



BAPTIST PRESS

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Sullivan Says SBC Needs
Debate For Center Course

By Jim Newton

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention needs debate between theological moderates and inerrantists to help the vast majority of Baptists steer a clear course down the center, former SBC President James L. Sullivan said.

Sullivan, president of the Baptist Sunday School Board for 22 years before retiring in 1975, told the Home Mission Board staff competing factions in the current controversy within the Southern Baptist Convention are wrong when they want to kick each other out of the denomination.

Sullivan estimated 80 percent of Southern Baptists are not aligned with either faction, although he did not call the factions by name or use labels to describe them.

The majority in the middle needs to hear clearly the debate between the two vocal minorities in order to "ferret out truth from error and nail down the decisions somewhere in the center of the controversy," he said.

Sullivan observed when Southern Baptists on the right of the theological spectrum began to organize and enlarge, as they did at the 1979 convention in Houston, the "moderates" retaliated by organizing and trying to expand. This caused polarization in which the majority in the center often was forced to choose sides.

The SBC agencies were left in the middle "on a desert island in worse shape than the President of the United States, with both sides chewing on him all the time," Sullivan added.

As head of the SBC's largest agency, the Sunday School Board, Sullivan said he learned the most basic principle of administration is the boards must operate at the center of the Southern Baptist constituency.

"But what happens when you do long-range planning and the center shifts?" he questioned. "And where can you find the center in a denomination so diverse?"

He said an analysis of letters he received showed Baptists are 10 times more likely to criticize than to compliment, and added if you get 10 critical letters to one complimentary one, you are on dead center. "It is a tragic thing," he lamented, "that a lot of Baptists are trying to use the Cooperative Program (SBC unified budget) to 'discipline' the agencies" by refusing to give money if they don't like what the agencies are doing.

"The Cooperative Program is not for the purpose of control. That's what trustees are for," he insisted. "The Cooperative Program is for the purpose of support, not control."

Neither should control of the agencies come through election of the convention president, he said.

Sullivan, president of the SBC for only one term--1976-77--insisted the SBC constitution gives the convention president no authority except to appoint a few people on committees and preside over the annual convention. "It is done that way to keep him (the president) from trying to control all the agencies and messing up the whole convention.

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"We must not ask the convention president to be authoritative," Sullivan said. If the agencies have to do what the convention president says, "we're in trouble."

He explained the agencies and institutions of the SBC are like a freight train with 100 loaded cars. "If you try to turn it at 60 miles per hour, you end up with a pile of debris," he said.

Sullivan, 73, said the SBC presidency is a position of honor, not authority, and he strongly favors limiting the term of office to one year rather than two. He declined nomination for a second term in 1978 because of this view, and because a virus caused heart damage that made him fear he would not live through a second term.

The former Sunday School Board executive interpreted debate at the SBC meeting in Pittsburgh over funds for construction of a new building for the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville as an issue of Baptist polity (organization). The Southern Baptist Convention does not have an "executive board," it has an "executive committee," he observed.

In Southern Baptist life, the four "boards" of the SBC (Home and Foreign Mission Boards, Sunday School Board and Annuity Board) are given broad powers of authority with accountability to the SBC "after the job is done," Sullivan said. But committees (including the Executive Committee) have more narrow powers of authority and have to get permission from the SBC every single time before they act, he explained.

"Historically, no committee of the SBC has ever had a building. If they had asked for permission to build a building and then requested an appropriation, there would not have been any objection," he said. It was a violation of Baptist polity to request an appropriation without first asking for permission to build the headquarters, he said.

Sullivan recently wrote a book on Baptist Polity which he hopes some day will result in a manual like "Robert's Rules of Order" to help Southern Baptists in their business meetings.

Such a manual must be developed, not by the Southern Baptist Convention, but by the Southern Baptist denomination--a distinction he said is crucial in understanding Southern Baptists. The Southern Baptist Convention is the annual meeting of messengers from the churches, but the term "SBC" is also sometimes used to describe the denomination which includes all SBC churches, 34 state conventions, 1,100 associations and all other organizations of the SBC, he said.

The uniqueness of the denomination is that no Baptist body is inferior or superior to the other but all are equally important, he said.

