



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Opinion Roundup

Editorials On SBC Praise Spirit at St. Louis Meeting

6/11/71

by the Baptist Press

Editorials in nearly two dozen weekly Baptist state newspapers praised the spirit of the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis, with many of the editorials contrasting the attitudes at St. Louis to those displayed in Denver last year.

"There was none of the rowdyism that characterized so much of the business sessions at Denver," said the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine in an editorial evaluation. "Even those who pressed for action on the Broadman Commentary issue, the one and only hot item, though determined were, for the most part, Christian in their approach."

Last year, no less than 17 Baptist state papers criticized the attitudes of messengers to the Denver convention using such words as "unChristian," "bitter," "hostile," "vitriolic," "arrogant," "unforgiving," and "militant."

This year, however, the editorials heaped praise upon the convention messengers for acting, as the Oregon-Washington editor said, "in the spirit of Christ."

And nearly a dozen of the editorials gave much of the credit for the calm, peaceful and harmonious sessions to the convention's president, Carl E. Bates of Charlotte, N.C.

"The convention was not raucous," observed the Baptist New Mexican. "There were no temper flare-ups, that I saw, and the convention conducted itself with Christian dignity and serious purpose."

Several of the editorials pointed to one classic example during the convention when President Bates asked one messenger speaking from a floor mike to repeat what he had said, and asked him, "Are you still there?" The messenger misunderstood Bates and replied, "No I'm not mad."

The Illinois Baptist captioned its editorial with that quote, calling it "the best four-word speech at St. Louis." Observed the editor: "It illustrated that Baptists can disagree without getting angry at each other."

Searching for adjectives to describe the convention, the editors used such descriptive phrases as "peaceful," "harmonious," "calm," "cool," "routine," "good but not perfect," "unique--there's not another like it," "wholesome," "conservative," and "monotonous."

The Baptist Standard of Texas characterized the convention with the word "suppressed," observing that "the messengers allowed themselves to be suppressed in their quest for peace."

Both the Alabama Baptist and the Christian Index of Georgia said editorially that the lack of conflict and the spirit of the St. Louis meeting reflected "a growing maturity" on the part of Southern Baptists.

Almost all of the weekly state papers commented on the vote of the convention (2,672 to 2,290) to ask the SBC Sunday School Board to "obtain another writer" to rewrite the Broadman Bible Commentary volume on Genesis and Exodus banned by the convention last year.

In an interpretation of the significance of that action, the Mississippi Baptist Record observed that "what is being said is far deeper than mere discontent with a commentary," and that "the messengers were speaking on a much larger issue."

"Southern Baptists are saying that they are determined to stay with the Bible believing conservatism which has characterized the convention since its beginning, and they are not willing to move toward a more liberal position," the Mississippi editor said.

"Changing one of the writers in Volume I of the Broadman Bible Commentary is not going to make it a conservative commentary which will please most Southern Baptists, since there are other sections and other volumes which are just as objectionable," said the Mississippi editorial. "Neither will it bring solution to the real issue troubling us."

The editors of the Virginia and District of Columbia papers, however, took a different view.

"The loser in this whole episode is...the people who are so unsure of their own faith and whose understanding of the Bible is so shallow that they can't read another view different from theirs without feeling threatened," said the Capital Baptist.

The Virginia Religious Herald called the commentary action "disturbing," and observed that "dropping this pebble in the denominational waters could result in ever-widening ripples, affecting many, if not all, boards, institutions and commissions" (of the SBC).

The Religious Herald cited the diversity within the SBC and added that such diversity calls for mutual respect and acceptance of differing points of view in the denomination. The action raised several difficult questions which Baptists must face in the future, the editorial said.

Both the Maryland and Louisiana papers said editorially that they did not believe Southern Baptists needed a Bible commentary anyway, and that any attempt by a Baptist publishing house to interpret the scriptures in a scholarly fashion was bound to cause "a stirring in the nest."

