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May 29, 1985

85-69

Dallas SBC '85 Might Be
Predicted 'Big Shootout'

By Dan Martin

DALLAS (BP)--The "big shootout" in the Southern Baptist Convention--predicted for five years--may come when an estimated 30,000 messengers assemble for the 1985 annual meeting at the Dallas Convention Center, June 11-13.

Since 1979, fundamentalist/conservatives within the 14.3-million member denomination have captured control of the presidency, vowing to stop what they perceive as a "liberal drift" and to turn the convention to a more conservative stance.

Moderate/loyalist forces have challenged the fundamentalist/conservative coalition with limited success, but this year have mounted their most significant effort to turn out the vote and to recapture control of the denominational machinery.

"In Dallas we will be making crucial decisions about the basis of our cooperation together as a denomination," said one leader. "We will be deciding whether we will be a diverse denomination cooperating together to do missions and evangelism or whether we will be a body cooperating along narrower doctrinal lines."

In the battle, the denomination's unified giving plan--the Cooperative Program--could be at stake. Moderate/loyalists have emphasized loyalty to the unified plan and to the SBC's 20 national agencies while fundamentalist/conservatives have said they do not wish to support causes they consider liberal, pointing particularly to the six seminaries.

Both wings of the nation's largest non-Catholic religious body have put together significant efforts to get messengers to the convention. Their success is witnessed by the fact convention planners are now preparing to accommodate up to 30,000 registered messengers.

If, indeed, 30,000 persons register, it will make the 1985 Dallas convention by far the largest in the 140 year history of the denomination. Only twice has the registration exceeded 20,000 messengers: 1982 in New Orleans with 20,456 and 1978 in Atlanta with 22,872.

The increase alone could be larger than the total of the smallest conventions in the last 25 years: 1973 in Portland, Ore., (8,871 registered) and 1962 in San Francisco (9,396).

The sheer size of the gathering is causing some problems for convention planners. Last week, SBC President Charles Stanley, Order of Business Committee Chairman Morris Chapman and others established stringent guidelines to make sure all registered messengers are able to exercise their franchise, closing the main meeting hall to all but messengers on the opening day, and possibly for the second and third days.

"I hope we don't have a lot of little votes," Stanley told Baptist Press, indicating the taking of voice, standing or hand votes could be a logistical nightmare with messengers spread over the sprawling hall and into the Arena.

While there are many issues looming, the pivotal vote will be that for the presidency. The presidency has been a key factor in the fundamentalist/conservative effort to turn the denomination. The strategy has been to elect as president men committed to the conservative cause and to the "inerrancy" of the Bible. Through the president's appointive powers, trustees will be placed on the boards of the 20 national agencies, thus turning the denomination toward a more conservative stance.

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This year, Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, is eligible for a second term, and has announced he will allow his nomination. Stanley, a staunch inerrantist, was elected on the first ballot in 1984, drawing 52 percent of the vote against two opponents.

Stanley will be challenged in his bid for a second one-year term by W. Winfred Moore, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and pastor of First Baptist Church of Amarillo, Texas, for 25 years. Although Moore has jokingly characterized himself as "right of the Ayatollah," he will carry the banner of the moderate/loyalist forces.

Attention will focus on the election Tuesday at 2:40 p.m. Much of what follows likely will be colored by who is elected and how big the victory is. Some fundamentalist/conservatives predict a sweeping win for Stanley, going so far as to say he will win by a 60-40 margin. Moderate/loyalists are more conservative, predicting a victory but not a lop-sided one.

One motion expected to be presented, no matter who wins, will be an proposal by presidents of the state Baptist conventions, that a special 15-member committee be appointed to study the crisis in the denomination and to propose ways to reconcile the dispute.

The presidents have been meeting for more than two months, and will convene again June 10 in Dallas to "fine-tune" their proposal. Such an effort already has the support of Stanley, Moore and former SBC Presidents Franklin Paschall of Nashville, who made a similar proposal last fall, and W.A. Criswell of Dallas.

Other issues expected to produce spirited difference of opinion:

RESOLUTIONS: Traditionally a volatile area, this year's resolutions are expected to produce emotion and spirited debate. By late May, more than 50 resolutions had been proposed. Many relate to unity in the denomination and/or support for the agencies, including a number affirming Russell H. Dilday Jr., president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, who has been a point man in the effort of the moderate/loyalists.

The battle over the ordination of women may be ignited again as several resolutions regard the role of women. Resolutions Committee chairman, Larry Lewis of Hannibal, Mo., has said he may suggest rewriting the controversial resolution opposing ordination of women which was adopted in 1984, not to change the opposition to such action but to eliminate some "poor theology" and unnecessarily offensive statements.

BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS: The BJCPA, in which Southern Baptists cooperate with eight other Baptist groups, came under heavy fire in 1984, when an effort to defund the First Amendment group failed by only a few percentage points.

This year, the SBC Executive Committee will report it is "not practicable" to establish an exclusively Southern Baptist Governmental Affairs Office in Washington, in response to a motion submitted in 1984. The recommendation, however, is expected to be opposed, possibly by Executive Committee member Ed Drake, of Dallas, who led the defunding effort last year.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Challenges are expected to the 1985 Committee on Boards report, which names trustees to the boards of the national agencies. The key challenge likely will concern Jerry Gilmore, a Dallas attorney, who was not renominated to a second term on the Home Mission Board because his wife, Martha, is an ordained Methodist minister. Supporters-- including directors of the HMB--have requested he be returned to the board.

Another challenge may come to William Delahoyde, an assistant US attorney in Raleigh, N.C., named to the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary board, making him the third member of the US attorney's office in Raleigh to be named as a trustee of a national agency.

The report of the 1985 Committee on Committees--appointed by Stanley without ratification by the convention--may be challenged. The Committee on Committees nominates the Committee on Boards, which in turn nominates persons to serve as trustees. Second Vice President Donald V. Wideman of North Kansas City, Mo., for said Stanley "excluded" him from the process, and state leadership said the president "largely disregarded" their suggestions in his nominations.

Other issues likely will be disputed as the convention moves along during its three-day run, but many observers say the key item is the nature of the SBC and the basis on which 36,700 autonomous churches cooperate.

"The Southern Baptist Convention will never be the same," said one observer. "Whatever happens, we will leave Dallas very much changed."

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China Trip Gives Lifetime
Memories To Valentines

By David Wilkinson

Baptist Pr ss
5/29/85

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—A 19-day tour across China—"the opportunity of a lifetime"—etched indelible impressions of Chinese people, culture and history into the "very soul" of Christian Life Commission Executive Director Foy Valentine.

The recent visit to China by Valentine and his wife, Mary Louise, was a gift provided personally by Christian Life Commission board members and other friends of the commission in appreciation for 25 years of ministry as the head of the Southern Baptist Convention's moral concerns agency.

Valentine noted that any Westerner who visits the country inhabited by one-fourth of the world's people is immediately overwhelmed by the sheer number of human beings. But emerging from the teeming crowds, he added, were individuals who left the Valentines with "a thousand vivid and treasured images."

Valentine was impressed by the "extraordinary industriousness" of the people. The Chinese, he said, live "an incredibly hard life where the rule is to labor almost every working hour in back-breaking, life-consuming toil."

While adequate housing remains a tremendous problem, Valentine said food actually appeared to be plentiful. The many children they met, he said, "were marvelously attractive, winsome and happy and appeared to be deeply loved and cared for."

Although China supports one of the world's largest standing armies, Valentine said he witnessed "little evidence" of a "culture-dominating military machine as in the Soviet Union," a country he visited last year.

Throughout the trip, Valentine said he perceived "appallingly little evidence of vital religious faith and religious vision" among the people, though there does exist "a pervasive commitment to leap toward justice, dignity and life."

"These people are not without ethics," he noted. "In fact, their ethics in some ways appear to be far more rigorous and responsible than the prevailing morality of the West. But they need to move toward the undergirding of all their social structures with the truth of revealed religion that authentic ethics issues from authentic theology."

The best prospects for effective Christian witness in China, Valentine believes, lie in opportunities just now beginning to open for Christian laypersons who find inroads into the country through business, medicine, education and technology.

The Valentines stepped off the beaten tourist's path on many occasions, including a trip to the Christian seminary in Nanjing where they were "cordially received." Valentine spoke with administrators, faculty members and some of the nearly 200 students who are training for various kinds of Christian ministry.

The faculty and students, he said, are "deeply committed to working within the Chinese culture to expand the promising house church movement and to recover the important ground gained years ago through the work of Christian missionaries and other Christian witnesses."

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In addition to a kaleidoscope of images of the Chinese people, Valentine said he will always remember China as "a country of walls." Symbolized most dramatically by the famous Great Wall, the thousands of walls which crisscross the farmland and surround the cities were "originally designed both to keep invaders out and to conserve the values developed within," he explained.

Most of the cities they visited were at least 3,000 years old, he added, a "humbling reminder" of the youthfulness of our own country when compared to the venerable and ancient history of the world's most populous nation.

