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Kentucky Baptist Attitude  
Divided on Court's Ruling

By Norman Jameson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Kentucky Baptists are as divided in their response to the Supreme Court's declaring unconstitutional a law requiring the Ten Commandments be posted in public classrooms as they were in their original support of it.

Some, like LaVerne Butler, pastor of Ninth and O Baptist Church in Louisville, feel the decision will only hasten God's judgment on America. Others, like Kentucky Baptist Convention Executive Director Franklin Owen, who advised caution until the law withstood scrutiny of the courts, were not surprised at the decision.

"This is censorship and banning of the Bible," declared Butler, who helped raise \$250,000 to post the Commandments in every classroom in 106 of Kentucky's 120 counties. He called the action "tragic" and said: "This is just another step in stripping America of all her religious heritage. I really think Nov. 17 (the day of the court announcement) is a sad day and from this day forward, it will be downward and another step toward the judgment of America."

Butler and Tom Riner, executive director of the Kentucky Heritage Foundation and pastor of two Louisville Baptist churches, said none of the 30,000 copies of the Ten Commandments already in Kentucky classrooms was posted under the stricken statute. Instead, they were posted under a similar authority through local school boards using private donations. Only \$1,400 was donated to post the Commandments under auspices of the state law, which itself required private funds for posting.

Kentucky's department of public instruction is waiting for an advisory from state Attorney General Steve Beshear as to whether the already posted copies will have to be removed. Beshear had originally advised that Kentucky's law was constitutional.

Riner, whose wife, Claudia, tried to get the 1980 Southern Baptist Convention to support similar legislation in other states, said rejection of the law does not signal a "witchhunt" and does not mean copies of the Ten Commandments already posted will "be torn out and burned."

Riner feels the Supreme Court ruling says Kentucky law cannot "require" the Ten Commandments to be posted, but it does not prohibit them from being posted. "If this is interpreted to mean a copy of the Ten Commandments is unconstitutional in a public building, then we've got a real problem," Riner said, pointing out the Ten Commandments are engraved on the Supreme Court building. He said the decision will not affect his efforts at all and he will continue to raise money to post the Commandments in classrooms, and in the offices of public officials.

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The Kentucky Baptist Convention, meeting in its final session in 1979, voted to look favorably on legislation that would get the Ten Commandments posted in public classrooms. Some Baptists were miffed when support from state convention leaders was not forthcoming. Owen counseled caution and the public affairs committee warned against Baptist support until the law had passed court tests.

"We all believe in the Ten Commandments and would like to see them displayed where they would be revered like they deserve to be," said Owen. "But I don't want us to push them in and make them a subject of unpleasant controversy which they don't deserve to be. I've always felt a little bit squeamish in realizing that any other religion can make the same move and use the fact that we've done it as an argument for doing so.

"We're living in an age when other religions are definitely becoming something to reckon with. Mormons have areas of the country that their numbers would control. It more perfectly protects the separation of church and state line, so I have to go with the (Supreme Court) decision, regretfully. It seemed a doubtful thing from the beginning to me, though very nobly intended. I wish everyone would want them up there and honor them. But I don't want them up there to dispute about."

Bill Hancock, pastor of Highview Baptist Church in Louisville, who was "very active" in getting the Ten Commandments posted, feels such rationalization is irrelevant, "in view of our foundation as a Christian nation." He said: "As Christians, we're going to have to quit rationalizing about our witness. We're going to have to be bold or be compromised."

Kentucky Baptist Convention President Bill Whittaker, who said he expected the Supreme Court to rule as it did, supported the decision on the grounds that the law would open up a way for other religions to post similar doctrines. Whittaker, pastor of First Baptist Church, Murray, had no comment on whether those already up should be taken down.

C.R. Daley, editor of the Western Recorder, the Kentucky Baptist newspaper, feels there is "no alternative" but to take them down. John Dunaway, member of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee and immediate past president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, feels the Supreme Court ruling indicates they should be taken down.

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Alabama On Track  
To Equal SBC Share

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Alabama Baptists increased their percentage of gifts to worldwide missions causes, adopted Bold Mission priorities in programming, personnel and budgeting for the next five years, and reaffirmed the trustee method of stewardship at their annual meeting.

