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Commentary, New President, Bylaws
 R structure Probable SBC Issues

By Jim Newton

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PHILADELPHIA (BP)--A motion to recall and rewrite an entire 12-volume Bible commentary "from a conservative viewpoint" is expected to start the miscellaneous business before the Southern Baptist Convention meeting here June 6-8.

The 11.8 million member convention will also elect a new president and vote on several recommendations initiating a reorganization of SBC structure, and will act on procedures for motions on the internal affairs of its agencies.

More than 13,000 "messengers" from churches throughout the nation are expected to attend the three-day meeting at Philadelphia's Civic Center. Evangelist Billy Graham and Apollo 16 Astronaut James B. Irwin will be major speakers.

Business sessions for the nation's largest Protestant denomination will get underway Tuesday morning, June 6. In the three days, there will be nearly four hours devoted to miscellaneous business from the floor and more than eight hours of reports and recommendations from committees and agencies.

A Southern Baptist pastor from Los Angeles, Gwin W. Turner, has given public notice that he plans to introduce a motion in the opening business session requesting the recall and rewriting of the 12-volume Broadman Bible Commentary.

An ad hoc group called the Fellowship of Conservative Southern Baptists has endorsed the motion Turner plans to introduce, according to a news release issued by the group from Naples, Fla.

Turner said his motion will read: "That because a large segment of the material of the entire set of the Broadman Bible Commentary (thus far published) is out of harmony with the spirit and letter of the 'Baptist Faith and Message' adopted by this convention, we request that the Sunday School Board withdraw from further sale the entire set, seek a new, conservative editor, enlist a group of thoroughly conservative writers, and rewrite the entire set from a conservative viewpoint."

Turner, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Mar Vista, a Los Angeles suburb, had made a similar motion at the Southern Baptist Convention in Denver in 1970 regarding the first volume of the commentary, covering Genesis and Exodus. By a vote of 5,394 to 2,170, the Denver convention requested the SBC Sunday School Board, which published the commentary, to withdraw Volume I and to rewrite it "with due consideration of the conservative viewpoint."

At the Southern Baptist Convention last year in St. Louis, a motion advising the board that the 1970 request of the convention to rewrite the commentary volume "has not been followed" and asking the board to obtain another writer to revise the volume was passed by a vote of 2,672 to 2,298.

Turner said he would introduce his motion calling for the revision of the entire 12 volumes in the opening miscellaneous business session at 12:00 noon, Tuesday, June 6.

In an article written for *The Sword and the Trowel*, a privately circulated conservative publication, Turner detailed his objections to the commentary, saying he rejected the "negative criticism" used by the scholars. He further charged that the writers denied the inerrancy of the scriptures, and rejected predictive prophecies.

"The entire commentary is built upon the expressed belief of the editor, and many contributors, that the Bible is not the word of God, and so is not throughout authoritative; and therefore its religious teachings and reported historical accounts may or may not be true; and its purported prophecies are not really prophecies," Turner charged.

Editorials in at least nine Baptist state papers quickly opposed Turner's motion. Two editorials called the proposal "ridiculous." The Baptist Standard of Texas said the "splinter group" is out to wreck the fellowship of the SBC, and that the group has "pooled its ignorance."

The Louisiana Baptist Message observed that "what they now want is a bonfire--a book burning affair in the city of the Liberty Bell. It would appear that what this group really wants is a Southern Baptist creedal statement, and they would volunteer to write it. . . ."

The Kentucky Western Recorder defended the commentary, saying it would be judged "conservative" by general standards. The charge that it is not in harmony with the Baptist Faith and Message Statement is not justified, the editorial said.

The Alabama Baptist carried both an editorial opposing the motion and an article by John Jeffers, Alabama member of the SBC Sunday School Board. Jeffers wrote that much more is at stake than a 12-volume commentary.

"What is at stake is the entire publishing ministry of the Sunday School Board and ultimately every other board and agency of this convention," wrote Jeffers, pastor of First Baptist Church, Auburn, Ala.

"What this amounts to (passage of the motion) is transferring the responsibility of an elected board of trustees to a majority of approximately 15,000 Southern Baptists who happen to be present and voting at a given session. . . . This would result in nothing less than chaos in our publishing ministry.

Jeffers said he hoped there would be a motion to table Turner's proposal "before too much damage is done."

In a statement released to Baptist Press, James L. Sullivan, executive secretary-treasurer of the Sunday School Board said that the board "is anxious to be responsive to the desires of the convention."

Adding that the board has tried to respond "to the spirit and letter" of the actions by the two previous conventions concerning the commentary, Sullivan said that if the matter again arises in Philadelphia, "We are anxious to have full discussion there in order to bring this project to a proper conclusion."