Sullivan expressed need for participation of the entire denomination in development of such a manual on Baptist polity the same way the doctrinal statement on Baptist Faith and Message was prepared in 1925 and refined in 1963.

"We could preserve our diversity and yet build greater unity if we had a manual of this sort," he said. "But it probably will not be done in my lifetime."

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Reagan Renews Pledge
For Tuition Tax Credits

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WASHINGTON (BP)--A leader of a New Right coalition seeking enactment of a tuition tax credit law said President Reagan has given his "strongest and most positive" commitment to seek passage of the measure.

Paul Weyrich, of the Committee For the Survival of a Free Congress, told reporters following a 15-minute meeting with Reagan at the White House that presidential assistants are working with Senate leaders to find the right "vehicle" for the tuition tax credit proposal.

He said the President reported he recently received a commitment from Senate leaders to bring the measure to a vote before the end of the year.

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Reagan, who during the 1980 campaign and since assuming office, has repeatedly pledged to work for the proposal, has encountered strong criticism from conservative groups for not following up on such pledges.

Weyrich, one of two dozen tuition tax credit supporters invited to the White House meeting, said Reagan's legislative director, Kenneth Duberstein, is working with Senators Howard Baker, R-Tenn., and Robert Dole, R-Kan., to find a bill the tax credit proposal can be attached to in the Senate.

No Baptists participated in the Sept. 16, White House meeting.

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Georgia Baptists Pay Off
\$6 Million Loan In Eight Years

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ATLANTA (BP)--The Georgia Baptist Convention has paid off a 25-year, \$6 million loan in eight years--saving more than \$5 million in interest payments.

The indebtedness was on the Georgia Baptist Center, a structure erected on the northeast edge of Atlanta in 1975.

At the same meeting the Georgia Baptist executive committee voted to sell downtown property where the convention was housed 1944-74 for \$2,100,000. Since 1974 the property has been used for a parking lot, generating about \$30,000 a year in income. Money from the sale of the land will be used to endow the state missions budget in Georgia.

The committee also voted to establish a partnership mission program with Liberian Baptist Mission. The three-year project will start Jan. 1, 1985 with 1984 given to planning projects and joint emphases. Georgia already has a sister state relationship with Baptist Convention of New York, approved in 1978.

One new item in the Georgia Baptist Convention Cooperative Program budget for 1984 is \$180,000 to help Mercer University establish a nursing school in Atlanta, which will offer a bachelor science degree in nursing. It will be operated jointly with Georgia Baptist Medical Center, which will also continue to offer a diploma program in nursing.

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Denton Equal Access Bill
Clears Senate Committee

By Larry Chesser

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Equal access legislation has been approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee but the measure is expected to face competition from a version disregarded by the panel when it reaches the Senate floor.

By an 11-4 vote, the panel approved a new version of S. 1059 sponsored by Sen. Jeremiah Denton, R-Ala., which would bar public elementary and secondary schools from denying equal access to students or groups to students that "seek to engage in voluntary extracurricular activities that include prayer or religious speech" during non-instructional periods.

On the Senate floor a bill (S. 815) sponsored by Sen. Mark O. Hatfield, R-Ore., is expected to be offered as a substitute if Denton's measure is considered. Unlike Denton's bill, Hatfield's proposal would apply only to secondary school students, barring public secondary schools which generally allow groups of students to meet during noninstructional periods from discriminating "against any meeting of students on the basis of the religious content of the speech at such a meeting."

During the Judiciary Committee session, Sen. Charles McC. Mathias, R-Md., questioned the need for equal access legislation; contending the bill is unnecessary if what is contemplated by it is constitutional.

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Delaware Sen. Joseph R. Biden, ranking Democrat on the panel, said some form of equal access is necessary to "diminish the ability of the demagogues among us, politicians and preachers alike," to use school prayer as an issue. Biden, who voted to report out the Denton bill, said he would support the Hatfield version if it is offered on the Senate floor.

Beyond limiting its scope to secondary school students, the Hatfield bill also differs from the Denton measure by assuring that student religious groups using school facilities are student-initiated and student-controlled and by protecting against the spending of public funds to support student religious activities, according to Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs general counsel John W. Baker.

