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December 4, 1986

86-181

Peace Committee Adopts
'Foundational' Statements

By Dan Martin

CO-N

ATLANTA (BP)--Two statements that will provide the "foundation for reconciliation" in the Southern Baptist Convention--one on theology, the other on denominational politics--were adopted by the SBC's Peace Committee during its 10th meeting in early December.

Chairman Charles Fuller said the two statements "form the basis for reconciliation" in the nation's largest non-Catholic denomination, which has been involved in political and theological controversy for more than seven years.

Fuller, pastor of First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Va., said the two statements were "hammered out" by the 22-member group during an "intense" meeting. He added they will form the basic foundation for the committee's report, which is expected to be unveiled in preliminary form at the Feb. 16-18 meeting of the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville, Tenn.

The Peace Committee was created at the 1985 annual meeting of the SBC and charged with responsibility for discovering the sources of the controversy, making findings and then recommending possible solutions. It must make its final report at the 1987 annual meeting of the SBC, June 16-18, in St. Louis.

The "foundational" statements, Fuller said, came about as the committee "struggled with just what it is wanting to accomplish ... what it is supposed to do."

"I had come out of the prayer retreat (at Glorieta, N.M., in October) feeling we had moved well along in theological reconciliation and were ready to move right into reconciliation having to do with politics. We had suggestions from both sides of the house, but the committee felt something needed to be ironed out stating our basis for reconciliation," Fuller said.

The statement on the basis for theological reconciliation which the committee adopted says:

"It is the unanimous conclusion of the Peace Committee that the cause of peace within the Southern Baptist Convention will be greatly enhanced by the affirmation of the whole Bible as being 'not errant in any area of reality.'

"Therefore, we exhort the trustees and administrators of our seminaries and other agencies affiliated with or supported by the Southern Baptist Convention to faithfully discharge their responsibility to carefully preserve the doctrinal integrity of our institutions receiving our support, and only employ professional staff who believe in the divine inspiration of the whole Bible and that the Bible is 'truth without any mixture of error.'"

The statement picks up parts of three other documents: the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message Statement, in Article I, affirmed that the Scriptures are "truth without any mixture of error;" a 1980 SBC resolution exhorted "trustees of our seminaries and other institutions ... to faithfully discharge their responsibility to carefully preserve the doctrinal integrity of our institutions;" and the 1986 Glorieta Statement, made by the presidents of the six SBC-affiliated seminaries, affirmed "the 66 books of the Bible are not errant in any area of reality."

The Peace Committee's "foundational statement on the basis for political reconciliation" mirrors the theological statement, Fuller said. The statement says:

"It is the unanimous conclusion of the Peace Committee that fairness in the appointive process will contribute to peace.

"Therefore, we exhort the present and future presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Committee on Committees and the Committee on Boards to select nominees who endorse the Baptist Faith and Message statement and are drawn in balanced fashion from the broad spectrum of loyal, cooperative Southern Baptists, representative of the diversity of our denomination."

Fuller said after the "foundational" statements were adopted, the committee moved into consideration of nine specific recommendations concerning political activity, presented by the five-member political activities subcommittee, chaired by Peace Committee Vice Chairman Charles Pickering, an attorney from Laurel, Miss. (See related story)

The recommendations, like the "foundational" statements, will be passed on to a six-member subcommittee that will draft the final report of the Peace Committee.

Fuller named William Poe, an attorney from Charlotte, N.C., as drafting subcommittee chairman. Other members include Edwin Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Houston; Jerry Vines, co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla.; William Hull, pastor of First Baptist Church of Shreveport, La.; Daniel Vestal, pastor of First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas; and Albert McClellan, a retired denominational executive from Nashville, Tenn.

Fuller said the "foundational" statements and recommendations do not mean the committee has completed its work on political activity. "We are by no means finished with the subjects relative to denominational politics," he said, adding politics "is now the area where we feel we need to concentrate most in preparing our recommendation to the convention."

"The political activities subcommittee said they have received numbers of requests, some of which have been on file for months, along with those submitted by (moderate-conservative leaders) James Slatton (of Richmond, Va.) and Norman Cavender (of Claxton, Ga.). Some of those proposals will be the basis for the recommendations that will come," Fuller said.

He added some of the proposals call for radical revision of convention governing principles, structures and procedures, such as ones calling for a major change in the way appointments are made to the key Committee on Committees and another which would change the method by which convention presidents are nominated and elected.

