



BAPTIST PRESS

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80-87

SBC Aglow With
Presidential Politics

By Robert O'Brien

ST. LOUIS (BP)—An unexpected surge of presidential politics has put snap, crackle and pop into the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, June 10-12, in St. Louis.

Adrian Rogers, elected SBC president last year in Houston, spiced up life for some 18,000 "messengers" expected to register at the Cervantes Convention Center, by refusing to accept nomination in St. Louis for a traditional second term.

The pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., declined another term, he said on May 6, because of pressing church and personal responsibilities which demanded his attention.

Within hours, SBC presidential politics—dormant but not rusty after last year's effort to elect Rogers—electrically charged the SBC atmosphere.

In the background lay a recent report that Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies, Dallas, was in the midst of a campaign to control SBC elections over the next eight to ten years in an effort to rid the SBC of those he considers to be "liberals."

Last year in Houston, a group contending for biblical inerrancy (errorlessness in the original manuscripts), led by Patterson and Houston Appeals Court Judge Paul Pressler, politicked successfully to elect Rogers.

But, in the wake of the recent report that Patterson would seek SBC control, W. A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, which sponsors the Criswell Center, disavowed Patterson's political approach. He said Patterson would withdraw from public leadership of the political movement. Criswell, however, praised Patterson's commitment to keep SBC institutions "true to the Word of God in its credibility, infallibility and inerrancy" and lauded his leadership of the Criswell Center in a statement released by the church and the center.

With speculation of all sorts rampant, names began surfacing—one quite openly, in contradiction to the usual SBC-style politics which dictates that the job seek the person, not the person seek the job.

Jimmy Stroud, pastor of Third Creek Baptist Church, a small congregation in Knoxville, Tenn., announced publicly he would run for office. "It is time," he said in a letter to editors of Baptist state newspapers, "to bring Southern Baptist politics out of the basement and give the election integrity and maturity."

"My candidacy is in contrast to the sham and hypocrisy of past campaigns carried on in secrecy until the expedient moment," he declared.

Meanwhile, other names have surfaced and projections indicate a wide-open race to elect a successor to Rogers, as well as to first vice president, Abner McCall, president of Baylor University, Waco, Texas, and second vice president, Don Touchton, a Florida pastor.

Even without presidential politics, the 123rd running of the 135-year-old SBC would have had its share of action.

Messengers will vote on a \$90 million Cooperative Program 1980-81 budget to fund the worldwide missions and educational needs of the 13.4-million-member SBC.

Even the budget, usually a routine item, gained extra attention after the SBC Foreign Mission Board said its share--\$36,059,008--was not adequate. The board will receive 48.40 percent of the Cooperative Program, down from the 48.69 percent it received in 1979-80. But, in terms of dollars, it will receive over \$2.7 million more than last year.

But the board, although frustrated that its share would not allow it to fulfill its goals for Bold Mission Thrust, will not push for action on the convention floor, according to its president, R. Keith Parks. "I don't think this matter can be properly handled from the floor," Parks said. "It's too complicated. It ought to come out as a recommendation of the Executive Committee."

Bold Mission Thrust, the SBC plan to proclaim Christ to the entire world by the close of the century, is the theme around which Southern Baptists will build the 1980 annual meeting, while dealing with a variety of other business and issues.

One such item involves changes in the SBC bylaws to tighten procedures for registration of messengers to the SBC. That grew out of an investigation of the registration at last year's convention following alleged irregularities.

The investigation, conducted by Lee Porter of Nashville, SBC registration secretary, at the request of the SBC, revealed some violations, a get-out-the-vote effort, and sloppy procedures. But it failed to turn up massive wrongdoing in the registration or in the balloting for SBC president which would have affected the victory of Rogers.

A proposed change in Bylaw 8 would stipulate that "each messenger shall register in person by presenting a completed and signed SBC messenger registration card to eliminate registration for a group of persons by one person. A suggested new Bylaw 35 includes this statement: "In order to cast a vote, a messenger must be present at the time the vote is taken. Voting by proxy is not permitted."

With the biblical inerrancy debate still a live issue, indications are that some sort of motion or resolution may come to the floor declaring that the Bible's original manuscripts were errorless "doctrinally, historically, philosophically and scientifically."

That same wording was used last year by Wayne Dehoney, pastor from Louisville, Ky., and former SBC president, in discussion preceding the SBC's vote to reaffirm the SBC's Baptist Faith and Message statement.

Some complained later that Baptist Press (BP) news accounts did not reflect the Dehoney wording, which was part of the discussion, not part of the vote which reaffirmed the Baptist Faith and Message statement as written in 1963. Since the convention, however, Baptist Press has reported the Dehoney wording in at least four news stories.