Meeting at Samford University, one of its three schools of higher education, the convention of 1,674 messengers increased its gifts through the national Cooperative Program by another one-half percent toward a goal of a 50-50 division of funds, less deductions for general denominational causes. The division now stands at 45.5 percent for SBC causes and 54.5 percent for Alabama convention causes. The percentage to the SBC will increase one-half percent annually until it is 50-50.

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In a resolution approved unanimously, the messengers reaffirmed "the trustee method of stewardship, insuring the responsiveness of our institutions and agencies to the SBC and Alabama Baptist Conventions," and expressed appreciation to those men and women of integrity who serve our agencies and institutions as trustees."

One resolution provoked a flurry of discussion but a substitute motion was eventually adopted.

The original resolution entitled "Two-Model Teaching of Creation," called for the state convention to petition the Alabama state textbook committee to adopt textbooks which teach biblical creationism and the theory of evolution with equal emphasis. The resolution as amended called on the convention to "affirm the biblical teachings that God is both Creator and Lord of Men and all creation," and asked "all educators in public schools to give due consideration to the religious views of their students when teaching theories of the creation of man and the universe."

Another resolution urged the Alabama legislature to make prostitution an offense against the criminal code and the people of Alabama. The practice went unmentioned during a lengthy review that rewrote Alabama's archaic criminal code.

Other resolutions asked that the legal drinking age be raised to 21 and urged an amendment to U.S. tax laws that would restore the \$20,000 income tax exemption to employees of charitable and religious organizations working overseas.

Drew J. Gunnells, pastor of Springhill Baptist Church, Mobile, and a former president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, was re-elected to a second term as president.

The 1981 convention will meet Nov. 17-18 at the civic center in Montgomery.

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### Wrapup

Conventions Draw Messengers  
But Controversy Stays At Home

By Dan Martin

Baptist Press  
11/21/80

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Record numbers of messengers turned out for most of the 34 state Southern Baptist conventions and three fellowships, but the rumored strife, takeover attempts and confrontations did not materialize.

One editor—Jack Harwell of the Christian Index—characterized the Georgia meeting as "more like a 'love feast' than a convention." Another—C.R. Daley of the Kentucky Western Recorder—editorialized that "those looking for the sensational and controversial...looked in vain."

Bailey Smith, president of the SBC, was highly visible in the conventions, even though he personally appeared in only two of them. Every meeting received a telegram from him in which he expressed his "deepest support and prayers." He asked the presidents of each convention to request messengers to "pray that I shall do everything possible to create an atmosphere of harmony, love and brotherliness in our most glorious denomination."

Smith, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., has become controversial in recent months over remarks he made saying God does not hear the prayers of Jews. Six conventions took note of the issue.

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West Virginia Baptists became so embroiled in debate over a resolution which claimed God does not hear the prayer of a non-Christian that they tabled the issue until the 1981 convention.

Tennessee Baptists declined to deal with the specifics—the resolutions committee ruled resolutions supporting Smith and dealing with the Jewish prayer question "inappropriate." Messengers, however, decried anti-Semitism in a resolution. District of Columbia and Virginia Baptists disagreed with Smith and said they will speak for themselves.

In Oklahoma, Smith, also president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, asked messengers not to act on the Jewish prayer matter. They adopted a statement supporting him for his leadership in the state and SBC. He declined to seek re-election.

Two other conventions—North Carolina and Indiana—resolved to praise Smith for his leadership, while Texas lauded SBC leadership but specifically refused to include Smith by name.

Virtually every convention went on record favoring a resolution suggested by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board which asked Congress to restore the \$20,000 income tax exemption to religious and charitable workers overseas. The only debate came in Maryland, over church-state questions.

South Carolina, Georgia and Texas, and the Iowa fellowship reaffirmed the Baptist Faith and Message statement of 1963; Oklahoma and the Northwest affirmed an "Inerrant and infallible" Bible; and the District of Columbia and Illinois commented the Bible can and should speak for itself.