The North Carolina Biblical Recorder observed that the "Broadman Commentary is really not worth all the division and misunderstanding it has caused," and that "this controversy will be resolved eventually just as others have in the past." The editor added that "there are still some ripples of discontent, but we do not view these as serious threats to the unity and progress of Southern Baptists."

Commenting on the emphasis on peace and harmony at the meeting, the Texas Baptist Standard wrote that the determination for harmony was so intense on the first day of the convention that the Sunday School Board possibly could have on that first day got an endorsement for its plan to have the original authors revise the commentary. "On this first day the determination for harmony would have endorsed almost anything other than sprinkling as a mode of baptism," the editor quipped.

"The desire for harmony did produce one action that is filled with unfortunate possibilities," said the Kentucky Western Recorder. "Based on unprecedented interpretation of Bylaw 16 by convention parliamentarian James Bullman, President Bates ruled that any motion affecting an SBC agency or institution...not printed in the report of that institution must be referred to the SBC Executive Committee."

The Indiana Baptist devoted its lead editorial to the interpretation of this bylaw, charging that Baptists "paid a tremendous price for peace" at the convention by sacrificing "the time-honored Baptist principle of the autonomy of the convention in session."

"This was the first time in the memory of convention observers that messengers were denied the right to debate and to vote on motions presented during a convention," said the Indiana editorial. "This in essence denies the convention the power to be a convention,... and means that the Executive Committee will be a filter of any motion by a messenger before the convention can discuss and act upon it."

The purpose of the bylaw, the editorial observed, is to protect the messengers from hasty motions by the agencies, but the new interpretation reverses this to protect the agencies from motions by the messengers.

"If we ever get to the place we do not trust this (democratic) process and the messengers themselves, we have ceased to be Baptists," said the Indiana editor. "The delay in considering this basic issue (bylaw 16 interpretation) meant that this year's SBC was devoid of any business initiated by the messengers. In this respect it was not a Baptist meeting."

The Ohio Baptist Messenger called the bylaw interpretation "a gag rule," and observed that the St. Louis convention "may go down as one of the most 'Presbyterian' meetings Baptists ever had,"

None of the editorials in the Baptist state papers agreed with the parliamentarian's interpretation of the bylaw. The Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine said that the interpretation put the SBC in the "bizarre position of having refused itself the privilege of conducting its own affairs, and in effect, placing the Executive Committee over the Convention."

The Baptist paper editors, however, were not critical of the convention president for the ruling. More than a dozen of the editorials praised Bates as a president, and his "calm, low-key," "fair," "courteous," and "masterful" job of presiding.

Bates "brought a new dimension of understanding to the presidency," said the North Carolina Biblical Recorder. "He is God's man for the hour for Southern Baptists," chimed the Georgia Christian Index.

"There has not been a better presiding officer nor do we recall a better president," added the Texas Baptist Standard.

The editorials had no praise, however, and some criticism, for the selection of James Bulman of North Carolina as parliamentarian. The Texas Baptist Standard called Bulman's appointment Bates' only mistake, and credited Bulman "for initiating the suppression" at the convention with "his innovative ruling" on bylaw 16.

The Maryland Baptist put it in stronger words. "Dr. Bates presided under great pressure from a parliamentarian who apparently wanted to run the convention and thought he could and should in his role.

"If Mr. Bulman's ruling had prevailed at Denver, there could not have been one word of discussion about the Sunday School Board or the Christian Life Commission," continued the Maryland editorial. "Messengers who felt as strongly as some did at Denver would have held a public burning of Robert's Rules of Order and the Convention's bylaws with Mr. Bulman tied to a stake in the center of the fire!

"We have always believed a parliamentarian was a resource person with recognized expertise in the field, but apparently Mr. Bulman felt he had a mandate to tell President Bates every move he could make. He popped up and down, paced the stage, counseled messengers on procedures and even talked to Dr. Bates while the president was addressing the body in his presiding," the editorial said.

"Mr. Bulman hasn't been to a convention since 1959, the year he insists he was bodily thrown out," the Maryland Baptist said. "It will probably be easier for the convention and Mr. Bulman if he doesn't show up again at the SBC annual meeting for the next 12 years."

