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July 2, 1974

Editorials Measure  
Dallas Convention

74-8

By Baptist Press

Editors of Southern Baptist state newspapers, reacting to the 117th session of the Southern Baptist Convention completed recently in Dallas, could all agree on one thing--it was the biggest ever, with a record 18,190 messengers registered.

And their consensus was, too, that it was a convention of unity and harmony, one without theological controversy, one which maintained the status quo on such issues as women, abortion, peace and amnesty, and one presided over by a president, Owen Cooper, whom they praised unanimously as one of the best SBC presidents ever.

Unifying factors, editors agreed, were Southern Baptists' continuing emphasis on evangelism and missions, their belief in the centrality of the local church and their ability to find more things to agree upon than to squabble over.

Whether biggest was best, however, drew mixed reactions.

The SBC's hugeness troubled two editors. "Bigness can be a monster which devours us," commented Edgar Cooper of the Florida Baptist Witness. The convention is getting so huge "that democratic business meetings are impossible." Cooper recommended improving ways for messengers to get attention at floor microphones. E. Eugene Whitlow of the Baptist New Mexican urged limiting the number of messengers eligible to register and until that happens limiting attendance on the floor to registered messengers only.

The television image magnification system, which projected speakers larger-than-life on two 24 x 32 foot screens, was widely hailed as a redeeming feature of the convention in the cavernous, flat, elongated Dallas Convention Center.

But the quality of the convention itself drew no unanimity from editors.

"Generally speaking, it was a constructive meeting," wrote James F. Cole, editor of Louisiana's Baptist Message. John J. Hurt of the Baptist Standard in Texas, Joe Odle of the Baptist Record in Mississippi and Hudson Baggett of the Alabama Baptist called in either the best or one of the best.

"Let's be honest, it wasn't a great convention," wrote Marse Grant of North Carolina's Biblical Recorder. "Some would even call it mediocre. No earthshaking decisions were made. The mood of America was reflected in convention discussions and since this mood is anything but stable at the moment, the convention came nearer to going backward at some points."

C.R. Daley of Kentucky's Western Recorder labeled it "a delightful and enjoyable experience" but one which "will not be regarded as an epochal meeting which gave new directions..."

The convention's newly elected president, Jaroy Weber, a Lubbock, Tex., pastor, drew editorial comment on his ability to lead from eight of 23 state editors who have editorialized thus far on the convention.

Seven of the eight indicated Weber would serve well, most seeming to base opinions on his responses at his press conference after his election was announced. The eighth, Gene Puckett of the Maryland Baptist, adopted a wait and see attitude, with this explanation:

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"Although his (Weber's) name had been mentioned several months ago as a possible candidate on the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship ticket, nothing was mentioned in recent weeks about his running," Puckett wrote. "In fact, he repeatedly said he would not permit his name to be put in nomination, especially by those identified with the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship.

"But under pressure, he yielded at the last minute and was nominated by Adrian Rogers, pastor in Memphis, Tenn., who recently was named to the board of directors of the Fellowship," Puckett said.

"In a press conference following his election," the Maryland editor continued, "Weber insisted he had never been affiliated with the Fellowship, but that he only had friends in the group as he did with other groups. He brushed aside the big play given him in the last issue of the Fellowship's publication.

"Weber says he deplores labels," Puckett said, "insisting they are always relative terms. He describes himself as a conservative, Bible-believing and preaching minister.

"The new president is to be commended for his statements in the press conference. Since they are now part of the public record, his performance will be judged by them, and the Fellowship stands in danger of being accused of misrepresenting the true situation. Weber's statements in the press conference suggest the Fellowship adopted him when he made no application. Time will be the revealer and judge of the entire situation," Puckett said.

Jack Harwell of Georgia's Christian Index wrote that he had not voted for Weber because of his endorsement prior to the convention by the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship but now believes that Weber "appears to be a Providential choice as our new leader."

Harwell elaborated: "In every public comment since his election, Dr. Weber has spoken out firmly for a middle of the road, sensible and balanced approach to every issue facing Baptists," said Harwell, reflecting sentiments of editors who commented on Weber. "We believe he will maintain this level-headed approach throughout his presidency and will be a unifying force among diverse elements within the SBC."

As for divisiveness over theological controversies, which has been a convention hallmark of years gone by, the editors saw none in the convention proper. Harwell, however, noted that the "only really divisive notes we heard in Dallas were not sounded at the convention. They were made at the meeting of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship, which scheduled its own meeting in Dallas during SBC week."

Harwell referred to comments at that meeting by William Powell of Atlanta, the Fellowship's president and editor of its publication, who charged that the rewritten Volume I of the Broadman Bible Commentary appeared to hold the same theological views as the first one and that Baptists should write the new author. Previous conventions ordered the original volume banned and rewritten by a different author.

At the Dallas meeting, Powell also struck out at the spring issue of Review and Expositor, theological journal of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Another editor, W. Ross Edwards of Missouri's Word and Way, in contrast to Harwell, said, "We are not aware of any divisive group seeking to bring pressure on the convention." Edwards spoke at the Fellowship's Dallas meeting, expressing his support of it.

Commenting editorially on reported SBC liberalism, Odle said, "Charges sometimes are made the convention is drifting toward liberalism, but there was no evidence of this in Dallas. Actually, the 1974 convention moved more to the right than to the left... Southern Baptists are not a creedal people, but there is enough unity in their beliefs concerning the great doctrinal truths which make them Baptists to bind them together as a denomination." He denied any impending SBC split.