"Because Hatfield's bill does fully protect the equal access of student religious groups to the use of school facilities and yet protects against the infringement of the separation of church and state, it is much preferable to Denton's," Baker said.

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CLC Approves Initiatives
On Hunger, Alcohol, Gambling

By Tim Fields

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--New education and action initiatives on world hunger and alcohol, new plans to deal with gambling and an expanded communications program were approved by members of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission during their annual meeting.

The development of new resources for the observance of World Hunger Day was authorized, including the promotion of a 16mm film and videotapes on hunger and additional initiatives related to hunger.

Members also approved the development of "alcohol and other drugs" awareness resources for children, a 1984 summer conference on alcohol and drug abuse prevention, production of a videotape on alcohol education and development of new resources for local churches in dealing with liquor-by-the-drink legislation, local option elections and liquor advertising.

Commission members also approved the reorganization and expansion of the agency's communications program effective Jan. 1, electing David Wilkinson as director of news and information services and approving a new job title for Tim Fields, director of communications.

Wilkinson, 29, will direct the news and information services and will be editor of a monthly Christian ethics publication.

Fields, who has directed the commission's total communications program since 1980, will be director of product development. He will be responsible for production, sales and distribution of all commission literature and products in support of applied Christianity among Southern Baptists.

Wilkinson, director of communications and a student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., will receive the master of divinity degree in December.

He is a former employee of the Christian Life Commission and has been associate editor of World Mission Journal for the Brotherhood Commission and information specialist with the Baptist Sunday School Board.

He is a journalism graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University.

During the meeting Lloyd Elder, president-elect of the Baptist Sunday School Board, told commission members and staff Southern Baptists must prepare to deal with societal megatrends which will drastically affect Southern Baptists in the United States.

Elder said we have passed from an industrial society to an information society which has resulted in a decentralized society based on high tech but which will need high touch to survive.

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"In order to minister effectively to this kind of society Southern Baptists must affirm and confess, not argue or reject, our shared meanings, biblical doctrines and Christian values," he said.

Elder said: "We must not simply live from one convention to the next and from one issue to the next, but we must be Kingdom people."

He warned that centralized, creedal structure could become a major new flaw in Baptist life. However, Southern Baptists will always require a strong core of shared meanings, beliefs and moral values, he emphasized.

"There has to be a binding force among Southern Baptists," he said. "The tragedy would be if we turned to a creedal, authoritarian, centralized structure. It would be equally tragic for us if we loosed ourselves from our strong core of shared values and beliefs."

In other action, members authorized the commission staff to produce peace with justice resources in support of the first annual Day of Prayer for World Peace established at the 1983 SBC at Pittsburgh as Aug. 5, 1984, and approved new programs related to concerns of Christian women and strengthening families.

The commission also asked the staff to request Cooperative Program funding from the Southern Baptist Convention through its Executive Committee to finance vigorous new efforts to oppose gambling.

Members approved production of a videotape and other resources related to gambling and approved a plan for the staff to work closely with state Baptist conventions "so that the strongest possible front against gambling can be organized and maintained."

Members reelected David Matthews, pastor of First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C., as chairman; Charles Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church, Arlington, Texas, as vice-chairman, and Lynn Clayton, editor of the Louisiana Baptist Message, as secretary.

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Thanksgiving Proclamation
Cites Peace, Prosperity

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WASHINGTON (BP)--President Reagan's 1983 Thanksgiving Day Proclamation calls on Americans to thank God "for our nation's peace and prosperity when so many in this world have neither."

Noting that the first such proclamation was made by President Lincoln 120 years ago during the Civil War, Reagan called Thanksgiving "an occasion for Americans to express gratitude to their God and their country."

Reagan affirmed Lincoln's words that the United States is a nation "under God" despite the country's institutional separation of church and state.

"We rejoice in the fact that, while we have maintained separate institutions of church and state over our 200 years of freedom, we have at the same time preserved reverence for spiritual beliefs. Although we are a pluralistic society, the giving of thanks can be a true bond of unity among our people. We can unite in gratitude for our individual freedoms and individual faiths."

Thanksgiving Day this year is Thursday, Nov. 24.

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