The Capital Baptist of District of Columbia added the parliamentarian "did more to bottle up the convention actions than he did to keep it moving." The editor then made four suggestions for improving the convention next year.

The editorial suggested: "(1) get another parliamentarian; (2) eliminate floor mikes and make everyone come to the platform, (3) make sure...whoever plans the program is aware of previous convention actions and insists on reports where it is necessary; and (4) set up some better way of dealing with resolutions than the last-minute way we draft them now."

A half-dozen Baptist papers commented on the significance of the resolutions adopted in St. Louis. The Louisiana Baptist Message called them "some of the strongest resolutions in the history of the convention."

The Georgia Christian Index observed that the resolutions, "dealing with such vital issues as abortion, penal reform, judicial overhaul, etc., showed in a dramatic new way that Southern Baptists are steadily becoming more and more concerned and involved with the workaday world where the gut issues of our times are so crucial."

The California Southern Baptists added that "there was no serious opposition to taking some pretty strong stands on some subjects that would not have stood a ghost of a chance of passing a few years ago."

About eight of the papers praised a presentation made by Baptist students, with the Michigan Baptist Advocate calling the presentation "without a doubt one of the highlights of the convention."

Some papers called the student presentation the most inspiration moment of the convention. One paper said there were not may "high hours of inspiration," while others pointed to an emphasis on reaching the cities of the world, the commissioning of 30 missionaries, and the president's address and annual sermon as the high points of the convention.

Several of the editorials said the convention was too short to do its business effectively, and the Mississippi and California papers said the denomination's agencies were hampered by not being able to bring full complete reports to the convention. The North Carolina Biblical Recorder countered, however, that the messengers liked the fewer speeches, the time-saving reports from agencies and the shorter sessions.

Asking, "Where do we go from here," the Missouri Word and Way urged all Baptists including the boards, agencies and pastors, to "proceed to major on majors. We need to unite in a spirit of deep humility, relying upon the power of the Holy Spirit to reverse our downward trends...."

The Illinois Baptist cautioned future conventions against becoming so wrapped up in internal affairs that they are unaware of what is happening in the rest of the world. As an example, the editorial pointed to the need for penal reforms at the county jail located just across the street from the meeting hall for the convention.

The Louisiana Baptist Message concluded by looking to the convention next year in Philadelphia, "where hangs the liberty bell." The editor observed that "the crack in the bell is real, as is the crack in Southern Baptist fellowship. "Who knows," the editorial asked, "there could be a rebirth of liberty (soul liberty in Philadelphia). Soul liberty has always been a hallmark among Baptists. The day it dies, Southern Baptists will become passe."

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2,336 Decisions Reported In Small Tarheel Town

6/11/71

LINCOLNTON, N.C. (BP)--More than 2,335 public decisions for Christ, including 1,584 professions of faith in Christ, were recorded during an eight-day evangelistic crusade here led by Evangelist James Robison of Hurst, Tex.

Crowds that nighly packed the high school stadium here to hear the 27-year-old Baptist evangelist were estimated at about 5,000--a figure equal to the total population of the Bible-belt town.

One local leader called the crusade the biggest thing to hit the county-seat town just 35 miles east of Charlotte since the days of "Cyclone Mac," a sawdust trail evangelist of the 1920's.

No massive evangelistic effort had been made here in the 50-year interim, local leaders said.

The crusade was sponsored by the South Fork Baptist Association, comprised of 49 Southern Baptist churches in a countywide area.

Crusade Chairman James McQuere, missionary of the South Fork Baptist Association, said he felt the campaign was successful because of 12 months of pre-crusade planning and Robison's "pure gospel" preaching, which is similar to that of Evangelist Billy Graham's.

During four nights when the crowds were given an opportunity to make a "love offering" to Robison and his evangelistic association, a total of \$11,321 was received. Robison said it was one of the largest "love offerings" ever given him in a single crusade.

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Cook Named Field Rep
For SBC Loans Division

ATLANTA (BP)--Bennett C. Cook, former director of the Church Services Division for the Northwest Baptist Convention in Oregon and Washington, has been named field representative for the Division of Church Loans of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board here.

