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Study Group Has 'Healthy
Confrontation' With BJCPABy Dan Martin *N-CO*

WASHINGTON (BP)--A meeting between a nine-member Southern Baptist Convention fact-finding group and the staff of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs was a "healthy confrontation," the study committee chairman said.

"We had our confrontation," said Gary F. Young, chairman of the special committee appointed by the SBC Executive Committee in September to study the relationship between the convention and the BJCPA, an organization of nine Baptist bodies in the United States and Canada.

The committee was appointed in response to a motion introduced in the 1986 annual meeting of the SBC which called for the SBC to withdraw from the BJCPA and to establish "an exclusive Southern Baptist presence" in the nation's capitol.

The two-day meeting Nov. 20-21 featured an unscheduled appearance by a U.S. senator, six religious groups who maintain Washington offices, as well as sharp questioning of the BJCPA staff on positions, leadership style, affiliations and published writings.

It also included a briefing on the work of the BJCPA--which ranges from lobbying, to education, publication, research, working with governmental officials and involvement in lawsuits, primarily at the Supreme Court level, which relate to First Amendment, religious liberty and separation of church and state. Briefing the committee were James M. Dunn, executive director, and Oliver S. (Buzz) Thomas, general counsel and director of research services.

Young said the "confrontation was painful, but all confrontations are painful for me." He added he considers the confrontation on issues "healthy" because "it was the first time that participants in the issues were able to sit and talk about the matters that divide us."

He said the two-day meeting was "not intended to evaluate personnel. I felt it was a time to bring people who had various opinions together with the personnel (of the BJCPA) to see if we could answer some questions and clear up some of the difficulties. It was obvious after our first meeting (in October) that we were never going to be able to deal with the program of the Baptist Joint Committee until we had talked with them to try to clarify matters."

At the start of the meeting, Young told BJCPA staffers: "I hope you will not feel this is a grand inquisition. We will be asking you why you said something or wrote something. Please don't interpret that as accusations. We will be confrontive. We will ask questions and deal with some things. We are dealing with issues, and not personalities, but we are not rocks, so personalities will be involved."

Following the meeting, Young commended the staff: "I am proud of you because you have submitted yourselves to a grueling experience. No one forced you to do it. You submitted yourselves. I commend you for your Christian spirit. I commend you for turning the other cheek. I commend you for practicing the Scriptures in your life and letting Christ shine through you."

Young added that while "forgiveness and healing are now in the process," it "does not mean the matter is already solved. But it does mean that I think solutions are possible."

Previously, Young said he believes "adjustments" may be necessary if the SBC is to maintain its relationship with the Baptist Joint Committee. "I choose the word 'adjustments,' very carefully," he said. "I don't think after all of the fact-finding we would recommend the status quo. We may recommend ways to help the Baptist Joint Committee, to enhance the effectiveness of the Baptist Joint Committee. Those are adjustments.

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"Adjustments don't necessarily mean that I think they are doing something wrong. 'Adjustments' may mean they are doing things right, and we need to enhance that."

The two-day meeting featured an appearance by U.S. Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., who told committee members that in his relationship with the staff of the BJCPA he has "felt ministered unto and not just lobbied."

Hatfield, who grew up as a Conservative Baptist, is a member of Georgetown Baptist Church, dually aligned with the SBC and with American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

He cited the Baptist Joint Committee and the Christian Legal Society for their assistance in the passage of Equal Access legislation, which allows secondary schoolchildren equal opportunity for religious activities as they have for other extracurricular activities.

Also appearing before the committee were representatives of the American Baptist Churches, Seventh Day Adventists, United Methodists, National Council of Churches, National Association of Evangelicals and Christian Legal Society, all of whom maintain offices in Washington and who told how their offices are organized and of their contact with the BJCPA on various issues.

The meeting also featured sharp questioning of BJCPA staffers over the joint committee's opposition to the School Prayer Amendment, the leadership style of Executive Director Dunn, as well as Dunn's former association with the controversial People For The American Way and the writing of Associate Executive Director Stan Hastey.

