



BAPTIST PRESS

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Florida Baptists Avoid Controversy in Meeting

PANAMA CITY, Fla. (BP)--Messengers to the Florida Baptist Convention avoided controversy as they held the 119th annual session of Florida's largest Protestant denomination.

According to observers, Richard Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church in Phoenix, Ariz., "clipped the wings of controversy" in an address to the pastors' conference on the eve of the meeting.

"Jackson set the mood of the convention when he exhorted Florida Baptists to concentrate on missions and evangelism and the challenges of Bold Mission Thrust to win the world to Jesus Christ by 2000," one participant said.

"He told us we could not do the job if we waste time arguing amongst ourselves," he added.

Not a single controversial resolution was introduced. Messengers did approve resolutions in support of legislation to exempt missionaries from the newly imposed income tax provisions, applauded Florida Baptist efforts during the Korea evangelistic crusade last spring, and called for prayer for president-elect Ronald Reagan.

The 2,000 messengers from the more than 1,600 churches of the Florida Baptist Convention also adopted a record \$12.8 million Cooperative Program budget, which increases Florida support to Southern Baptist Convention agencies.

The budget provides for 48 percent to national and worldwide causes through the SBC, the same percentage as in the 1980 budget. However, Florida contributions to SBC causes are expected to be an estimated \$500,000 higher in the 1981 budget, because messengers adopted a provision which will share contributions above the basic budget with the worldwide program.

Previously, Florida Baptists shared only the basic budget, keeping all contributions over the budgeted amount for state causes.

Messengers voted to share the contributions over the budget with the SBC, and to increase the percentage of giving to 50-50 by 1985. Contributions to the SBC Cooperative Program will remain at 48-52 percent for the next three years, will go to 49-51 in 1984 and to 50-50 by 1985.

In other business, messengers elected Alton Butler, pastor of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church in Pensacola, as president, and named Babb H. Adams, pastor of First Baptist Church of Immakolee, as chairman of the state board of missions, which functions as an executive committee between conventions.

The 1981 meeting of the convention will be Nov. 9-11 in Orlando.

Bailey Smith Declines
Second Oklahoma Term

DEL CITY, Okla. (BP)--Bailey Smith, president of both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, declined a second term as head of the Oklahoma Baptist group at its annual meeting.

Smith, pastor of the host church, First Southern Baptist Church, was the center of attention as 1,332 messengers gathered for the 75th annual meeting of the Oklahoma Convention.

"The news media hovered around all week wondering if the convention would support or criticize Bailey," said one convention watcher.

Because of the national news attention, Smith told messengers in a business session: "Several of you have come to me asking if you could make a resolution of support for the statement, per se. I would just like to say to you that I would believe it would be inappropriate."

Smith referred to his controversial statement that "God does not hear the prayers of a Jew." Smith has received both favorable support and harsh criticism after the comment was publicized.

In accord with the SBC president's wishes, the resolutions committee presented a resolution "commending the church and staff of First Southern and expressing our prayerful support for Dr. Bailey Smith and his untiring, dedicated and loving efforts for our denomination, state-wide and nationally."

After the resolution was adopted, Smith told messengers: "This is just exactly what I wanted. We are leaving the other matter behind."

Smith said earlier in the year he would step down from the BGCO presidency. Election to a second term is not traditional, but exceptional in Oklahoma, contrary to the practice in the SBC where a president generally serves two one-year terms.

Messengers elected Sam Pace, director of associational missions for the Comanche-Cotton Association in Lawton, Okla., as president.

In other business, resolutions opposing relaxation of controls on beverage alcohol, pari-mutuel horse race betting, and pornography were passed. Other actions urged passage of exemptions for the Foreign Earned Income Act for foreign missionaries and reaffirmed a 1979 resolution urging release of the hostages in Iran.

Messengers also noted a belief in the "inerrant and infallible" Scriptures in another resolution which encouraged every church to be involved in a massive statewide Scripture-distribution plan celebrating the 75th anniversary of the convention.

Messengers also approved a report by the academic affairs committee of Oklahoma Baptist University in response to criticism in the 1979 convention of faculty, teaching, textbooks, doctrinal stands and "moral conditions" on the campus of the Shawnee institution.

In presenting the report, Lloyd G. Minter, a Bartlesville attorney, said the committee interviewed 80 persons in nine sessions as they looked into the charges.