"The committee is reluctant to recommend radical changes in the structure, procedures and policies which have been workable in the convention for so long," Fuller said. "The circumstances in which we find ourselves demand that we address sources of our division, but we must be careful that any changes we suggest have long-term benefits to Southern Baptists, not just expedient benefits."

He indicated the final report will include a number of recommendations in the "do and don't category" of politics within the convention. He added he has said all along there will be politics in the Southern Baptist Convention, and the task of the Peace Committee will be to help sort out the bad politics from the acceptable politics.

In his remarks concerning the December meeting, Fuller praised James Flanning, pastor of First Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., who has been elected to the Peace Committee, succeeding Cecil Sherman, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas, who resigned following the October meeting.

"James Flanning proved to be a good addition to the committee, coming up to speed readily and making measurable contributions to our discussion. He is a man of conviction, anxious to represent many Southern Baptists who think as he thinks," Fuller said.

The chairman said the committee has set three additional meetings: Jan. 8-9, 1987, in Dallas; Feb. 18-19 in Nashville, Tenn.; and April 2-3, also in Nashville.

Fuller added: "Despite the reactions of some to the Peace Committee's call for restraint and lowered political rhetoric, we are still convinced the best atmosphere in which to work for reconciliation is one not charged with overt political activity. Those with vested interests on both sides of our denominational house may disagree or even be cynical about it. Opinion is their privilege, but the committee has an assignment to carry out."

Eight Recommendations
OK'd By Peace Group

CO-N

ATLANTA (BP)—Two "foundational" statements, a transitional statement and eight recommendations have been adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee.

The foundational statements are:

"It is the unanimous conclusion of the Peace Committee that the cause of peace within the Southern Baptist Convention will be greatly enhanced by the affirmation of the whole Bible as being 'not errant in any area of reality.'

"Therefore, we exhort the trustees and administrators of our seminaries and other agencies affiliated with or supported by the Southern Baptist Convention to faithfully discharge their responsibility to carefully preserve the doctrinal integrity of our institutions receiving our support, and only employ professional staff who believe in the divine inspiration of the whole Bible and that the Bible is 'truth without any mixture of error.'

"It is the unanimous conclusion of the Peace Committee that fairness in the appointive process will contribute to peace.

"Therefore, we exhort the present and future presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Committee on Committees and the Committee on Boards to select nominees who endorse the Baptist Faith and Message statement and are drawn in balanced fashion from the broad spectrum of loyal, cooperative Southern Baptists, representative of the diversity of our denomination."

The transitional statement says:

"We believe the beginning and continuation of a process which hopefully will resolve theological issues will diminish undesirable political activity.

"In order to minimize as much undesirable political activity as possible during this process, we recommend the following:"

The group, by common consent, agreed to include in the final report a comment to "let the Bible speak for itself" on its nature, and cited the words of Moses (Deuteronomy 4:2), David (Psalm 119:160), Jesus (Matthew 5:18), Paul (II Timothy 3:16) and John (Revelation 22:19).

Nine recommendations were presented for discussion by the Peace Committee's political activities subcommittee. Eight were adopted and one was referred back to the subcommittee "for further work." One other recommendation, which arose from the floor, was referred to the subcommittee.

The adopted recommendations are:

— Recommendation One: "That the members of the Peace Committee commit themselves to abstain from all overt political activities. We further request that all political constituencies cease sending emissaries to instigate overt political activities in the Southern Baptist Convention.

"That we further request the leadership of all political constituencies to respond in writing to this recommendation of the SBC Peace Committee and that they abide by the report adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta, Ga., 1986, as follows:

"That the convention respectfully request there be a one-year moratorium on theological/political position meetings and a deceleration, if not a dismantling, of the political power structures, allowing the Peace Committee and SBC agency leadership to work without distraction on the theological and political problems before us during the year 1986-87.

"That the convention deplore the use of the type of intemperate, inflammatory and unguarded language used by some spokesmen on both sides of the political spectrum."

— Recommendation Two: "We believe Baptist Press has sought to abide by the report of the SBC Peace Committee, adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta, 1986, and should be commended.

"We encourage the autonomous independent journals to abide by the report of the SBC Peace Committee ... as follows:

"That the convention urge Baptist Press, the state Baptist papers and the independent journals to be especially careful to be fair and accurate in reporting events in the convention and refrain from labeling and attributing improper motives."

"We further encourage them to aid the Peace Committee in the peace process by positive and accurate reporting to their constituencies."

