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November 30, 1971

### Convention Roundup

Race Relations, Baptism Issues  
Dominate SBC State Conventions

By the Baptist Press

During annual meetings of 32 Baptist state conventions scheduled in late October and November, two key issues were most prominent: Southern Baptist involvement in race relations, and efforts to restrict state convention membership to churches which practice baptism by immersion only.

These two issues confronted in some form no less than 16 of the 32 state conventions meeting during a six-week period.

Most of the conventions, however, were described by veteran observers as "calm," "peaceful" and "harmonious." The majority of the conventions conducted their business without a ripple of controversy.

Other issues confronting several of the state bodies included such matters as problems relating to operation of Baptist colleges; opposition to legislation proposing a "non-denominational prayer amendment" to the Constitution, and to state-wide legalization of gambling, federal aid to parochial schools and to Baptist institutions; and matters of prison reform, drug abuse, and assistance to pastorless churches and churchless pastors.

At least 13 of the state conventions dealt in some way with race relations.

Seven of the conventions adopted resolutions expressing "disappointment," "distress," and varying degrees of opposition to an administrative decision by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board to revise a church training quarterly for teenagers, *Becoming*, because of a study unit on racial reconciliation which leaders felt was "subject to misinterpretation."

Eight state conventions urged their churches to intensify efforts at racial reconciliation, advocated rejection of "racism," or emphasized that the gospel is for all people regardless of race.

Two conventions, California and Kentucky, elected blacks as vice presidents, and in Texas, six black, white and Mexican-American Baptist bodies held a joint, interracial rally at Houston's Astrodome, attracting more than 42,000 people.

On the second major issue--efforts in seven state conventions to limit convention membership to messengers from churches which do not practice alien immersion or open communion--there were no clear trends emerging.

Two conventions, Alabama and North Carolina, refused to adopt proposals to limit convention participation to churches which do not practice alien immersion.

Two others, Arkansas and California, took actions which tended to strengthen current limitations prohibiting participation of such churches in the state convention sessions.

Two other conventions, Indiana and South Carolina, refused to require churches to be affiliated with a local Baptist association in order to send messengers to the state convention. A third convention, Texas, refused to make association affiliation a test for membership on the convention's Executive Board.

While the conventions' actions on membership requirements tended to be inconsistent, there appeared to be uniform increased concern on the state level for intensified Baptist efforts at racial reconciliation, especially in light of the controversy over the revision of the church training quarterly.

Expressing some degree of "distress," "disappointment," or "displeasure" over the withdrawal and revision of *Becoming* were conventions in Kentucky, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, North Carolina, California, and Oregon-Washington.

Most of these conventions went beyond simply expressing "displeasure," by urging their own churches to intensify their efforts at racial reconciliation.

Maryland Baptists, for example, amended their resolution to add a paragraph strongly encouraging "our churches to examine their own attitudes in regard to race so that our preachments will become practices," and urging the churches to open membership to all people regardless of race.

Kentucky Baptists, who elected a black pastor as vice president, reaffirmed "rejection of racial segregation as inherently un-Christian" and reaffirmed "our commitment to racial reconciliation." The South Carolina convention urged its churches to observe a special day of racial reconciliation on Nov. 21.

Southern Baptists in Illinois commended individuals and churches who have "sought ways to bridge prejudicial barriers and reject racism" and praised those who have set examples which would "correct the false label our Southern Baptist Convention and churches have as being racists."

Three conventions adopted resolutions relating to public school integration. Virginia Baptists opposed busing to achieve racial balance, but endorsed open housing as the Christian basis for support of the neighborhood school concept. Texas Baptists also decried racial discrimination in housing, and adopted a strong resolution supporting public school desegregation. North Carolina Baptists urged private schools to comply with the law of the land by opening doors to all races.

In Texas, more than 42,000 black, white and Mexican-American Baptists from six conventions held a joint interracial rally at the Astrodome, which observers said broke down racial barriers. After the news media carried stories concerning the withdrawal of *Becoming*, the presidents of the six bodies issued a statement saying the decision failed to reflect "new attitudes of love which have grown at the grass roots of Baptist life."

For the first time, a black minister delivered a major address at the Louisiana convention, and a black evangelist speaking at the Arkansas convention expressed disappointment over the *Becoming* incident in that convention's closing address.

In Georgia, however, the convention refused to instruct trustees of its children's home to implement a three-year policy of accepting children of all races, voting instead to leave this matter to the trustees and administration.

Seven conventions faced the more complicated issues of baptism and requirements for membership in the state convention. No clear trends seemed evident.