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Research Fellowship
To Meet June 10

Baptist Press
5/29/85

DALLAS (BP)--The Southern Baptist Research Fellowship will meet 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m., June 10, at the Greneleaf Hotel, Dallas, prior to the annual session of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Religion and the Future of American Cities" will be the topic of an address by Paul Geisel, professor of urban sociology in the Institute for Urban Studies, University of Texas at Arlington.

The president's address, "Religion Research Issues in Southern Baptist Life," will be presented by Orrin Morris, director of the division of research, Home Mission Board, Atlanta.

Other featured speakers include Ebbie Smith, assistant professor of missions and Christian ethics, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas; Ron Tonks, assistant executive director of the Historical Commission, Nashville, Tenn., Benny Daniels, associate director of the regional office, Bureau of the Census, Dallas, and C. Kirk Hadaway, director of research, Center for Urban Studies, Nashville, Tenn.

Membership in the fellowship is open to denominational agency staff, state convention staff and local church staff involved in research.

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Southern Baptist Ministers
Shifting To Republicans

Baptist Press
5/29/85

GREENVILLE, S.C. (BP)--An overwhelming number of Southern Baptist ministers have deserted the Democratic Party in favor of the Republican Party during the past five years, an ideological shift which may help explain the current strife within the Southern Baptist Convention, according to James L. Guth.

Guth, professor of political science at Furman University in Greenville, S.C., bases his conclusions on a recently completed survey.

"While it is true the white South, as well as the nation as a whole, has moved toward Republican affiliation since the 1980 election," Guth said, "the increase is much more dramatic among Southern Baptist ministers. I believe this is occurring largely because the Republican Party is addressing social issues relevant to the ministers and that the rift inside the Southern Baptist Convention is, for the first time, forcing ministers to choose sides."

Guth sent more than 1,700 surveys to a random sample of Southern Baptist pastors in 1984-85 and received nearly 1,000 responses. He asked for views on social issues, especially those of concern to the Christian right, and to see if party realignment was taking place. Many of the findings were compared to those of a similar survey he conducted in 1980-81.

He presented the findings to the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago in April.

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"Like the rest of the South, the Southern Baptist ministers were, at one time, overwhelming Democratic," Guth said. "But now the ministers are overwhelmingly Republican, and most of the party realignment has taken place since the 1980 election."

According to Guth's 1980-81 poll, 29 percent of Southern Baptist clergymen called themselves Republican, 41 percent were Democrat and 30 percent were independent. By 1984, however, 66 percent of the clergy had moved into the Republican camp and the Democratic percentage fell to 25.

It should be noted the figures for both the Republicans and Democrats in the 1984 poll included independents who were "leaning." Guth said these "leaners" exhibited all the traits of those who listed themselves as "strong" Republicans or Democrats.

"Although ministers have moved in the same direction as the national and Southern white electorates, they are far more Republican and far less Democratic than either," Guth said.

The most dramatic changes have occurred in such deep south states as South Carolina, Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi, where fully half of the ministers have shifted their allegiance from the Democrats to the Republicans.

The number of new Republicans in the deep south is 49 percent, compared to 25 percent in the Northeast and Midwest.

Why has this party realignment taken place? Are Southern Baptist ministers becoming more conservative or has the Democratic Party failed to address issues important to clergymen?

Guth said the reasons are many. His survey found, for instance, the new Republicans overwhelmingly favored conservative issues. Eighty-eight percent were against the ERA, 84 percent were for an anti-abortion amendment, 78 percent favored the Moral Majority and 98 percent preferred Reagan.

"Although the ministers are following a national pattern and becoming more conservative, they have, for the most part, always been conservative," Guth said. "It used to be that if you were a white Southerner, you were a Democrat, even if you were conservative.

"But that's no longer the case. The Republicans have been addressing the right issues and conservatives have been finding the party which is more in line with their political philosophy."

The new Republicans also tend to support the Southern Baptist Convention's conservative faction and its causes. Seventy percent strongly agreed the Bible is inerrant and 56 percent felt women should not be ordained. The same figures for old Democrats were 46 percent and 43 percent, respectively.

"I think it is clear that the people who have moved within the convention have moved to the conservative side," Guth said. "The Southern Baptist Convention has always had the sort of problems it is facing now, but this time the fundamentalist faction is better organized and the problem isn't so easily diffused.

"Before, the lines were never clearly drawn and there was no need for people to choose sides. But now they are and you see people making up their minds. They are having to move in one direction or another."

Guth concluded his paper with the observation that the continued allegiance of the ministers to the Republican Party would depend very much on the performance of the second Reagan administration.

"But even in the absence of major action on issues such as a constitutional amendment on abortion or school prayer," Guth said, "one must suspect most Southern Baptist ministers will prefer the symbolic offerings of a conservative administration to those of a Democratic Party dominated by liberals."