



**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Southern Baptist Response  
To Refugees Plight Urged

By Gwen Long

ATLANTA (BP)--As the plight of Indochinese refugees worsens, Southern Baptists have been urged to press their senators and representatives to fund relief efforts and raise immigration quotas.

"Southern Baptists must translate sympathies into action and do it quickly, if the lives of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees are to be saved," said Gene Tunnell, consultant on refugees at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Tunnell urged Southern Baptist action as:

--Refugees continue to pour out of their Communist-dominated countries in record numbers, and in many cases are being turned away from refugee camps, many to die of starvation and exposure.

--The United States Congress has, as yet, failed to act on either immigration quotas or funding of refugee relief. Federal funds to help refugees ended April 29, and no new appropriation has been passed.

The plight of the refugees is underscored by news reports that Malaysia already has deported 13,000 refugees, escorting them out to sea in unseaworthy boats. The country threatens to continue the deportations until other nations step up resettlement efforts.

Also, Thailand has forced more than 45,000 Cambodians back into their war-torn country, where many people are reported dying of starvation.

In Hong Kong, refugees are arriving at the rate of 10,000 per month and authorities estimate the refugee population in Southeast Asia--now at 350,000--will swell to a half million by September.

Tunnell also urged Southern Baptists to call on President Carter to use emergency measures in rescuing the boat people who've already been sent to sea.

In addition, he said, the United States should set up more refugee camps and raise the immigration quotas from 7,000 to 14,000 per month.

"Although Southern Baptists have increased their sponsorship of refugees, our efforts are still inadequate compared to the denomination's size," he said. So far this year, the 13.2-million member denomination has resettled 311 people. Only one percent of the 35,000-plus churches of the denomination have participated in relief efforts, Tunnell said.

By comparison, he said, American Baptists, with one-sixth the number of churches, resettle 10 times that number of refugees, Tunnel noted.

Flagging sponsorship is not the only problem, he said. Lack of federal funds also is contributing to the problem. Currently, 7,000 persons accepted for sponsorship are still in camps because federal funds for refugee assistance ended April 29 and another appropriations bill has not been passed.

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"Southern Baptists need to express their support for funding the rescue and resettlement," Tunnell said, "because in a time of national economic troubles, Congress is leery of giving money without feeling public support."

In addition to contacting local representatives and senators, Southern Baptists may write members of Senate and House committees which are directly concerned, he said.

Members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary are Edward M. Kennedy, Massachusetts, chairman; Birch Bayh, Indiana; Robert C. Byrd, West Virginia; Joseph R. Biden Jr., Delaware; John C. Culver, Iowa; Howard M. Metzenbaum, Ohio; Dennis DeConcini, Arizona; Patrick J. Leahy, Vermont; Max Baucus, Montana; Howell T. Heflin, Alabama; Strom Thurmond, South Carolina; Charles McC Mathias Jr., Maryland; Paul Laxalt, Nevada; Orrin G. Hatch, Utah; Robert Dole, Kansas; Thad Cochran, Mississippi; and Alan K. Simpson, Wyoming.

Members of the House Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship and International Law, chaired by Elizabeth Holtzman, New York, are George E. Danielson, California; Sam B. Hall Jr., Texas; Herbert E. Harris, Virginia; Michael D. Barnes, Maryland; Richard C. Shelby, Alabama; Hamilton Fish Jr., New York; M. Caldwell Butler, Virginia; and Daniel E. Lundgren, California.

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1979 SBC: The Bitter-Sweet Taste Lingers

By Robert O'Brien

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptist state newspaper editors commenting on the recent 122nd annual Southern Baptist Convention in Houston saw it as a bitter-sweet example of Southern Baptists at their worst and best.

The best, they said, came in the form of an extravaganza in the Astrodome in which more than 48,000 Southern Baptists, plus many others viewing satellite telecasts around the country, saw 1,100 missionaries dedicated and another 1,200 volunteer for missionary service.

In fact, they described that Bold Mission Thrust Rally as unparalleled in SBC and perhaps Christian history.

And SBC President Jimmy Allen, architect of the rally, got high marks from the editors, both for his efforts on behalf of missions and his balance, graciousness and good humor as he presided over potentially explosive business sessions.

One editor, Edgar Cooper of the Florida Baptist Witness, went as far as to make a "Bold Suggestion" that Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas, succeed Baker James Cauthen, retiring chief executive of the SBC Foreign Mission Board.

The worst aspects of the convention, the editors said, came in the form of unprecedented political maneuvering, mixed with allegations of voting irregularities, which took place during successful efforts to elect a president committed to biblical inerrancy as an issue.

Not since the vitriolic 1970 convention in Denver, in which Southern Baptists battled over volume one of the Broadman Bible Commentary, has a convention produced such fire and brimstone.

For several years after Denver, state Baptist editors used that as the benchmark for describing the mood of conventions. With that session fading into memory, the 1979 convention will certainly take its place when comparisons are made.

The battle waxed hot as various gradations of conservatives called each other names and attached labels, which, one observer said, "may be okay for cans and boxes but is unacceptable for people." Ironically, some who spoke freely of "liberals" bridled furiously at the designation "ultraconservative" and newsmen became confused over what to call whom.

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"It is hard to know who is wearing the white hats and who is wearing the black hats; sometimes the hats look gray," declared R. G. Puckett, editor of the Maryland Baptist.

While expressing strong distaste for the political maneuverings surrounding the election of Adrian Rogers as SBC president, the editors, impressed by the sincerity he displayed in a two-hour special news conference with them, urged Baptists to support and pray for him and give him a chance.