— Recommendation Three: "That the Peace Committee invite the editors of the state Baptist papers and Baptist Press to meet with the Peace Committee Wednesday afternoon, Feb. 18, 1987. ..."

Fuller told Baptist Press the meeting will give the editors of the 37 state Baptist newsjournals an opportunity for a "question and answer session. We will be looking for reaction to the preliminary report, inquiry. At that point, their input could be very helpful to us in working through our report, drafting and finalizing it."

— Recommendation Four: "That the Peace Committee request the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention to set a time in their agenda on Wednesday morning, Feb. 18, 1987, for the preliminary report of the Peace Committee and response by Executive Committee members."

— Recommendation Five: "In view of the fact that the Cooperative Program is the lifeline of all that we are doing as Southern Baptists, we commend our churches and state conventions for their increased giving to the Cooperative Program, and we encourage our people to continue their strong support of the Cooperative Program and urge that this trend continue."

— Recommendation Six: "That the SBC Peace Committee request the SBC Resolutions Committee to continue its policy of not presenting resolutions that are divisive in Southern Baptist life."

— Recommendation Seven: "We recommend that the president of the Pastor's Conference and the chairman of The Forum enter into a discussion concerning getting back together."

— Recommendation Eight: "That the Peace Committee commend the SBC president as he continues to seek input from all constituencies in the Southern Baptist Convention and exercises fairness in naming members of the SBC Committee on Committees."

The recommendations which were referred back to the political activities subcommittee were proposals having to do with the nomination and election of the SBC president and a suggestion on how to move the convention back to a more open nomination process without political party-style endorsements of candidates.

The committee also asked the subcommittee to look into suggestions of determining how "fairness" can be obtained in appointments and nominations.

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Southern Baptists
Get \$3 Million Rebate

Ann. SO-N

Baptist Press
12/4/86

DALLAS (BP)—Southern Baptists covered by their Annuity Board's church insurance program received an early Christmas present this year. Their December medical premium was free.

The Annuity Board refunded nearly \$3 million to 21,989 ministers and church employees or churches in November, according to statistics released by the board.

The free premium could mean an extra \$30 for an individual, or up to \$250 for a family of three or more.

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The rebate was an incentive in last year's "open enrollment" campaign to get new people enrolled in the medical plan and reward current participants who were covered since January 1986. The campaign opened medical coverage during October and November 1985 to all eligible ministers and church employees who had been denied participation in any medical plan.

Some 6,000 people enrolled in the Southern Baptist medical plan, a board spokesperson said.

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Northwest Baptists
Focus On Evangelism

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Baptist Press
12/4/86

SPOKANE, Wash. (BP)—The 39th annual Northwest Baptist Convention focused on the need for new churches and a greater commitment to evangelism as 460 messengers and 69 guests gathered at the Ridpath Hotel in Spokane, Wash., Nov. 18-20.

"Vision Northwest 2000" was the theme which provided an emphasis on expanding Baptist work in the two-state organization. Convention staff members and other leaders urged churches to begin developing strategies for making their dreams for the year 2000 come true.

Participants signed pledge cards to indicate their willingness to pray for spiritual renewal among the convention's churches and to support the beginning of a new ministry at their own local church level through prayer, financial support and/or personal involvement.

During a miscellaneous business session, Vernon Holliday, pastor of First Baptist Church of Klamath Falls, Ore., expressed disappointment in the convention's baptism total for 1985-86, "the lowest in a long time." He moved that the convention set a goal of one baptism per month per church or mission, noting that by the end of the 1987 church year, 4,320 baptisms would be recorded. The motion passed unanimously.

Gene Dempsey, pastor of Pinehurst Baptist Church in Everett, Wash., was re-elected to a second one-year term as convention president. Other officers are Allen Elston, pastor of Warm Springs Baptist Church in Warm Springs, Ore., first vice president; and Lee Kem, laywoman and member of Kitsap Lake Baptist Church in Bremerton, Wash., second vice president.

Messengers also approved a total budget of \$3,023,689, which is a 16.3 percent increase over the current budget. Northwest Convention churches are expected to give \$1,568,751 of that amount in undesignated contributions, up 5.2 percent from the current budget. The balance of funds are to be received from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and other sources of revenue. Of the portion Northwest Baptists will provide, 33 percent will support worldwide missionary and evangelistic endeavors through the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program unified budget. That percentage is the same as it is in the current budget.

The 1987 meeting of the convention will be Nov. 10-12 in Eugene, Ore.

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