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N-10

'Dissolve' BJC Ties,
Southern Baptists Urge

By Marv Knox & Greg Warner

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Southern Baptist Convention's representatives to the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs have recommended the SBC "dissolve its institutional and financial ties" with the Washington-based church-state agency.

The SBC Public Affairs Committee voted 8-4 to suggest the SBC sever ties with the Baptist Joint Committee, comprised of nine Baptist bodies. The vote, taken Oct. 6 following the BJC's annual meeting, also asked for \$485,200 to fund and staff the Public Affairs Committee "as the agency of the Southern Baptist Convention to deal with First Amendment and religious liberty issues beginning Oct. 1, 1988, or at the earliest possible date. ..."

The action does not mean Southern Baptists will "defund" the BJC, said Public Affairs Committee member Richard Land of Dallas. "This is a dissolution of institutional and financial ties, not defunding. Churches may still contribute" to the BJC, he said.

The Public Affairs Committee met before and after the BJC meeting in Washington Oct. 5-6. The motion to dissolve ties mirrored a motion made in the preliminary meeting of the Public Affairs Committee Oct. 4.

That motion would have asked the SBC Executive Committee to "immediately withdraw funding" of the BJC if it failed to provide certain financial information, professional staff correspondence and access to staff for evaluation interviews. The Public Affairs Committee instead passed a substitute motion that included the original requests but did not specify withdrawal of funding.

The Public Affairs Committee's motions stemmed from the BJC executive committee's previous refusal to grant a similar request. Following up on an SBC motion, the Public Affairs Committee has been attempting to analyze the BJC, including its accountability to the SBC.

When the BJC convened the following day, it set in motion its own staff evaluation process, granted the Public Affairs Committee only part of the information it requested and denied unilateral Public Affairs Committee access to the staff for evaluation.

The BJC voted 24-7, with only members of Southern Baptists' delegation dissenting, to request the BJC executive committee evaluate the staff on behalf of all nine member denominations and report back to the full BJC at its next meeting, in October 1988.

Immediately following that vote, Southern Baptist Norris Sydnor of Mitchellville, Md., asked the BJC to grant the Public Affairs Committee's request for eight items: a breakdown of the 1986-87 budget and the proposed 1987-88 budget; staff salaries and benefits for the past five years; a list of the staff's organizational memberships paid by BJC funds; itemized expense accounts for the past five years; a copy of the BJC constitution and bylaws; a roster of BJC committees; copies of correspondence to and from the staff for the last three years; and approval of Public Affairs Committee interviews with the staff Oct. 7 and 8.

The BJC granted access to five of the items but contested the Public Affairs Committee's right to expense accounts, correspondence and independent staff evaluation.

Land recounted how the Public Affairs Committee previously had sought the information and how the BJC executive committee -- in a poll conducted by Executive Director James Dunn on behalf of Chairman Wesley Forsline -- turned down that request. "It is important to note that it is difficult for our constituency to understand why" the BJC staff is not accountable to the Public Affairs Committee, he said.

"I would never permit correspondence of my professional staff to be opened," said American Baptist William Cober of Valley Forge, Pa. Baptist General Conference member Warren Magnuson of Aitkin, Minn., noted disclosure of correspondence could be harmful to innocent parties, particularly people that professional staff have helped in pastoral functions.

Concerning staff evaluation, Cober said: "If all nine member bodies did this, it would be inappropriate. Our staff could not do what we hired them to do." Added North American Baptist John Binder of Oakbrook Terrace, Ill., "My objection is to a formal staff evaluation from one agency of nine around this table."

Sydnor stressed the BJC "sells itself to the Southern Baptist Convention" by telling Southern Baptists, "The staff of the Baptist Joint Committee is our only staff" for church-state issues. The denied access to the requested items hampers the Southern Baptists' process of accountability, he added, noting the SBC delegation's position is untenable when it has accountability to Southern Baptists without accountability from the BJC.