Rogers did not back away from his charges that seminaries and colleges have some "liberal" faculty members. But he declared that he had had no part of the political process which elected him, and he disavowed the methods.

That political process, widely reported before and during the SBC, involved meetings in 15 states and operatives in other states over a 14-month period. Houston Appeals Court Judge Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas organized the effort to elect a president committed to biblical inerrancy.

At the convention, the "inerrancy" forces caucused in rooms, complete with hostesses and refreshments, in the skyboxes overlooking the Summit floor. Floor men operated below to conduct the efforts to elect Rogers, while reports indicated that buses brought in messengers simply to vote on that issue.

In the midst of all of this, enough evidence of voting and registration irregularities presented itself to cause Lee Porter, SBC registration secretary, to resolve to conduct a full investigation even before the SBC voted to instruct that action.

Editors virtually unanimously condemned the political maneuvering with descriptions ranging from "horrendous" to "smelly." Observers could remember no parallel in SBC history, although the "conservatives" said it was something the "liberals" had done for years. Not so, responded Julian Pentecost, editor of Virginia's Religious Herald and C. R. Daley of Kentucky's Western Recorder. "There is no historical precedent for what they did," said Pentecost. "Politics in electing convention presidents are not new," added Daley, "but they have never been seen in such open and brazen form."

The editors who commented on it, such as Presnall Wood of the Texas Baptist Standard, Theo Sommerkamp of the Ohio Baptist Messenger, and John Roberts of the Baptist Courier in South Carolina, heartily endorsed the SBC's call for investigation of the election process. "The investigation should be completed before the Executive Committee meets in September," said Roberts. "Its findings, regardless of what they are, must be made public... We doubt that any voting irregularities were sufficient to change election results, but this opinion needs to be substantiated by truth."

"When 'groups' square off to gain or keep control of the convention, unchristian behavior often results," added Lynn Clayton of Louisiana's Baptist Message. "This kind of unethical behavior is deplorable and symptomatic of unchristian attitudes and motives. Baptists still need to learn to disagree cordially."

Besides disavowing the politics which elected him, Rogers also told the editors he would be president of "all Southern Baptists," not just of a segment. He further declared that he would not embark on a theological witch hunt, said he previously had disassociated himself from the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship, said he would not make a person's biblical interpretation or theory of inspiration a test of fellowship, and said he would operate with love in his heart, not blood in his eye. He also pledged support to the SBC's Bold Mission Thrust.

All the editors expressed a willingness to accept the words of Rogers, pastor of the 10,400-member Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., at face value and wait to see what the future holds.

In an editorial entitled "An Open Letter to Adrian Rogers," Jack Harwell of Georgia's Christian Index, reflected the spirit of the editors with this comment: "You (Rogers) are truly a dynamic person, a powerful preacher, a fervent soul winner, a gracious gentleman. Please, Dr. Rogers, use all of that dynamism, power, fervency and graciousness to rally Southern Baptists together around Bold Mission Thrust, and not to divide us around futile doctrinal extremities."

But several editors noted that the path would not be easy for Rogers.

"It seems that many 'moderate conservatives' may stand at arm's length waiting to see what directions the new administration of the president will take," said Al Shackelford of Tennessee's Baptist and Reflector. "On the other hand, the so-called 'ultraconservatives' will be watching to see if Rogers can be the 'great right hope' they desired when they supported him. Some of these seem to expect immediate results in ridding the convention of 'liberal' professors and denominational executives."

"He has a tight rope to walk with one end being held by those who agree with his views and the others by those who disagree with him," declared Daley.

In summing up the impact of the convention on Southern Baptists in the future, the editors generally agreed that only time will tell. "Who knows what its full meaning was, and any attempts to come to some kind of a conclusion would have to be labeled only speculation," said Don McGregor of Mississippi's Baptist Record.

Clayton expressed the opinion that the "inerrancy" forces, which elected only one of their pre-convention slate of candidates, "did not control the convention but they did have significant impacts on it--some of it good and some of it bad."

"The convention had its bright moments and surprises," summed up James Lee Young of the Rocky Mountain Baptist. "For one, after the pressures and aspersions cast on the six SBC seminaries, messengers reaffirmed their support of the schools... (and they)... reaffirmed their commitment to the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God, yet refused to be drawn too far in any direction by the factions."

The editors saw no sign of a split which some had predicted. "The Houston papers had proclaimed 'division in Southern Baptist ranks, and differences were evident,'" said Bob Terry of Missouri's Word and Way, "but that night (the Astrodome rally) demonstrated the commitment of Southern Baptists to the proclamation of the gospel around the world. Internal matters are not going to sidetrack Southern Baptists..."

"Despite a few flurries of ill will, the convention was one of great inspiration and challenge," declared Hudson Baggett of The Alabama Baptist.

"There could be trouble and turmoil ahead but not likely," said Daley. "The constitution of the convention puts direction of our seminaries into the hands of trustees elected by and answerable to the convention. President Rogers says he is committed to this structure. Besides, there is too much confidence among Southern Baptists in our seminaries and their leadership to allow for a witch hunt. Actually what happened in Houston could have a salutary effect. Sinners and wise teachers in Baptist seminaries and colleges will re-examine their beliefs and teachings, and integrity will require they teach according to and not contrary to the denomination's doctrinal statement or remove themselves."

"It seems that every few years Southern Baptists have the kind of convention we suffered last week," said Shackelford. "Let's hope and pray that it will be many years before the attitude and atmosphere of the 1979 SBC surface again."