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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee:
901 Commerce #75
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-235
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Marv Knox, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041

DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996

NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300

RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151

WASHINGTON Stan L. Haste, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4228

June 10, 1986

86-87

SBC Peace Committee
To Ask For Extension

By Dan Martin

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee will ask for a one-year extension so it may define the limits of theological diversity in the agencies of the 14.4-million-member SBC.

The request is part of an 11-page report issued by the committee on the eve of the 1986 annual meeting of the SBC in Atlanta's Georgia World Congress Center, June 10-12.

The report, adopted unanimously June 8 also asks for a one-year moratorium on political activities so the committee can do its work "without being constantly besieged by an emphasis on the political controversies" in the convention.

"The call for a moratorium is in no way an effort to muzzle anyone or to ask anyone to compromise their convictions," said Charles Fuller, chairman of the committee created at the 1985 annual meeting in Dallas and given the task to study the controversy and recommend solutions. "We are not just asking Southern Baptists to declare the moratorium, we are offering something in return."

The request, one of seven recommendations included in the report, asks for the moratorium and a "deceleration, if not a dismantling of the political power structures, allowing the Peace Committee and SBC and agency leadership to work without distraction on the theological and political problems before us during the year 1986-87."

Fuller said the "heart of the report is the theological diversity issue." In its February meeting, the committee issued a statement that "preliminary findings" indicate "significant theological diversity" exists in the six seminaries of the SBC.

"The statement listed four illustrations of differences of opinion--the historicity of Adam and Eve, the accuracy of accounts of events recorded in the Bible, the stated authorship of books of the Bible and the miracles recorded in the Scripture.

"Our task in the coming year," Fuller said, "will be to attempt to work through a definition of the legitimate parameters of our diversity. There is no question that a certain amount of legitimate diversity is good, healthy and wholesome. But it is also obvious there is a limit to how far our diversity can stretch without deteriorating our fellowship.

"During the coming year we will work on what constitutes legitimate diversity."

Fuller said many have predicted there will be "casualties" as the limits are established, because "there is no way in which we can finally come to peace without having some casualties. Some people who have been at the heart of the controversy will have to be dealt with. But one of our responsibilities is to try to bring about reconciliation and bring along as many of us as we can in the denominational family."

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The 11-page report, to be presented to the convention June 10 at 7:10 p.m., was drafted by a subcommittee headed by Atlanta layman Harmon Born. Other members were Jerry Vines of Jacksonville, Fla.; William A. Hull of Shreveport, La.; Daniel Vestal of Midland, Texas; and Albert McClellan of Nashville, Tenn.

It was fine-tuned during a three-and-a-half hour meeting June 8 and unanimously adopted by the 20 members present. Jim Henry of Orlando, Fla., and Vestal were absent.

It includes seven recommendations, including the one calling for the moratorium on political activity and another asking to be continued until 1987. It also asks that 1986-87 be a year of intercession with "periods of prayer, prayer rallies and similar emphases for reconciliation and restoration in SBC life and work."

It urges Baptist Press, the state Baptist newspapers and the "autonomous independent journals to be especially careful to be fair and accurate in reporting events in the convention and refrain from labelling and attributing improper motives."

It also requests the new SBC president and SBC nominating committees "to be especially mindful of fairness in all appointments and nominations so that they are representative of the convention."

Another recommendation points out the Peace Committee has scheduled a prayer retreat with SBC agency leadership and seminary presidents, and calls on Southern Baptists to "strongly support" those who will be involved in the effort.

Fuller said the committee was given three assignments: "We were asked to identify the sources of the controversy, to make findings and then to offer recommendations. Many people wanted us to get on to the third part, but we have spent a large part of the past year on the first and second sections of our assignments.

"Our report reflects more of the sources of the controversy and the statements, but we expect the next year to focus on the recommendations."

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Baptist Preachers
Explore Christ

Baptist Press
6/10/86

By Robert O'Brien and Jim Lowry

ATLANTA (BP)--Some 20,000 preachers from across the Southern Baptist Convention heard messages exploring dimensions of the nature of Jesus Christ and elected Georgia pastor Nelson Price as president at the two-day Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference, June 8-9.

Adrian Rogers of Memphis, Tenn., expected to compete for the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention at its 129th annual meeting, emphasized at the opening session of the Pastors' Conference that the house of Christianity stands firmly on the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

"If you do not accept the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, you have some real problems," declared Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church. "If you don't believe in the virgin birth, then you will have difficulty with Mary, Jesus Christ, the Word of God and your own character. I wouldn't give you half a hallelujah for your chances in heaven if you don't believe in the virgin birth."

Price, who preached on "The Name of Jesus," was elected without opposition to succeed Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, as president. Price is pastor of Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga.

Thomas A. Hinson, pastor of First Baptist Church of West Memphis, Ark., was elected vice president. Richard Blair, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, was elected secretary-treasurer.

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Only passing reference was made during the two-day conference to the strife Southern Baptists have undergone in the debate between fundamental-conservatives and moderate-conservatives.