Expressing support for a proposed new bylaw providing procedure for handling motions from the floor dealing with internal matters of SBC agencies, Sullivan added that if the new bylaw is passed, he felt the convention should provide "the necessary two-thirds vote to afford the Sunday School Board an opportunity to know the will of the convention in the commentary matter."

He was referring to a new bylaw which the SBC Executive Committee will recommend, which would refer to the elected trustees any motions made from the floor dealing "with internal operations or programs of an agency." The agency would be required to report on the motion the next year, unless the convention votes by a two-thirds majority to consider it immediately.

The Executive Committee will recommend two other bylaw changes seeking to clarify a parliamentary ruling last year which interpreted a bylaw to mean that any motion dealing with an agency's work must be referred to the SBC Executive Committee. The proposed changes would stipulate that these bylaws would apply to recommendations by an agency of the convention which had not been previously published, not to motions from the floor.

Editorials in three Baptist state papers have supported the proposed bylaw changes, saying they would prevent a crowd of 13,000 people from being "stampeded into witch hunts," according to the Baptist Standard of Texas.

Added the Kentucky Western Recorder: "It is wise to provide some self-limitations to protect ourselves from hasty actions based on emotion more than on full knowledge and reflection." The Baptist New Mexican agreed: "We would largely destroy the useful function of any of our agencies and their boards by attempting to manage them from the convention floor."

But the Indiana Baptist strongly opposed the new Bylaw 17, charging it is unconstitutional, unBaptistic, and unnecessary. The bylaw would deny the messengers the right to "direct" the denomination guaranteed in the constitution, it would violate Baptist polity and the democratic process, and it would not be necessary since a motion to refer is always in order, argued the editorial. Calling for the defeat of the new Bylaw 17, the Indiana editorial supported, however, the two other bylaw changes.

The SBC Executive Committee, in addition to the bylaw changes, will also recommend adoption of a record \$32.8 million budget, and three structure changes in organization.

It will recommend reorganization of the boards of the SBC Brotherhood Commission and Radio-Television Commission, and that the functions and work of the SBC Stewardship Commission be transferred instead to the Executive Committee.

If approved, the proposal would abolish the Stewardship Commission as an agency of the convention, effective in 1973 after approval by two successive conventions.

The Executive Committee will also report on disposition of nine matters referred to it for action by the convention last year. Two will report the response of the Sunday School Board explaining why the board should continue the position of "doctrinal reader" and why the name "Broadman" should not be dropped from the title of the Broadman Bible Commentary.

A new convention president will be elected to succeed Carl E. Bates, pastor of First Baptist Church, Charlotte, N.C., who has served two terms and is ineligible for re-election.

At least four Baptist state papers have carried editorials or articles speculating on who might be nominated from the floor for president, all pointing out that no one will know for sure until the election at 3:00 p.m., Tuesday, June 6.

Listed in a story in the April 19 issue of the Baptist Standard were five possible nominees, three from Texas. The list included Mrs. Marie Mathis of Waco, Tex., an administrative staff member for Baylor University and president of the SBC Woman's Missionary Union; John R. Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church Houston and president of the SBC Pastors Conference; James E. Coggin, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth; Owen Cooper, industrialist from Yazoo City, Miss., and chairman of the SBC Executive Committee; and Fred B. Rhodes, deputy administrator of the Veterans Administration and former vice president of the SBC.

The Philadelphia Convention will mark the first time Southern Baptists have met here since the convention was organized in 1845. Three American Baptist Convention ministers are scheduled to speak on the program.

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Astronaut James Irwin
Replaces Nixon at SBC

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5/18/72

PHILADELPHIA (BP)--Astronaut James B. Irwin, the command pilot for Apollo 16 and the first Southern Baptist to walk on the moon, will speak on the program of the Southern Baptist Convention in June instead of President Richard M. Nixon.

President Nixon, who had expressed hopes of addressing the convention, informed convention officials in mid-April he would not be able to accept the engagement because of a schedule conflict with his trip to Russia and follow-up responsibilities.

The chairman of the SBC committee on order of business, Lee Porter of Bellaire, Tex., announced that Col. Irwin would bring a devotional message instead.

Another miscellaneous business session has also been added just before Col. Irwin is to speak, said Porter, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Bellaire, Tex.

The revised agenda calls for miscellaneous business from 3:45 to 4:10; and for Irwin's devotional concerning his trip to the moon from 4:10 to 4:30.

Irwin, an active Baptist layman and member of Nassau Bay Baptist Church near Houston, will also speak twice at the SBC Woman's Missionary Union Convention, Sunday night and Monday afternoon, June 4-5.

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