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California Baptists Retain Membership Prohibitions

SAN FRANCISCO (BP)--Sidestepping expected heated controversy, messengers to the Southern Baptist General Convention of California calmly defeated six constitutional amendments which would have deleted, in one form or another, prohibitions against churches accepting alien immersion or open communion.

The debate about whether to accept churches into the convention which condone taking the Lord's Supper with other Christians or accept those immersed by other denominations has gone on for five years in California.

This year's version of the debate didn't involve refusal to seat messengers, as it has in past years. Consensus of those favoring the amendments, which were defeated by wide margins, was that a convention has no right to interfere with local church autonomy in such areas.

In other action, messengers refused a motion to give California Baptist College, Riverside, a percentage of the convention's budget but did lift restraints which have kept the college leadership from making direct appeals for funds to churches and individuals in the churches.

Part of the defeated motion would have taken five per cent from the 26 per cent of the California convention's budget now going to Southern Baptist Convention causes and given equal 21 per cent shares to SBC causes and to California Baptist College.

Messengers adopted a total budget of \$3,166,749, of which \$1,610,000 is expected from Cooperative Program unified budget contributions of Southern Baptist churches in California.

Citing widespread distrust growing out of abuse of political power, one resolution said, "Separation of church and state does not mean separation of religion from government nor politics, nor should it imply the divorce of religion's basic moral and ethical principles from the conduct of public affairs."

It urged President Nixon to "call our country to a national day of prayer and repentance" and affirmed "trust in the basic principles of the American system of democracy. . . ."

Other resolutions urged support of programs of energy conservation and expressed appreciation for the 21-year presidency of Harold Graves at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif.

Paul Brooks Leath, pastor of Truett Memorial Baptist Church, Long Beach, Calif., was elected president.

Next year's convention is scheduled Nov. 12-14 at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles.

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Costumed Group Invades
Virginia Baptist Gathering

11/19/73

RICHMOND (BP)--Two horsemen, accompanied by a costumed group of followers on foot, stormed First Baptist Church here, disrupting the opening session of the 150th annual meeting of the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

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According to reports, the horsemen dismounted and surged with their followers into the sanctuary, where the church's pastor, Luther Joe Thompson, was welcoming "messengers" to the statewide Southern Baptist gathering.

But the visitors' mission, planned for its impact, was peaceful. Dressed in the costumes of persons who might have attended the first Virginia Baptist annual meeting, they cheerfully greeted their 20th century "counterparts," launching three-days of sesquicentennial celebration, which paid tribute to Baptist leaders of the past who endured persecution rather than deny their beliefs.

Virginia Baptists interspersed business with the sesquicentennial celebration, adopting a \$5.7 million Cooperative Program unified budget and passing resolutions calling for religious freedom, a free press and honesty in government; opposing parimutuel gambling and relaxation of state alcohol control laws and urging cooperation to end the energy crisis.

Underscoring attempts "both from without and within" Southern Baptist ranks to dilute basic principles of religious freedom, a resolution reaffirmed "the autonomy of the local church, separation of church and state, the right of the individual to interpret the word of God as he is led by the Holy Spirit. . ."

The resolution also reaffirmed "the freedom from creedal and doctrinal pronouncements as binding requirements" and the "freedom to worship God according to our conscience without fear of duress or punishment."

The messengers also approved statements "affirming the essential relationship of free press and religious liberty, the one being essential to the other" and applauding "the free press in its diligent pursuit of truth in the face of lies and attempts at suppression."

But, after some debate, messengers accepted a motion from the floor to also "deplor and condemn some segments of the press and other news media that abuse freedom of the press by suppression of the truth and by publication of gross misrepresentations and lies."

Virginia Baptists also deplored "abuse of electronic surveillance and computer personal data files as dangerous threats to individual freedoms, both civil and religious," called for resistance to encroachments on religious liberties by "insisting on the public's right to know, by calling for clear limitations on secrecy in government and by becoming personally active in political processes, demonstrating a Christian witness at all times."

Commenting on the national political crisis, a resolution cited the "grave loss of confidence" in government and the "apparent lack of integrity on the part of some government officials."

It called for "honesty and truth in all statements by public officials," supported "in prayer and by conviction the just and effective conclusion of the Watergate affair" and called for "immediate effort (by all persons) at all levels of government to commit themselves to regaining the confidence of the American people and to act in ways which shall earn such confidence."

The messengers received a report from the convention's long-range planning committee and set aside time for protracted discussion of it next year. A spokesman said the report, which deals with many aspects of convention structure and relationships, will be a focal point at next year's convention.

Charles G. Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church, Roanoke, Va., where next year's convention will be held, Nov. 12-14, was elected president.

Of the \$5.7 million budget, messengers allotted 38 per cent to Southern Baptist Convention causes and 62 per cent to Virginia causes.

The three-day meeting featured dramatic sights and sounds of Virginia Baptists from 1715-1973, including inspirational, musical and dramatic presentations and an address by V. Carney Hargroves, president of the Baptist World Alliance.