The BJC subsequently voted to deny the three Public Affairs Committee requests. Southern Baptists cast all 11 votes to turn over expense accounts and to allow the Public Affairs Committee to evaluate staff. They cast all eight votes to allow the Public Affairs Committee to examine staff correspondence. Fifteen of Southern Baptists' 18-member delegation were present, and some of them sided with the majority on both votes.

Those votes represented the major loss for the Public Affairs Committee majority in a meeting characterized by both sides as hostile and in which members from both groups referred to "hidden agendas." The BJC also overturned or modified five other moves by the Public Affairs Committee or some of its members:

-- It approved a 1988-89 budget total of \$708,110, including \$515,600 from the SBC Cooperative Program budget. The request included a 15 percent increase over 1987-88 contributions. Some Southern Baptists dissented, particularly noting the SBC provides a majority of the BJC budget but does not have a majority voice in its decision process.

-- It passed a resolution proposed by Southern Baptist Les Csorba III of Alexandria, Va., that encourages presidential nomination and Senate confirmation of U.S. Supreme Court justices "who adhere to the traditional principle of church-state separation and the cherished right of religious freedom" and encourages Baptists to write senators in support of such nominees.

However, the BJC deleted eight paragraphs of the resolution that cited specific illustrations of what the "traditional principle" means.

-- It approved a resolution offered by Smith that demands that People for the American Way, a secular First Amendment organization, withdraw its videotape, "Life and Liberty for All Who Believe" because it "includes portions highly critical of many Christian leaders."

However, it struck 10 other paragraphs from the resolution, including the statement, "We believe it is in the best interest of all nine Baptist denominations that the (BJC) cease and desist from any further association with People for the American Way because its record and objectives are thoroughly foreign to the objectives of our nine Christian groups." Several members noted that, although Dunn at one time was an individual PAW member, the BJC never has been associated with the organization.

-- It declined to reprimand Dunn for writing a "clarification" letter to senators following an August resolution by the Public Affairs Committee in which it endorsed Robert H. Bork as a nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court. Dunn noted some people in Washington had been misinterpreting that endorsement to mean the entire SBC had endorsed Bork and said his letter clarified that misinterpretation. Public Affairs Committee members contended Dunn's letter counteracted and misinterpreted their action.

-- It refused to force Dunn to present to the Public Affairs Committee in advance any future staff clarifications of Public Affairs Committee actions.

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-- It refused to rescind but did refer to committee and pull from active circulation a 1980 resolution, "On the Dangers of Civil Religion." It also referred to committee Csorba's request to delete all references to the "Religious Right" in the resolution.

In moves of consensus, the BJC adopted a Public Affairs Committee-sponsored resolution supporting the Danforth Abortion-Neutral Amendment to the 1987 Civil Rights Restoration Act, and it adopted a motion proposed by Sydnor that encouraged the BJC to establish a voluntary affirmative action hiring policy for executive staff.

When the Public Affairs Committee reconvened following the BJC meeting, several members who consistently lost votes in the BJC action said they felt they had been abused by the BJC. "I felt like we'd been beaten up," said Les Csorba III of Alexandria, Va. "We made every attempt to cooperate, but I felt thoroughly punished."

During this meeting, they voted to recommend dissolving SBC ties with the BJC. The motion was made by Albert Lee Smith of Birmingham, Ala., who also offered the funding withdrawal motion prior to the BJC meeting.

Public Affairs Committee members defeated a motion offered by Lloyd Elder, president of the SBC Sunday School Board in Nashville. The motion would have declined action on another SBC motion calling for continued examination of the BJC staff, and it would have noted the Public Affairs Committee is working "to successfully preserve 'jointness' with the other Baptist bodies and yet ensure responsiveness to our own Southern Baptist Convention."

Committee members approved a Land motion noting Dunn "is not the executive director" of the Public Affairs Committee, directing that all Public Affairs Committee reports to the SBC or its Executive Committee be made by the Public Affairs Committee chairman or his designee and that no BJC staff member be represented as a Public Affairs Committee staff member.