Harwell said debate "about freedom for women and SBC recognition of female ordination documented anew that Baptists are an ultra-conservative people. They can be swayed by a lot of emotion and oratory, but they can't be led to question or delete Biblical authority."

Daley saw messengers' actions as taking the correct course by "refusing to endorse the ultra-conservative view or the ultra-progressive view on theological and social issues. They espoused positions which should not alienate any Baptists but let all Baptists feel they can cooperate in a world wide missionary effort, though they are not agreed at every point," he said.

On the question of women's rights, which was most clearly identifiable as the main issue at the convention, 14 of 23 editors who have thus far editorialized mentioned the issue not at all or only in passing. That, of course, doesn't include a sampling of opinion they may have expressed on the issue prior to the convention or may yet express.

Of the remaining nine, two mentioned the debate on ordination of women only, with no clearcut personal opinion except that it is a local church decision; four mentioned the quota only, with three clearcut opinions; and one dealt with both ordination and quota, with no clearcut opinion.

The consensus of those discussing the defeated proposal for one-fifth women on boards and agencies was that a quota was unwise but that women are considered important in places of SBC services.

"This doesn't mean the convention resents women on its boards--in fact, some already serve on such," said Robert Hastings of the Illinois Baptist. "These defeats simply mean if we start setting quotas for every special group, we will soon have a hodge podge."

"Although the proposal for a quota was defeated, its purpose was accomplished," said John Roberts of South Carolina's Baptist Courier. "More women will be elected to boards."

Roberts and Hastings joined some other editors in the same opinion of a defeat of a proposal for a quota of minority groups.

Cooper of the Florida Baptist Witness editorialized on the full question of how the convention dealt with women.

"Shades of Adam--the Southern Baptist Convention has been ribbed," his editorial began. "Mrs. Richard Sappington, the wife of a Houston, Texas, pastor, did it again." Cooper mentioned her success last year in Portland and discussed her efforts in Dallas.

The Christian Life Commission's statement "included a general statement reaffirming the Bible teaching that every individual is of infinite worth and 'that in Christ, there is neither male nor female...' and pledging to work to eliminate sexual discrimination. It also urged the rejection of 'discrimination against women in job placement, by providing equal pay for equal work and by electing women to positions of leadership for which God's gift and the Holy Spirit's calling equip them." Cooper wrote.

Cooper noted that Mrs. Sappington took this to mean approval of ordination and successfully moved its tabling.

"Stick with it, CLC!" Cooper said. "One of these days we may vote to liberate something that needs liberating."

Grant took strong exception to publicity seekers at the SBC. "Chief among these in Dallas was the lady in white, Mrs. Richard Sappington...who is exploiting the current interest in women's causes. She enjoyed the spotlight so much in Portland last year that she was on stage again this time. It's sad that quotes from her dominated the news wires, giving a vastly distorted picture of the convention to the nation...People will get sick of her and will turn her off when the saturation point is reached in her crusade, whatever that crusade is," Grant said.

Three editors--Alvin C. Shackelford of the Indiana Baptist, O.L. Bayless of the Rocky Mountain Baptist and Baggett in Alabama decried what they feel is cronyism in selection of members of SBC committees, board and agencies.

"Over the past 40 years," commented Bayless, "it is most interesting to see how a certain group of men through the SBC have been able to maintain board positions continuously."

Shackleford said, "This year's committee on boards has asked the SBC Executive Committee to study some aspects of these elections. This study could be expanded to the whole process." (BP)

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Students Name Center  
After Late Missionary

7/2/74

FLORENCE, Kan. (BP)--A learning center at Haskell Indian Junior College here has been named by students in honor of the late Samuel Morris, who was a Southern Baptist home missionary 25 years until his death in December, 1972.

The name, Morris Learning Center, was chosen by a committee of the college's student senate, which received nominations from the student body-at-large.

Morris, an American Indian of the Sac and Fox Tribe, became the pastor of Haskell Baptist Mission in 1969, across the street from the college, serving there until his death.

Friends said of Morris, a native of Cushing, Okla., that he had a tremendous impact on the college's students. The school, with an annual enrollment of about 1,200, draws Indians from throughout the United States and is funded by the U.S. Department of Indian Affairs.

Haskell President Wallace E. Galluzze paid Morris tribute:

"Thank God that our students had the benefit of his counsel, kindness, understanding, guidance and encouragement. Students are the only ones who can testify to this. All we can do is bear witness.

"Thank God that the Haskell staff and members of his church and community had the benefit of his ministry when they were in need. I thank God that He sent Sam my way because he had the courage to love and comfort me when I felt much alone."

Morris' widow, Olelah is on reserve status with the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and is employed by Haskell College. A son, Joe, is assistant basketball coach for the college's conference championship team.

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Harold K. Graves Elected  
AATS Vice President

7/2/74

ATLANTA, Ga. (BP)--Harold K. Graves, president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif., was elected vice president of the American Association of Theological Schools, (AATS) in the United States and Canada at their annual meeting here.

Graves was elected to a two-year term, 1974-76. Frederick W. Whittaker, president of Bangor Theological School, Bangor, Maine, was elected president. Jesse H. Ziegler is executive director of AATS, with offices of Vandalia, Ohio.

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