is painful...Southern Baptists are not going to become anything other than a conservative denomination," the California paper said. It added, however, "Southern Baptists are not going to turn their backs on progress now."



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Nashville, Tennessee 37219

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DAVIS C. WOOLLEY NO
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
127 NINTH AVE. N.
NASHVILLE, TENN. 37203

skills activity suggested in curriculum materials.

"Study course" will be checked by the member when he has earned credit in any manner prescribed by the New Church Study Course. When such credit has been earned, the member may continue to check this point each week for a period of six months.

Church music record system items will include a monthly project wall chart, a summary of weekly records, a member's record and a church music report book.

The monthly project wall chart will provide for monthly listing of projects, activities and units selected for the group. Activities may be listed by title or subject under the appropriate heading: personal development, outreach, worship and ministry. Each member may check his participation when he has completed an activity by marking in the appropriate space opposite his name.

The summary of weekly records will include information regarding enrolment, new members, drops, total present, on time, performances one and two, personal development, outreach, worship and ministry.

The member's record includes "present" and "on time" to be marked for rehearsal only. Spaces also are provided to mark attendance at two performances.

The church music report book contains instructions regarding the use of the church music record system.

Detailed explanatory booklets about the Broadman Church Records System will be mailed this summer to Southern Baptist churches across the nation. State secretaries of church music, Sunday School, and church training departments also will have explanatory material.