Public Affairs Committee Chairman Sam Currin of Raleigh, N.C., told Baptist Press: "I don't think this would have come to a head at this meeting had they (the BJC) not refused the Public Affairs Committee's right to look at financial records and documents and interview the staff. It really comes down to a matter of trusteeship and accountability. The Southern Baptist trustees do not believe they can represent the SBC ... when in fact they do not have the power to do so."

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N-CO

BJC, SBC Split Called
'Best For All Involved'

By Greg Warner & Marv Knox

Baptist Press
10/9/87

WASHINGTON (BP)-- Severing Southern Baptist ties with the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs is the best thing for all involved, including the eight other Baptist groups that comprise the Washington-based agency, according to the chairman of the 18-member Southern Baptist contingent.

"I really do feel we have done the right thing," Sam Currin of Raleigh, N.C., told fellow members of the SBC Public Affairs Committee.

Currin and seven other members of the committee voted Oct. 6 to ask the Southern Baptist Convention to dissolve the 50-year relationship between the SBC and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. Four Public Affairs Committee members voted against the action, five were not present for the meeting and one has resigned.

"I think the Lord had his hand in this," Currin later told Baptist Press. "The other eight (BJC bodies) are going to be much happier."

Members of four of those bodies disagreed with Currin's prediction, however, saying the departure of Southern Baptists would be tragic, disappointing and damaging to the work of the BJC.

The vote to sever SBC ties followed a two-day meeting of the BJC in which repeated initiatives from Southern Baptists on the committee were defeated by the full board.

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"I got a message they really do not want us," Currin told Baptist Press. "The meeting was so fractious, I did not even feel comfortable (with the other members) during the break times."

"The Public Affairs Committee felt that it really had no choice in the matter," he said. "The Southern Baptist members of the Joint Committee clearly perceived that their views and their trusteeship on the Joint Committee were not welcomed by the other eight member bodies."

"This has nothing to do with being welcome," said John Binder, executive director of the North American Baptist Convention. Southern Baptist members were welcomed by the BJC, Binder said but created tension by trying to run "roughshod" over other committee members.

"I presume they had made their decision (to disassociate) before they came and were just trying to justify it," said Warren Magnuson of Aitkin, Minn., and a representative from the Baptist General Conference.

In recent years, disagreement among Southern Baptists over the work of the Baptist Joint Committee has brought calls from some -- including members of the Public Affairs Committee -- for withdrawal of SBC funding from the agency and establishment of an SBC-only public affairs organization.

"This vote by the Public Affairs Committee is going to relieve a major source of tension in the SBC," Currin predicted. "Establishing a separate public affairs agency will give us better representation and will remove us and remove our convention from all controversy associated with the Baptist Joint Committee."

Although the SBC committee would not allow reporters to quote members' comments during their meeting, some members spoke to reporters afterward and allowed some of their comments in the meeting to be used "on the record."

Lloyd Elder, a Public Affairs Committee member and president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, said severing ties with the BJC negates Southern Baptists' renewed commitment to cooperate with other Baptists on the Baptist Joint Committee.

When messengers to the 1987 Southern Baptist Convention approved a restructuring plan for the SBC Public Affairs Committee, Elder said, they "knowingly voted" to continue the relationship of "jointness" with the BJC. "If we take this action, we will begin to hear more and more from the total constituency of Southern Baptists," Elder warned Public Affairs Committee members.

Arguing for defeat of the motion, Elder asked the committee not to let the turmoil of the two-day BJC meeting overshadow the 50-year relationship between the BJC and Southern Baptists. "Don't make a decision that goes against 50 years of jointness because of perceived disagreements today," he said.

Several members of the Public Affairs Committee said jointness is not possible, however, when they are not permitted a greater role in BJC decisions. During its meeting Oct. 6, the BJC denied Public Affairs Committee requests for more involvement in the BJC budgeting process, a separate evaluation of staff members and copies of staff correspondence and expense accounts.