Cook will visit churches in the Northwest, Utah-Idaho, Alaska and New Mexico conventions, where he will give counsel, advice and guidance, when requested, concerning church loans. The Church Loans Division assists Baptist churches, association and state conventions in providing financing for the purchase of church sites and for construction of church buildings.

A native of Marshall, Tex., Cook was education director of Fernwood Baptist Church in Dallas, and a staff member of several other Texas churches, before going to the Oregon-Washington convention in 1959.

He has held numerous positions with the Northwest Baptist Convention, and was the interim executive secretary of the two-state Baptist body from January to May of this year when Dan Stringer of Arizona was named executive secretary.

Cook has been associate executive secretary of the Northwest Convention, director of its Church Services Division, consultant in church architecture, associate in the department of evangelism and Brotherhood, and Sunday School secretary.

He is a graduate of East Texas Baptist College, Marshall, Tex., and attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth.

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Four Named New Missionaries
By SBC Home Mission Board

6/11/71

ATLANTA (BP)--Two couples, including a former national office staff member, were appointed as career home missionaries by the Board of Directors for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board here.

Serving as home missionaries will be George A. and Barbara Torney of San Francisco, Calif., and Harold W. and Laverne Wilcox of Gate City, Va.

Torney for several years was associate secretary of metropolitan work for the Home Mission Board's national office here.

The Torneys will work as directors in the First Southern Baptist Church in San Francisco where he is presently pastor.

A native of Maryland, Torney is a graduate of William Carey College, Hattiesburg, Miss., and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville. Mrs. Torney is a graduate of Mobile Infirmary School of Nursing.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox, both natives of Kentucky, will serve as missionaries for social ministries in Gate City, Va. Wilcox is currently associational director of Christian social ministries for the board in Gate City, Va.

He attended Campbellsville College and is a graduate of Georgetown College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, all in Kentucky. Mrs. Wilcox also attended Campbellsville College.

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Action Halted on Rewriting
Broadman Bible Commentary

6/11/71

NASHVILLE (BP)--Action toward the rewriting of Volume I of the Broadman Bible Commentary has been halted by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board here.

In a special called meeting, the executive committee of the elected board passed a motion requesting James L. Sullivan, executive secretary of the board, to "...instruct editorial personnel working with the Broadman Bible Commentary not to engage in any official discussions with any of the 11 writers of Volume I until the meeting of the full elected board July 21-22."

The action was taken to allow the full board the opportunity to consider a valid interpretation of the motion about Vol 1 of the Commentary passed at the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis one week earlier.

"The motion on Vol. I passed at St. Louis," said Sullivan, "raises a question as to whether one writer or all the writers contributing to this volume are involved."

The St. Louis motion asked that "...the Sunday School Board be advised that the 1970 convention action regarding the rewriting of Volume I of the Broadman Commentary has not been followed and that the Sunday School Board obtain another writer and proceed with the commentary according to the vote of the 1970 convention in Denver."

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June 11, 1971

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Baptist Press

Sullivan said that the full board in its July meeting, will be attempting to relate the motion's call for 'another writer' to all factors related to this complete volume and to the other volume in the series."

Primary targets of those critical of the commentary have been chiefly certain interpretations in the treatment of Genesis. The commentary on Genesis was written by G. Henton Davies, principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford, England.

Davies, who has planned to visit the United States in July, was to have visited the Sunday School Board the week before the elected board meeting to discuss the rewriting of the Genesis commentary. He has accepted invitations for preaching engagements from several SBC churches.

In a telephone conversation on June 11, Sullivan told Davies that the executive committee action precluded the scheduled discussion about the rewriting of Volume I.

He also told Davies he would be welcomed as a leader in the Baptist world fellowship. Davies is now serving as president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

10-11-68

Dear Mr. [Name],

I have your letter of [Date] regarding [Subject].

The [Organization] is currently [Status] and [Details].

We are [Action] and [Details].

Very truly yours,

[Name]



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