Paul Pressler, a Texas appeals court judge from Houston and Executive Committee member, was critical of Dunn's comments during the debate on the School Prayer Amendment, as well as Hastey's writing in particular and the Baptist news media in general.

At one point, the meeting also featured impassioned pleas for peace and reconciliation.

"The times out of which these things came were highly emotionalized times of polarization," said Darrell Robinson, vice chairman of the SBC Executive Committee and pastor of Dauphin Way Baptist Church of Mobile, Ala.

"I think it is apparent, at least to me, that generally the press has been biased against the Judge and the movement which he is identified with. But I see moderation and a change and a coming together like we haven't had before. I think we are growing through it," Robinson said.

"I wish that we could move on from this with reconciliation and forgiveness. I know it is hard to forgive ... it is hard to forgive when we are mistreated or when one we love is mistreated. But the Word tells me that God has forgiven me and he gave his Son. It wasn't easy for Jesus to forgive us on that cross, but he has done it.

"God forgets. I have a hard time forgetting, but I find that if I'll forgive, it grows less and less vivid in my mind and heart as I go on, not treasuring it and not going over and over it. So I wish we could practice this forgiveness and leave behind these things," Robinson added.

Pressler said he agreed with Robinson, but added: "I think sometimes things need to be brought to light in order that we might put them behind us. If we are not confrontational on solving problems when wrong has been done, then we will not get the problems solved."

Robinson said: "I think you are right, and this is the time to be confrontational and to resolve it and to get it on the table. Then we can leave it behind and move on to greater things. Can you do that?"

Pressler answered: "I am willing to do so, but I do think we need to know the unfairness that there has been."

In addition to Young, Pressler and Robinson, committee members are James Yates, pastor of First Baptist Church of Yazoo City, Miss.; Carolyn Miller, a homemaker from Huntsville, Ala.; Frank Lady, an attorney from Jonesboro, Ark.; Frank Ingraham, an attorney from Nashville, Tenn.; David Maddox, a real estate developer from Fullerton, Calif.; and James Jones, pastor of Campbellsville (Ky.) Baptist Church.

Director 'Welcomes'
Fact-Finding Effort

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WASHINGTON (BP)—The executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs told a nine-member fact finding committee he "welcomes" their investigation into the work of the religious liberty watchdog organization.

"Meeting with this committee is a plus," said James M. Dunn. "We welcome the opportunity to help you get facts ... not opinions."

The committee was appointed by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee to study and make recommendations about the relationship between the SBC and the BJCPA, which is composed of nine Baptist bodies in the United States and Canada.

The committee was named in response to a motion introduced at the 1986 annual meeting of the SBC, which would withdraw the SBC from the BJCPA and establish "an exclusive Southern Baptist presence in Washington."

Dunn told the committee he both welcomes their fact-finding visit and supports an enhanced Southern Baptist presence in Washington.

"It may surprise some of you that you have no stronger backer for a Southern Baptist presence in Washington than James M. Dunn," he said. "Southern Baptists do need an independent presence in Washington. It has come to some realization, with Larry Braidfoot (general counsel and citizenship specialist with the SBC Christian Life Commission) spending about a week a month here.

"We are eager and anxious to magnify the Southern Baptist voice in Washington," Dunn said. "We will do what we can," to support a voice on moral issues other than the BJCPA assignment.

Dunn also told the committee he believes the BJCPA "has been doing our job," in Washington, and added he thinks "we have been doing it the way Southern Baptists and others have asked us to do it." Despite that, he said, "We are open to change."

Dunn was questioned about the committee's opposition to the constitutional amendment on school prayer, which was opposed despite a 1982 SBC resolution supporting the action.

Dunn said the position taken by the staff followed a position statement adopted by the BJCPA board in March of 1982. "We were saying what the committee told us to say," he explained.

The executive also said the 1982 resolution contained "factual errors," in that it said no government official would write the prayer. Dunn said a White House briefing paper had said if the prayer were allowed, "someone" would have to write the prayers.