Several other issues may surface in St. Louis, including concern over infringement by government into church activities through the Employee Retirement Security Act (ERISA), use of clergy by the CIA, the selection process for SBC trustees, and debate over prayer in public schools.

The selection process for trustees has come under scrutiny during discussion of the Patterson-Pressler political efforts to name a president who would control committees which nominate trustees. The president appoints a Committee on Committees, which names a Committee on Boards to nominate trustees for the national SBC agencies for the convention to vote upon.

At least one observer, Duke McCall, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, has urged re-evaluation of the appointment process.

The school prayer issue involves efforts led by U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms and supported by a number of evangelicals, including SBC President Rogers, to remove authority from the Supreme Court, via congressional action, to decide on prayer. They would turn that over to individual states.

Opponents of that action say it would weaken the Constitution and would create a hodge-podge of laws across the country which would favor whoever was in the majority. The Supreme Court, they say, only ruled against government-prescribed prayer in schools, not against voluntary prayer. School boards, they say, should be educated to realize that.

The SBC previously has passed a resolution supporting the effect of the Supreme Court ruling.

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Prison Gates Swing
Open for Dwane Jackson

By James Lee Young

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BRECKENRIDGE, Colo. (BP)--Don't tell Dwane Jackson there's no such thing as a miracle. He'll laugh and then feel sorry for you.

Jackson points to his own life as proof miracles can happen.

On Feb. 20, Jackson was released from Fort Leavenworth Prison Camp two years before his supposed earliest possible release date.

The reason for his special release? So he could return to resort mission work in Breckenridge--again.

Jackson was sentenced to Leavenworth in August 1979 after being found guilty of wire-tapping and theft (sentenced to five years for the former, two years for the latter) in Houston. The acts for which he was tried took place in 1972. He was charged in 1974 and convicted in 1976.

At the time Jackson began serving his sentence, he had already served two months--in missions--in Breckenridge, under the sponsorship of Spring (Texas) Baptist Church.

The congregation has backed and encouraged the former Houston police officer through his many trials and struggles related to illegal acts committed when he was a narcotics officer.

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After a big drug bust Jackson and his associates split the money found on one of the drug dealers in "repayment" for personal expense and trouble involved in the case.

An illegal wiretap was also involved and Jackson says he was the one who actually hooked it up. He and nine other agents eventually went to prison on the charges of theft and illegal wiretapping. All the others are still serving time.

When the case hit the newspapers and television, Jackson and his family were members of Spring Baptist Church which he credits for strong support of his family during the crisis. He took a part-time janitorial position with the church, then became interim activities director for the large, growing church in the suburbs of metro Houston. A year later, he enrolled in seminary.

After testimonial speaking engagements that took Jackson and his wife as far as Indiana, New York and Colorado, they began to see that the Lord wanted them in mission work.

Then they met Colorado State Missions Director Don Murray, at a meeting in Retta, Texas. Jackson gave Murray his resume. The missions director's next stop, unknown to the Jacksons, was Spring Baptist Church.

While in Spring, Murray mentioned that he had met this former policeman from Houston and wondered if the pastor or anyone had heard or knew anything about Jackson. The rest is history. They did know him and recommended him for whatever God had in mind.

Murray invited the Jacksons to come to Colorado and when they saw Breckenridge, they knew immediately that was where God wanted them.

They moved to the area, found property for their home and ministry, and began their work last summer. Then the court order came through instructing Jackson to report for sentencing and then prison.

The Jacksons left Colorado and six months later, Jackson--to his own amazement--walked through the gates of Leavenworth, a free man except for his special probationary status.

"Many thousands of people prayed and supported us, giving me freedom to minister for our Lord and victory in the end, when Feb. 19, God opened the prison doors and they sent me away, literally," Jackson told the Rocky Mountain Baptist.

The stipulation on his being released was that he return to Breckenridge to continue the ministry the jail sentence had so rudely interrupted last summer.

Are there miracles today?

Jackson will tell you there are.

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Sullivan Resting In
Nashville Hospital

Baptist Press
5/29/80

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--James L. Sullivan, retired president of the Baptist Sunday School Board and former Southern Baptist Convention president, entered Baptist Hospital in Nashville May 27 for observation.

He entered the hospital suffering chest pains. It was discovered he had an enlarged heart surrounded by fluid. Doctors drained the fluid and were able to reduce Sullivan's heartbeat from 160 per minute to 80. Doctors say Sullivan is to have no outside appointments or travel for two months. The fluid was caused by allergies.

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