Hawaii Baptists Report
Financial, Numerical Growth

WAHIAWA, Hawaii (BP)--Hawaii Baptists adopted a record budget, noted increases in membership and missions giving and passed resolutions related to the political scene at their 31st annual meeting held at First Baptist Church here.

Of the adopted budget of \$363,618, the convention expects \$125,000 from the Cooperative Program contributions of the 45 congregations in the Hawaii Baptist Convention. Twenty-five per cent of the Cooperative Program receipts will go to the Southern Baptist world missions budget.

Reports show missions giving almost doubled, increasing from \$162,222 in 1972 to \$300,125 in 1973, and that membership in the 45 congregations increased by 807 to 10,428.

The messengers adopted a resolution favoring legislation limiting campaign contributions and another calling upon political leaders to commit themselves to the Christian standard of honesty in their relationships, justice in their dealings and compassion for their enemies.

A further resolution called on Hawaii Baptists to become more involved in the support of both issues and candidates and to vote only for candidates who will clarify their stands on issues in the 1974 election.

Allen Au, the fourth layman to serve as president since the organization of the Hawaii Baptist Convention in 1943, was re-elected as president. Au is president of a realty corporation.

Messengers also heard a report on the development of Hawaii Baptist Academy. Three years ago, a spokesman said, the convention voted to lease two-and-a-half acres of the academy's property to a condominium developer to secure funds to help construct a new school building.

After repeated delays because of financial and zoning problems, messengers learned, construction will begin on both the condominium and the school building in April 1974.

Edmond R. Walker, executive secretary-treasurer of the convention since 1963, challenged the convention to give priority to the task of reaching people for Christ because of the fast-growing population of Hawaii.

"Hawaii Baptists have come to a turning point in reaching people and we will reach people in accordance with our commitment and compassion," he said.

In recognition of his 10 years of service as executive secretary-treasurer, Walker was presented with an inscribed hand-carved Hawaiian "calabash" in traditional Hawaiian style.

The 1974 convention will be held in historic Lahaina, Maui, Nov. 6-8.

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Tennessee Convention
Puts on 'the Dog'

11/19/73

MEMPHIS (BP)--Tennessee Baptists were honored at their annual meeting here by the presence of Cricket, a dog that may have attended more Southern Baptist and Tennessee Baptist Convention meetings than any animal in history.

Cricket, the chihuahua pet of Mr. and Mrs. Harold D. Gregory of Nashville, has attended seven Southern Baptist Convention meetings and was on hand for the 1965 Baptist World Alliance meeting in Miami Beach.

The Tennessee Baptist meeting here was Cricket's seventh state meeting, said Mrs. Gregory, whose husband is superintendent of missions for the Nashville Baptist Association.

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Besides Cricket and his owners, the Tennessee convention was attended by more than 1,300 "messengers" who voted a record \$7 million Cooperative Program (unified) budget amid an atmosphere of "calm" and looking toward next year's centennial meeting in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

During the three-day annual meeting at Eudora Baptist Church, messengers to the Tennessee convention increased the number of members on committees and deferred a proposed constitution change that would increase the executive board membership.

Messengers also elected Grant L. Jones, pastor of First Baptist Church, Sevierville, as president. Jones and two vice-presidents of the convention were elected by acclamation, giving emphasis to a note of "fellowship and unity" exemplified throughout the convention, a spokesman said.

In a convention marked by a lack of controversy and few resolutions, the messengers voted to distribute two-thirds of Cooperative Program (undesignated) \$7 million budget to Tennessee Baptist work and the rest to SBC causes.

It was thought prior to the annual meeting that an offer to give \$5 million to Union University if the school would move to the Memphis area would create a rift during the convention, but the offer was withdrawn prior to the meeting and wasn't an issue.

Messengers recognized Mrs. Eura Lannom, assistant to the editor of the Baptist and Reflector, news publication of the Tennessee convention, and Charles Norton, secretary of the convention's church training department, for 30 years service each, and Miss Beulah Peoples, promotion director of Woman's Missionary Union for Tennessee Baptists, for 15 years service.

Eight of Tennessee Baptists' Royal Ambassadors (RAs), a Southern Baptist program for boys, were recognized, bringing honor to their home state when they were given National Service Aide awards, the highest achievement for an RA.

The boys, all 17 years old, constitute the largest number from a single state holding the top award, according to William E. Highsmith, RA secretary for the Tennessee convention. Highsmith said there are five service aide awards. "These boys earned all five and have reached the top rung."

The five service aide requirements call for 750 total hours of service to the boys' church and denomination (150 hours per each award level).

The 1974 Tennessee convention is scheduled for November 12-14 in the Middle Tennessee State University convocation center in Murfreesboro

As for Cricket, he has learned something worthwhile from all his exposure to Baptists, Mrs. Gregory said.

"Cricket places his paws on the chair at the table and bows his head for the blessing," Mrs. Gregory said. "He does that all the time while we read the Bible and have prayer at breakfast." She added, "He is a creature of habit. . . and has been doing this for five or six years."