He added the 1982 SBC resolution was in opposition to eight other SBC resolutions passed supporting the Supreme Court's 1962-63 decisions opposing state-mandated prayer in the classrooms. Following the 1982 SBC resolution, he said, 10 state conventions acted on the matter; nine "repudiated" the SBC document and one supported it.

Stan Hastey, associate executive director, told the committee: "There is the perception that the Baptist Joint Committee has regularly defied the wishes of the Southern Baptist Convention. But in the entire 50-year history of the organization, the only time the position of the Baptist Joint Committee ran contrary to that of the SBC was in 1982. It is not as though we have been unresponsive. On the contrary, it has been a very happy consensus across the years."

One member of the fact-finding committee, Paul Pressler, an appeals court judge from Houston, was critical of Dunn's published comments during the school prayer amendment debate. At the time, Dunn said President Reagan was "playing petty politics with prayer" and engaging in "despicable demagoguery" in regard to the amendment.

The Texas judge referred to Dunn's comments as "disgraceful conduct" and demanded an apology and assurances "you will not do that again." Study Committee Chairman Gary F. Young of Phoenix, Ariz., told Dunn he believes the statement "hurt your witness."

Dunn told the committee he regrets his choice of words in the heat of political battle.

Wesley Forsline, chairman of the BJCPA, and pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, affiliated with the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., in Minneapolis, noted Dunn's job "calls for someone who can be abrasive and a 'burr-under-someone's-saddle,'" and said of the remarks concerning Reagan, "That is one of the things that happens up here. I am not going to take it too seriously."

Pressler, however, said Dunn's remarks "hurt the Baptist Joint Committee very badly."

Forest Montgomery, general counsel for the National Association of Evangelicals, told the fact-finding committee the comments likely had a positive end result.

"The Baptist Joint Committee is sometimes admittedly fiesty. They started out on the school prayer issue ... (with) rhetoric that was more exaggerated than we would have used. But it is interesting the way that worked out. Having quite plainly opposed the president on the school prayer amendment, then when the Baptist Joint Committee went to bat for Equal Access, it gave them great credibility on that school prayer issue."

Equal Access legislation, actively supported by the NAE and the BJCPA, allows secondary school students "equal access" to school facilities for religious activities as are granted to other extracurricular activities.

During the meeting, Dunn told the committee he "made a mistake" to serve as a director of People For The American Way, a First Amendment rights coalition. Dunn served one three-year term but declined a second term after criticism of the organization by Southern Baptists.

According to its critics, the organization has engaged in "vicious attacks" on "conservative Baptists" including former presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Dunn was questioned about the fact he is included in a currently-available fund-raising tape circulated by People For The American Way. Although several of the committee members said they had been shown the tape by Albert Lee Smith, a Birmingham, Ala., insurance executive and Southern Baptist representative on the BJCPA, Dunn said he has not seen the tape, did not know he had been included and has never been contacted by Smith about the tape.

Young told Dunn he "regrets" that Smith had chosen to show the tape to several committee members but had not contacted Dunn directly about it.

Pressler also questioned Hastey about articles he has written on the current strife in the SBC and his coverage of a meeting during the 1986 annual meeting of the SBC. The Texan referred to Hastey's articles as "bad reporting ... absolutely terrible journalism."

Hastey said in 13 years as a Baptist Press reporter in Washington he has "written probably 1,000 pieces. Only a very small percentage of them has ever been questioned. This (a story on the 1986 meeting) is one of these instances. But, as I tried to tell the judge that day, it was an honest mistake. I do not write that which I know to be false."

Hastey added: "I have too great a self-interest in my own vocation as a Christian and in my professionalism as a journalist to ever deliberately write falsehoods. All I would ask is enough allowance on the part of my critics is that perhaps my mistakes are honest ones ... (or) bad reporting from time to time."

Special Committee Invites
Testimony Concerning BJCPA

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WASHINGTON (BP)—Southern Baptists who wish to comment on the work of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs may do so in an open meeting in Nashville, Tenn., Jan. 20, 1987.