The committee brought 12 conclusions and 10 recommendations, which have been approved by OBU trustees, and cited lack of communication between OBU faculty members and the churches as the primary problem.

On misconduct, it said: "Although from time to time there is conduct on the campus that does not correspond with the Christian ideals of the university, such incidents are exceptional and the generally outstanding moral fiber of our students is the primary reason for a moral climate substantially above society as a whole."

It commended OBU President E. Eugene Hall and the university faculty, but noted the committee is "convinced there is a need for a closer relationship between the university community, Oklahoma Baptists and the pastors."

The same man who requested the study, Jerry Sullaway, pastor of Emmanuel Southern Baptist Church in Edmond, made a motion to require the university to hire only Baptists as faculty members. It was defeated by a 2-to-1 vote.

Messengers approved a 1981 budget of \$11.4 million, with 56 percent going to Oklahoma causes and 44 percent to worldwide causes through the Southern Baptist Convention. The percentage reflects a half-percent increase to the SBC Cooperative Program, as Oklahoma Baptists progress toward a goal of a 50-50 split by 1985.

Also, messengers were told the churches recorded 25,714 baptisms in 1980, an increase of 4,180 over 1979.

The 1981 convention will be Nov. 10-12 at Eastwood Baptist Church in Tulsa.

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SBC Messenger Goals
Set In Pastors Meeting

Baptist Press
11/13/80

COLUMBIA, S. C. (BP)--An estimated 6,000 moderate messengers will be needed at the 1981 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Los Angeles to protect denominational institutions from fundamentalist takeover, a group of pastors was told here.

Some 50 to 55 South Carolina pastors met at St. Andrews Baptist Church on the eve of the annual meeting of the South Carolina Baptist Convention to discuss threats to the unity of Southern Baptists and to the denomination's "continuing cooperative missions commitment."

The South Carolinians will attempt to recruit 350 messengers committed to preventing censorship in the institutions.

David Matthews, pastor of First Baptist Church of Greenville and one of the organizers of the meeting, said no future meetings are scheduled because "we are making conscious moves to avoid becoming a group. We are not a theological or doctrinal group...we are just mainstream Southern Baptists trying to encourage people to support the convention. The group here was very diverse."

He added: "We are not in opposition to the (Paul) Pressler-(Paige) Patterson group. It is their politics that is threatening. Their expressed desire is to enforce doctrinal uniformity on the institutions. That is the problem, not their doctrinal position. We want to preserve their right to believe what they want to believe. Our concern is for the freedom we have as Baptists."

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Matthews said the Columbia meeting was an open meeting, and was attended by some "who were essentially in sympathy with the Pressler-Patterson perspective, if not their intentions."

Pressler, an appeals court judge from Houston, and Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, have been leaders in a group charging that denominational institutions—particularly seminaries—are riddled with liberals who do not believe in an "infallible" and "inerrant" Bible.

They are on the record as espousing a political campaign designed to elect SBC presidents committed to biblical inerrancy who will in turn insure appointment of trustees to the agencies and institutions who will enforce their doctrinal view.

Matthews said an informal network was established, with some 10 persons each to recruit 10 others as messengers to the Los Angeles meeting.

The network, he said, "is just a method of reporting...to know what kind of representation we have."

Matthews declined to reveal identities of those in the network, but a pastor present at the meeting said those working with Matthews will be Paul Batson Jr., pastor of Marion Baptist Church, Marion; Posey Belcher, pastor of First Baptist Church, Walterboro; Fred Miller, pastor of the host church, St. Andrews, in Columbia; and laypersons Olin and Lulley Owens of Greenville.

Working with the other meeting organizer, Henry Finch, pastor of Oakland Baptist Church in Rock Hill, will be Paul Pridgen, pastor of North Charleston Baptist Church in North Charleston; Ted Mears, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church of Florence; Marion Aldridge, pastor of First Baptist Church in Batesburg; and David DeBord, pastor of Fernwood Baptist Church in Spartanburg.

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North Carolina Messengers
Laud Newspaper, President

Baptist Press
11/13/80

GREENSBORO, N.C. (BP)--Messengers to the 150th anniversary session of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina overwhelmingly approved the work of the state Baptist newspaper and resoundingly reelected their president.

Both the newspaper, the Biblical Recorder, and the president, Cecil Sherman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, have been criticized by conservative elements within the state.

Two resolutions concerning the Biblical Recorder were introduced. One, by J. Steve Sells, pastor of First Baptist Church of Stanfield, asked that the paper "be used as an inspirational, unity-building, love-projecting publication rather than a biased tool used for degrading character."