"Many of you may have come to Atlanta with the cry down deep in your hearts, 'Is there any hope for my convention, for my church, for my ministry, for my marriage, for me?'" said James Reimer, pastor of Second Baptist Church, Springfield, Mo.

Jerry Vines, co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., preached on the literal return of Jesus Christ. He said Christians should be concerned with the person of Christ, not the event of the second coming: "The one who invaded history 2,000 years ago will conclude history some day. We have the promise of a literal second coming because he had a literal birth, life, death and resurrection."

Speakers throughout the conference, including former SBC President Bailey Smith of Oklahoma City, emphasized the validity of the Bible as the Word of God and urged pastors to apply its teachings to their lives and ministries.

David Ring, evangelist from St. Charles, Mo., who has cerebral palsy, challenged the crowd to make themselves available to Jesus, without concern for the abilities they may or may not possess. "Don't whine, but shine for Jesus," he urged. "Don't tell me God can't change lives. I have cerebral palsy. What's your problem?"

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WMU Avoids
SBC Politics

By Erich Bridges and Joe Westbury

Baptist Press
6/10/86

ATLANTA (BP)--The Woman's Missionary Union refused to become entangled in Southern Baptist Convention politics during its 98th annual meeting here, but the incoming president of the 1.2-million-member organization suggested missionaries as a cure for the denomination's seemingly endless controversies.

"Southern Baptists began because of missions," said former missionary Marjorie Jones McCullough of Alexandria, La., at a press conference following her election as national WMU president. "Any time we get away from missions and the Cooperative Program, then we've hurt ourselves."

Her comment was one of the 10 references to the convention squabble during WMU's two-day meeting.

A strong call for reconciliation within the denomination resounded as speakers sought a healing spirit in the strife torn denomination. Christine Gregory of Danville, Va., WMU national president, 1975-81, made the strongest plea as she called on the 3,500 women to adopt a specific time of daily intercessory prayer.

"We need a commitment to governing our tongues, to talking less about us and them, moderates and conservatives and fundamentalists, and more about Jesus," she said.

The 5,000 participants also celebrated the 150th anniversary of Baptist missions in China and prepared for the 100th anniversary of Southern Baptist missions education for children in 1988. The meeting theme, "What We Yet May Be," called on women to study their heritage as a guide for the future.

"Millions of women around the world are involved because the women before us had a vision," said outgoing President Dorothy Sample of Flint, Mich., who described her travels in 50 states and 34 countries during five years of leadership.

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"Dark clouds of controversy" have clouded the vision of Southern Baptists, she said, but Southern Baptist women "are praying we will have a clear vision again...We will not be weakened in our commitment...We shall not doubt. We shall believe the impossible."

The organization elected McCullough as its new president to succeed Sample, who has completed a maximum of five one-year terms. Pattie Dent of Holly Springs, Miss., was elected recording secretary, succeeding Betty Gilreath of Charlotte, N.C.

McCullough, the 14th president of WMU, worked as a Southern Baptist missionary in Nigeria, Ghana and Brazil. The widow of Glendon McCullough, the late Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission leader, she has held numerous local, state and national WMU leadership positions. She received the bachelor of arts degree from Louisiana College in Pineville and the master of religious education degree from the WMU Training School (now part of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), Louisville, Ky.

In her state of the union address, WMU Executive Director Carolyn Weatherford noted a slight decline in national WMU membership but reported a net increase of 2,315 WMU groups and 15,974 members since 1981. She said almost 70 percent of Southern Baptist churches are reporting some type of WMU involvement.

At all five sessions of the gathering, the WMU women were challenged by British missions researcher David Barrett to use "world-class thinking."

"The opposite of world-class thinking is self-centered thinking," explained Barrett, editor fo the "World Christian Encyclopedia." He is doing research for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board for four years.

"World-class thinking is looking at the world as God sees it, with God's eyes, God's heart, God's love, God's concern." Christians must look beyond themselves to the world's five billion people, including 900 million who live in absolute poverty, Barrett said.

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SBC Forum Makes Appeal
For Free Interpretation By David Wilkinson and Bob Stanley

Baptist Press
6/10/86

ATLANTA (BP)--The third annual SBC Forum, touted as an alternative to the larger Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference, began and ended June 9 with appeals for a return to the "Baptist hallmark" of freedom of biblical interpretation.

Norman Cavender, a Georgia layman, opened the meeting at the Omni in Atlanta with a promise that Southern Baptists will never abandon their hard-won liberty to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, despite the efforts of fundamental-conservative leaders.

"The sad truth is the bell of liberty in the Baptist Hall has been broken," he said. "We're drifting toward authoritarianism over the total of the Southern Baptist faith.

Later closing speaker James Flammig of Richmond, Va., urged Baptists not to make claims about the Bible that the Bible does not claim for itself.

In recent years, Flammig said, Baptists have become "divided over words never found in the Bible. Our attitudes do not mirror the attitudes of our Lord. We give little indication that we will return to the basic biblical principles of repentance, forgiveness, trust and love."