Arkansas Baptists, for example, adopted a committee report aimed at ending a four-year controversy by defining the term "regular Baptist church" in the constitution requirements for membership as a church which accepts the Southern Baptist Convention's Baptist Faith and Message Statement of 1963, but adopted by a vote of 389-263 an amendment which added that this statement "shall not be interpreted as to permit open communion or alien immersion." The action thus seemed to strengthen limitations against doctrinal diversity in the state.

The California convention refused to delete a constitution requirement prohibiting acceptance of messengers from churches accepting alien immersion. Furthermore, two constitution amendments designed to strengthen this requirement were introduced for voting next year.

In Arkansas, however, three churches which had been denied seats at the convention for four years were accepted this year without protest, while in California, four churches which permit membership by "alien immersion" were denied seats.

In contrast to the Arkansas and California actions, the North Carolina convention defeated a proposal to amend the constitution to exclude churches which accept alien immersion when the amendment failed to get the necessary two-thirds majority.

In Alabama, the convention refused in three different votes to alter its membership requirements so that only churches which practice baptism by immersion would be accepted. It was pointed out, however, that no Southern Baptist congregation in Alabama is known to accept alien immersion.

South Carolina and Indiana Baptists faced the issue from the standpoint of requirements for affiliation with a local association, where such doctrinal battles are most often fought, as a test for convention membership.

A constitution amendment in South Carolina which would have required affiliation with an association was defeated, but a constitution change was proposed for a vote next year which would specify churches must practice baptism exclusively by immersion for membership. The South Carolina convention also defeated a motion to deny seats to messengers from First Baptist Church, Greenwood, S. C., which was ousted from the local association last year for its baptism policies.

Indiana Baptists voted to delete a stipulation from its constitution which required membership in a local association for churches to attend the state convention.

In Texas, messengers voted down an effort to delete the nomination of a pastor from a Lubbock church to the state Executive Board. The controversy arose because the Lubbock church is not a member of a local association due to its alien immersion policies.

Arguments in the debates at the seven conventions had similar sounds. Those in favor of convention requirements against alien immersion or open communion, or for associational membership requirements argued that from a scriptural basis immersion is the only form acceptable, and that anything less is not in keeping with Baptist doctrine.

Opponents, however, contended that such requirements were an infringement upon local church autonomy to set doctrinal policies, and that one Baptist body cannot determine what another autonomous Baptist body can or cannot do.

The issue, however, does not appear to be settled in many of the conventions, and may crop up again.

An issue which surfaced in dozens of state conventions during the 1960's--federal aid to Baptist schools and hospitals--confronted only two conventions this year, Texas and North Carolina. Other problems relating to Baptist schools and institutions faced seven conventions.

Texas Baptists turned down a request for federal loans and grants to their hospitals by a vote of 1,466 to 724, almost the same margin as action two years ago on a request for government loans to Texas Baptist schools.

In North Carolina, the convention refused to amend the constitution to require convention approval of all government-funded programs at Baptist institutions, leaving such decisions to its General Board.

Texas Baptists voted to release from convention ownership and operation a school and a hospital--the Memorial Baptist Hospital System of Houston, and the University of Corpus Christi. The school last year received a government loan to help rebuild after Hurricane Celia, but did not receive convention approval.

Georgia Baptists authorized a debt-retirement program for the now-defunct Norman Junior College, Norman Park, Ga., and voted to create a new Baptist assembly on the campus. Mississippi Baptists also voted to construct a new assembly to replace one destroyed by Hurricane Camille.

Efforts to consolidate three schools in Kentucky, and a move to close an academy in Tennessee, both were referred to committees for study. Efforts to sever ties between the Florida Baptist Convention and Stetson University, and to cut financial support from Furman University by the South Carolina convention were soundly defeated.

Four state conventions approved plans or proposals to establish a new program of assisting churches seeking staff members, and pastors and staff members seeking a place of service in churches.

Texas Baptists approved employment of a coordinator of counseling services for ministers and their families and establishment of a computerized church staff information service. Virginia authorized a similar position, and Illinois defeated an effort from the floor to rescind plans approved by the state board to create an information service. Florida Baptists voted to study establishing such a program.

On religious liberty and church-state relations, seven conventions adopted resolutions opposing government financial aid to parochial secondary and elementary schools, and seven conventions opposed efforts in Congress to adopt a "non-denominational prayer amendment" to the U. S. Constitution, or commended Congressmen who voted against the amendment.