The other, by Alfred T. Ayscue, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church of Mt. Airy, supported the newspaper and editor Marse Grant.

The resolutions committee rejected Sells' resolution and reported out with Ayscue's.

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In a floor debate, Owen Duncan, pastor of Race Path Baptist Church in Ellenboro, moved to substitute Sells' critical resolution for the favorable action. Duncan criticized Grant for news stories about SBC presidents Bailey Smith and Adrian Rogers and claimed the newspaper does not present a "balanced viewpoint."

The move to substitute the Sells resolution was defeated by a wide margin.

Ayscue said his resolution has at its heart "a cherished Baptist principle, a free press. It is closely related to our abiding defense of a free pulpit. To stifle the effectiveness of the Biblical Recorder through censorship, however well disguised, would be a serious blow to the work of this convention."

A few minutes after debate on the Recorder resolution, messengers gave Grant a standing ovation and prolonged applause as he came to the podium to give his report.

For the first time in the memory of veteran convention goers, a president was opposed for a second one-year term. Such a term usually is automatic.

However, opposition has developed to Sherman, who has taken the lead in organizing "moderate" pastors to oppose attempts to control denominational institutions by a group committed to the "Inerrancy" of the Bible.

Sherman has contended the primary issue confronting the denomination is not doctrinal, but control and power.

Sherman defeated M.O.Owens Jr., pastor of Parkwood Baptist Church of Gastonia, a well known conservative leader, on a standing vote estimated by news media representatives at 2-to-1.

The first vice president, Frank R. Campbell of First Baptist Church of Statesville, also faced opposition. Campbell, who has been involved in the moderates' campaign, defeated A.L. McGee of Wilmington for a second term.

In his presidential message on opening night, Sherman dealt with the Inerrancy controversy.

"You think all Baptists are like you. I think all Baptists are like I am," he said. "We are surprised when we discover that we are diverse on a number of things. The latest unit of measurement that has been dividing (us) is called biblical inerrancy. (Someone) started measuring me by the theological yardstick of inerrancy. I do not measure up. I do not hold an inerrant view of the Bible..."

"Let me go further. I have never said someone who holds an Inerrant view of the Bible should not be on one of our (SBC) boards. But there are some who have said if I do not hold to an Inerrant view of the Bible, I will not be on one of our boards."

Sherman, who claimed "all of us have a high view of the Inspiration of the Scriptures," asked messengers: "Is the Inerrancy question going to become the test of fellowship?"

Another convention speaker, Harold C. Bennett, executive secretary of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, told messengers he believes God "will help us through the crisis."

Later, in an interview, Bennett said he believes the controversy "is beginning to level out...moderation is coming into being." He added: "We ought to remain together if we can. If we can work through the problems of remaining together, God will bless us."

In other action, messengers approved a joint project with the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists to help increase the number of churches in that state from 100 to 200 in the next five years;

--Approved a \$19,250,000 budget with 35 percent of the funds going to the SBC Cooperative Program, an increase of about 1.5 percent from last year.

--Defeated a report which called for eliminating the quota system in the election of trustees and directors of institutions and agencies. Present policy calls for 25 percent of trustees and directors to come from churches of 400 members or less. That policy will be continued.

--Voted to send communications to SBC President Bailey Smith offering "prayerful support" and to express appreciation to President Jimmy Carter for his leadership.

Next year's meeting will be Nov. 2-4 in Greensboro, a joint session with the predominantly black General Baptist Convention.

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Georgia Enjoys
Quiet Meeting

Baptist Press
11/13/80

TUCKER, Ga. (BP)--Georgia Baptists embraced a new executive, approved record budgets and institutional expansion and passed brief resolutions—all with an absolute minimum of controversy—at their annual convention.

Pre-convention rumors about a conservative-moderate confrontation proved false and 3,104 messengers had a harmonious meeting, according to Jack Harwell, editor of the Christian Index, Georgia Baptists' newspaper.

Searcy S. Garrison, executive secretary-treasurer, was repeatedly praised and honored as he approaches a Dec. 31 retirement after 26 years as the convention's administrative leader. The messengers warmly received James N. Griffith of Athens as Garrison's successor.

W. Ches Smith III, pastor of First Baptist Church, Tifton, Ga., and former chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, succeeded Griffith as state convention president.