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Other speakers at the Forum were R. Keith Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, Richmond; Bill Sherman, pastor of Woodmont Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn.; and Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of Woman's Missionary Union, Birmingham, Ala. Herbert R. Reynolds, president of Baylor University, was unable to speak due to illness.

Charles Wade, pastor of First Baptist Church, Arlington, Texas, and Forum chairman, said he was "elated" with the attendance and with the themes addressed by the five speakers to the crowd of an estimated 5,000.

"I've heard themes I haven't heard in Baptist pulpits since I was a boy," Wade said. One of those themes, he said, was "Baptists as a people of freedom. You can put a Baptist and a Bible together and build a church as long as you trust that Baptist as a priest before God. But you have to trust, and that's what we've been missing in recent years in Baptist life."

Gene Garrison, pastor of First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, who presided at the meeting, said an offering of more than \$17,000 had been received to help offset about \$20,000 in expenses for the event.

In a standing vote, the audience joined Garrison in asking the Forum's program committee to bring a plan to next year's meeting to perpetuate the meeting on an annual basis.

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Religious Educators
Study Servanthood

By Ken Camp and Orville Scott

Baptist Press
6/10/86

ATLANTA (BP)--About 600 religious educators tackled the issue of how to handle diversity, examined the model of servant leadership and rallied around the theme, "It Takes Us All," at the 31st annual meeting of the 1,700-member Southern Baptist Religious Education Association June 7-9.

Diversity in the Southern Baptist Convention is nothing new, and only those who do not know Baptist history say the opposite, Walter Shurden, professor at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., told the religious educators.

"The Peace Committee told us what we already knew and have known for years--that there is theological diversity in the Southern Baptist Convention," said Shurden. He said diversity in theological emphases and in worship styles is part of Southern Baptists' heritage.

Looking at "the risks of servant leadership," Robert Fulbright, minister of Christian education at Kirkwood Baptist Church in Kirkwood, Mo., noted risks of shared responsibility, vulnerability and maintaining a balance between a healthy self-concept and a humble servant position.

Joel Gregory, pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, reminded religious educators that while they live in an age of religious superstars and a time that places emphasis on highly visible gifts, the New Testament says the long march of persevering service is the larger gift.

During a panel discussion, three Southern Baptist leaders agreed that while methods may change, biblical principles never do.

The organization's 1986 Distinguished Service Award was presented to Philip B. Harris who retired from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in 1977 after 17 years as head of the Church Training Department.

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During the business session, the religious educators elected as president Lloyd Householder, communications director for the Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn. They chose as president-elect Irene Bennett, minister of education and youth, Evans Baptist Church, Evans, Ga.

Other officers chosen were vice president, Jerry Chiles, minister of education, First Baptist Church, Carrollton, Ga.; western vice president, David Strawn, minister of education, Plymouth Park Baptist Church, Irving, Texas; central vice president, Willard Zeiser, program coordinator, Missouri Baptist Convention, Jefferson City, Mo.; eastern vice president, Diane Smith, consultant, Virginia Baptist Board, Richmond, Va.; and assistant secretary, Bob Thompson, church development consultant, St. Louis Metro Baptist Associations, St. Louis, Mo.

Re-elected were secretary-treasurer, Joe Haynes, consultant, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn.; and executive director, Elaine Dickson, president, Life Transitions, Inc., Brentwood, Tenn.

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Missionary George Bagby Cowsert
Dies Unexpectedly In Brazil

By Mike Chute

Baptist Press
6/10/86

VITORIA, Brazil (BP)--George Bagby Cowsert, 61, a Southern Baptist missionary to Brazil for 34 years, died unexpectedly June 6, in Vitoria while exercising in his home.

Missionaries report Cowsert returned home from jogging and was riding an exercise bicycle when he died. An autopsy showed the cause of death was a hemorrhage in his pancreas.

Cowsert's wife, Hilda, was in the northwest part of Espirito Santo state, speaking at an associational meeting, at the time. A household helper found him.

A memorial service was conducted June 8 in Vitoria, with 45 pastors and 600 people attending. The body was to be flown to the United States for another memorial service and burial in Wingate, N.C.

Cowsert has been director of religious education and stewardship for the Espirito Santo State Baptist Convention since 1977. Previously he was a general evangelist and executive secretary of the Rio Grande do Sul State Convention, 1953-65. He was a general evangelist in the state of Goias, 1965-77.

He started churches and was pastor of several during his missionary career. He was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to J.J. and Grace Bagby Cowsert, missionaries to Brazil for 40 years. His grandfather, B.Y. Bagby, was a pastor and cousin of William "Buck" Bagby, first Southern Baptist missionary to Brazil.

Besides his wife, survivors include four children, Naomi Grace Key, Fort Worth, Texas; Norma Anderson, Jacksonville, Fla., Elena Catherine Kay, a Southern Baptist missionary serving in Santos, Brazil; and Jack Cowsert, Raleigh, N.C.

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