A special study committee, named by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee to study the relationship between the SBC and the Washington-based religious liberty watchdog group, invited persons who wish to comment on the BJCPA to its next meeting, to be held in the SBC building at 901 Commerce.

The committee was charged with the dual responsibility of studying the relationship and making recommendations, as well as studying the makeup of the SBC Public Affairs Committee, a 15-member group that relates to the BJCPA.

Gary F. Young, chairman of the nine-member committee, said a time block from 1 to 9 p.m. has been set aside to hear from people who wish to have input in the committee's ultimate decision.

Young, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Phoenix, Ariz., said people who wish to appear must notify him in writing of their intention by Jan. 5. He can be addressed at First Southern Baptist Church, 3100 W. Camelback Road, Phoenix, Ariz. 85017.

Presenters will be limited to 15 minutes but do not necessarily need to take all of the time, Young said.

In addition to inviting Southern Baptists to participate, Young said questionnaires are being sent to selected groups for input. Included are members of Congress recommended by members of the study committee, the SBC Executive Committee, the 42-member BJCPA, state executive directors, editors and public affairs leaders and a random sampling of Southern Baptists.

The committee also will meet with the 15-member Public Affairs Committee on Jan. 21, 1987, Young said.

The fact-finding committee will make a preliminary report to the February meeting of the Executive Committee and a final report to the group in the Executive Committee's business session immediately prior to the 1987 SBC annual meeting in June in St. Louis.

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Alabamans Re-elect Layman,
Continues 'Term of 18 Days'

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Baptist Press
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MOBILE, Ala. (BP)—After serving a term of 18 days, layman Steve Tondera of Huntsville was re-elected president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention at its annual meeting in Mobile Nov. 18-19.

Tondera, who succeeded Lewis Marler of Jasper on Nov. 1 when Marler resigned because of health reasons, defeated Glenn Weekley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jasper.

An employee of NASA and immediate past chairman of deacons in the First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Tondera also is president of the Alabama Cattlemen's Association. He is the first layman to serve as president since former Mobile Mayor Lambert Mims was elected in 1970.

In other business, the 1,658 messengers passed a record budget of \$24.7 million, of which 42.75 percent will go to Southern Baptist causes and 57.25 to Alabama Baptist causes. This is a .26 percent increase over last year.

Several building programs dominated the business sessions, and one of them drew particularly heavy fire from the messengers.

Bill Butler, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dora, questioned Sanford University's sale and development of a 180-acre tract of land near its campus because he said the sale was executed without the convention's approval.

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Thomas Corts, president of Sanford, defended the sale and another messenger moved that the convention approve the action of the Sanford trustees. A standing vote was so close that a written ballot was taken, finally affirming the trustees' decision to develop the property, 420 to 371.

Two other building plans received approval: the state convention's purchase of a \$1 million, 14-acre tract in Montgomery as a potential site for a new state office building, and the Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers' request for a \$1.7 million loan from the federal department of Housing and Urban Development in order to build a 50-unit retirement home in Montgomery County.

The only resolution to spark debate was one opposing the "indoctrination of humanism" in the public schools.

Mobile was the site of a recent federal court case in which more than 600 parents and teachers sued the state board of education for approving textbooks that they said omitted historical references to Christianity and advanced the religion of secular humanism. Mobile Baptists were parties on both sides of the case, which is awaiting a verdict.

The resolution at the convention prompted an amendment that the term "secular humanism" replace "humanism." Messengers refused to adopt that change but did agree to "request" rather than "instruct" the Alabama Baptist Christian Life and Public Affairs Commission publicly to oppose the teaching of humanism in the commission's dealings with state officials and agencies.

Another resolution, recognizing women as "co-professionals" in ministry, failed to come out of committee because it was considered "divisive and controversial." The resolution, which stopped short of calling for the ordination of women, was offered by the Alabama Baptist Education/Music Association.

The 1987 Alabama convention will meet Nov. 17-18 at the Montgomery Civic Center.