Colorado messengers called for the respect of individual dignity and responsibility in matters of politics, theology, personal and social issues, and supported local church autonomy in the question.

Virginia Baptists denounced "creeping creedalism," reaffirmed "loyalty to the Scriptures" and voiced strong opposition "to any who would attempt to determine how our brothers would state their faith."

In North Carolina, convention president Cecil Sherman, pastor of First Baptist Church, Asheville, denounced those who would take over denominational institutions. He said the issue is not theology, but control, and he criticized attempts to make him toe a creedal line to serve the convention.

Sherman, who has been a leader in an effort to get "friends of missions" to attend the 1981 Southern Baptist Convention in Los Angeles, was easily re-elected despite an effort to unseat him by M.O. Owens Jr. of Gastonia, a well known conservative leader.

Three other conventions saw action on takeover attempts. In Ohio, Grady Cothen, president of the Baptist Sunday School Board, said current strife in the 13.4 million-member denomination is "a planned assault by the devil himself to divert Southern Baptists" from Bold Mission Thrust goals. Kentucky and Georgia messengers resolved to send messengers to national conventions and Northern Plains called for prayer for the 1981 SBC meeting.

State Baptist newspapers, criticized by conservatives for "biased reporting," were lauded by resolutions in four states—Kentucky, North Carolina, Texas and Illinois—for their efforts at reporting controversy.

Two states spent time saying goodbye and praising retiring executive directors. Indiana Baptists bade farewell to E. Harmon Moore, as did Georgians to Searcy Garrison. In Alaska, Allen Meeks was elected by messengers to become executive director there, and Arkansas welcomed their new executive, Huber L. Drumwright.

In every state convention, messengers approved record budgets, and in most, increased percentages will go to the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program for use in worldwide missions, education and evangelism.

The Cooperative Program figured more prominently in four conventions. In Virginia, messengers fell 15 votes short of reaching the two-thirds necessary to change their constitution to make gifts to the Cooperative Program the main test of messenger qualification. In Kentucky, messengers heard without opposition first reading of a change to their constitution which would qualify messengers on the basis of Cooperative Program gifts and/or membership.

In Tennessee, a motion was referred to the bylaws committee which would require officers to be members of a church which gives at least 10 percent of its budget through the Cooperative Program.

Speaking to the New York convention, SBC President Smith promised messengers he is leading his church to increase Cooperative Program giving by 300 percent.

Convention institutions figured in six meetings. Virginia Baptists withheld funds from the Virginia Baptist Hospital in Lynchburg until it clarifies its abortion policies; Mississippi Baptists okayed the merger of Clarke College, a junior college, and Mississippi College; Tennessee Baptists turned down graduate programs for its three schools, and Missouri messengers okayed a request changing Southwest Baptist College to Southwest Baptist University, provided it does not offer graduate courses.

In Texas and Oklahoma, messengers received reports about two criticized schools, Oklahoma Baptist University and Baylor University. The OBU report suggested closer communication between the school and state congregations; the Baylor report said trustees were working to fulfill convention-ordered directives.

Six conventions approved "linking" resolutions. Tennessee Baptists agreed to work with both Michigan and Upper Volta; North Carolina and Georgia will work with West Virginia and Missouri will assist Taiwan in evangelism efforts.

Two conventions—Northwest and California—struggled with membership. Northwest messengers compromised on a proposal which would require associational approval for churches to become members, finally settling for associational evaluation, and California Baptists are considering their fourth change in definitions of cooperation since 1948. Louisiana seated its first all-black church without fanfare.

National politics involved eight conventions. District of Columbia messengers decried the religious right; Michigan, Colorado and Georgia thanked outgoing President Jimmy Carter, and Maryland, Georgia and Florida noted they are praying for President-Elect Ronald Reagan. Pennsylvania-South Jersey Baptists deplored the philosophies of the Ku Klux Klan, American Nazi Party and Communist Party because of the way such groups foster racism and violence.

The three fellowships discussed dates of organization into a state convention. Iowa is aiming toward 1983, Minnesota/Wisconsin toward 1984, and New England toward 1982.