Georgia Baptists approved a record Cooperative Program budget for 1981 of \$17.5 million. About 10 percent will be deducted for shared promotional-administrative expenses and the remainder will be divided equally between Georgia and Southern Baptist causes.

Also approved with no dissent was almost \$15 million in new projects for Georgia Baptist institutions, including expansion for the Georgia Baptist Medical Center and a new apartment unit for the elderly for Georgia Baptist Homes in Atlanta. Georgia Baptists already operate two large homes for the elderly in Atlanta and another in Waycross.

The only friction was a brief but spirited debate on scientific creationism in public schools. Messengers endorsed equal time for teaching scientific creationism in schools where evolution is taught, the same stand they took in 1979. They also voted to commend a Georgia legislator who is pushing the creationism bill in the state legislature. One messenger opposed the creationism commendation, citing church-state violations and other objections.

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An effort to adopt a narrow stand on biblical inerrancy failed when messengers agreed with their resolutions committee that the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statement "is an adequate statement of our position and no additional expression is needed."

Other resolutions urged Congress to extend the Foreign Earned Income Act of 1978, and opposed pari-mutuel gambling. Another praised Georgian Jimmy Carter for his work as U.S. president and assured President-elect Ronald Reagan of "prayerful support" from the representatives of Georgia's 1.1 million Southern Baptists.

Another resolution called on Georgia Baptists to place funds in their 1981 church budgets to send members to the Southern Baptist Convention in Los Angeles.

A group of ministers meeting at a separate site during the convention issued a formal call for Baptist ministers and laymen in Georgia to make every possible effort to attend the Los Angeles meeting.

J. Pruett Gannon, pastor of Smoke Rise Baptist Church in Stone Mountain who was elected group spokesman, said, "We have no group. We have no organization. We are just Georgia Baptists, encouraging our fellow Georgia Baptists to go to Los Angeles.

"Anyone and everyone may work with us. We are particularly interested in those who are firmly committed to the cause of missions through the Cooperative Program, and those who cherish our precious Baptist heritage, individually and institutionally."

Some of the leaders of the Georgia group attended the Gatlinburg, Tenn., meeting in September, the first organizational meeting of moderates opposed to the announced takeover intent of SBC institutions by people committed to doctrinal uniformity.

The 1981 session will be Nov. 9-11 at Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta.

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Maryland Levels Race Bar,
Choses Trustee President

Baptist Press
11/13/80

LAUREL, Md. (BP)--Maryland Baptists elected a seminary trustee as convention president and called for committee representation "from all socio-economic, cultural, ethnic and racial groups" during their annual meeting.

The resolution asking the convention's nominating committee to seek candidates from all areas was passed over the objections of several who felt it might establish a dangerous quota system.

The 570 messengers elected Lewis McDonald, pastor of Oak Grove Baptist Church in Bel Air, as president of the 100,000 member Baptist Convention of Maryland. He is Maryland's trustee on the board of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

In other actions, messengers approved a \$2,644,307 budget with \$1,822,100 to be raised from convention churches. Of that amount, 38.5 percent will be distributed to national Southern Baptist Convention causes, an increase of .4 percent over last year.

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Actions at the 145th convention included a resolve to pray for reconciliation with Iran and a statement that "we seek to understand the grievances of Iran, whether or not we agree with them, (and) that we disavow the use of terrorism as a means of gaining one's ends."

A resolution on global stewardship called on industry and government to clean up abandoned dump sites of both hazardous and non-hazardous waste; supported legislation to discourage future dangerous waste disposal; and encouraged experimentation and use of alternative natural resources such as wind, sun and water.

Messengers directed their Discipleship Task Force to assist people in education, awareness and financial response to world hunger; supported President-elect Ronald Reagan; asked God's blessings on President Carter and his family during transition; and committed themselves to Bold Mission Thrust. They said they will not allow any cause or issue to "detract from or undermine the spirit and implementation of this priority" to present the gospel to everyone in the world by the year 2000.

The only serious debate on any of the 11 resolutions came when messengers considered a resolution urging Congress to "restore the \$20,000 tax exemption to employees of charitable and religious organizations working overseas."

The resolutions committee reported the action without recommendation because a committee member said such action exhibited preferential treatment of religion by the government and was therefore an infringement of church-state separation.

After Mary Strauss, Maryland's representative to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, urged adoption, the motion passed on a hand vote.

The 1981 meeting will be Nov. 9-11 at Asbury United Methodist Church in Salisbury.