In other resolutions, eight conventions opposed state-wide efforts at legalized gambling; six conventions issued statements opposing some aspect relating to alcoholic beverages; five conventions urged Baptist concern and efforts at prison reform; and several others resolved on drug abuse, abortion, pornography, and other issues.

Two conventions adopted resolutions relating to a theological controversy on the national level of the denomination, and the Indiana convention defeated two proposals aimed at censoring "liberal" professors at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.

By a margin of only 24 votes, Virginia Baptists expressed their "favor (of) the freedom of Broadman Press to print whatever will meet the needs of cooperating churches." The motion was referring to decisions by the Southern Baptist Convention to recall and rewrite the Broadman Bible Commentary because it was not consistent with the conservative views of the majority of the messengers.

Maryland Baptists deplored "the tragic and unnecessary controversy" over the commentary, but commended selection of Southern Seminary professor Clyde Francisco to rewrite the commentary.

Most of the convention sessions were characterized by observers as harmonious and peaceful, with the emphasis on conducting the work of the conventions and evangelism and missions. Even those where the issues of race relations and baptism questions sparked national interest in most cases could fit those descriptions.

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#### Seminary Lecturer Compares Films to Jesus' Parables

11/30/71

LOUISVILLE (BP)--The use of the movie projector to communicate the Christian message is similar to Jesus' use of parables to convey his message, said a special lecturer at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary here.

Jesus spoke in parables because that was the best means to convey his message, said G. William Jones, associate professor of film arts at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He added that film in our day presents the best means to communicate these ideas.

Jones said Jesus used parables to keep from forcing his message into legalistic, propositional statements. "Parables reached out to involve persons while letting them apply the basic teaching in their life setting," he said.

In the same way as parables, movies tell the Christian message in a way which involves the total person, and leaves the individual free to apply Christian teachings to his individual life, he said.

Jones made the comparison of parables and movies during the annual Gheens Lecturers in Practical Ministry at Southern Seminary. A Methodist minister, Jones considers himself a "minister of film."

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Also during the lectureship, Jones said that "the only way a man hears is when it applies to his life situation, and successful films captivate our age better than any other art form."

Jones also said that Christians as well as others need to understand that contemporary movies have an educational dimension that can directly relate to Christians.

Jones, a member of the controversial President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, devoted one dialogue session at the seminary to discussion of the commission's report.

"If you want to get rid of this (pornography) you first need an effective program of sexual education," the lecturer said. That (sexual education) is the real enemy of pornography," he continued.

It is "sheer, driving curiosity that drives the young to pornography," he said. By educating people properly about sex, you will only then eliminate the curiosity about it that provides a catalyst for the pornography manufacturers, he added.

Jones also said that churches have a definite role to play in educating people of all ages properly about sex.

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#### Missionaries in Indonesia Meet to Clarify Decisions

11/30/71

BANDUNG, Indonesia (BP)-- Southern Baptist missionaries in Indonesia held a rare called meeting here "to resolve questions and clarify misunderstandings growing out of unusually far-reaching decisions (made) at the 1971 mission meeting last July," missionary William N. McElrath reported.

The missionaries, constituting the Indonesian Baptist Mission, spent hours discussing plans for seminary extension centers to complement the resident seminary at Semarang, Java.

They also heard reports on efforts to start small "house churches" rather than large institutional churches. The "house churches" are projected as the Baptist Mission's main future thrust in evangelism and church development.

The meeting was the mission's first called session in 12 years and the second in its 20-year history. The first was held in 1959. Both were scheduled to make it possible for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board administrator for Southeast Asia to attend, said McElrath.

Although the two called meetings grew out of differing situations, some of the same topics were discussed, such as missionary working relationships with the Foreign Mission Board and with Indonesian Baptists, the missionary's proper role, and how best to strengthen indigenous churches.

In 1959 there were 60 Southern Baptists under appointment to Indonesia; in 1971 there are 112.

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#### Shipboard Conversions Reported in Indonesia

11/30/71

BANDUNG, Indonesia (BP)-- Unusual evangelistic response aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Enterprise has been reported by R. Keith Parks, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board area secretary for Southeast Asia.

Parks, who is spending this year in Singapore, spoke at a called meeting of Southern Baptist missionaries in Indonesia.

According to Parks, the Enterprise made two recent stops in Singapore. During the first visit, several Christians among the 5,000 crewmen made a prayer covenant with members of Singapore's International Baptist Church.

Seven men agreed to meet for prayer at seven o'clock every morning--"till Jesus comes, or till the ship gets back to California," one of them was quoted.

Within three weeks, 37 other men were converted and five were called to preach, so the seven praying sailors told their Baptist prayer partners in Singapore, Parks said.

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