"It is a question of accountability when they say we can't have all the information we request," said Albert Lee Smith of Birmingham, Ala., who made the motion to sever ties with the Baptist Joint Committee. "Southern Baptists are giving a pretty sizable amount of money (to the BJC), and it is important to have accountability."

"If surrender of accountability is the price of continued jointness, then the price is too high," agreed Richard Land of Dallas. "The only satisfactory accountability is accountability to trustees solely elected by the Southern Baptist Convention."

Land and at least two other committee members said if the Public Affairs Committee had been allowed to evaluate the staff, the vote to dissolve the joint relationship would not have happened. "And I wish it had not," Land added. "I have a heavy heart and a sense of loss, but in conscience I could do no less."

J.I. Ginnings of Wichita Falls, Texas, a Public Affairs Committee member who opposed the motion to disassociate, said progress made toward the Public Affairs Committee's goals -- such as the BJC's agreement to conduct its own staff evaluation with representation from the Public Affairs Committee -- indicated jointness would work.

While Ginnings earlier this year supported establishing a separate SBC agency in Washington, he said he changed his mind after seeing how effective the Public Affairs Committee could be on its own. "Underpinning all of this was my conviction that the (Southern Baptist) Convention wants us to remain tied to the Joint Committee," he added.

Jointness was working "as far as we were concerned," Currin said, "but we did not realize that by strengthening the Southern Baptist contingent on the Joint Committee we would engender a negative reaction from other member bodies." The expanded role of the newly constituted Public Affairs Committee produced a "backlash" from other leaders, he said.

William Cober, associate general secretary of the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A., disagreed: "I think the (Southern Baptist) group had already determined they were not in harmony with the historic activities of the Baptist Joint Committee. Several of them told me if they could not evaluate the staff and programs on their own, they did not see any way they could cooperate.

"They really have harmed our Christian witness and ought to be held accountable for their precipitous actions," Cober added.

"I felt there was a hidden agenda from some members of the Public Affairs Committee that was imposed on the Baptist Joint Committee," C.J. Malloy Jr. of the Progressive National Baptist Convention said after the BJC meeting. "For a new group of personalities to come in and vote against every proposal was unfortunate.

"If they were seeking to get information, they went about it in a rather intimidating way," Malloy said. "I feel it was more a personal attack (on the staff) than seeking to get information."

Several of the non-SBC members of the Baptist Joint Committee said even if Southern Baptists withdraw their financial support, the agency will continue by seeking funding from other sources. "But we would lose the jointness even if the funds came," said Magnuson. "We've been immeasurably blessed by the Southern Baptists over the years. We need them. We want them."

Binder, who said he was unsure if the BJC "could or should continue," said he would suggest a meeting between members of the Public Affairs Committee and the larger BJC to try to resolve differences.

New BJC Chairman Marvin Griffin of Austin, Texas, a National Baptist Convention of America representative whose church is dually aligned with the SBC, said: "My fervent hope is that the relationship will continue. There is room for different positions on the issue and still be good Baptists. That's what makes Baptists Baptist. However, jointness will be very difficult if the Public Affairs Committee takes the position that every position they adopt has to be ratified by the body."

BJC Executive Director James Dunn predicted the agency can continue its work in Washington by relying on financial support from individual Southern Baptist churches, associations and state conventions.

"This probably will mean a healthy and even stronger Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, regardless of the organizational or funding approach," Dunn said. "I am completely convinced that, one way or another, Southern Baptists will continue to have a strong voice for the separationist perspective in Washington, D.C."

If instead the Public Affairs Committee stays in the coalition and forces the BJC to depart from its "historic agenda ... as a champion of church-state separation," Dunn said, the BJC staff would resign and eventually the other Baptist bodies would "disassociate" themselves from the Southern Baptist Convention.

Preachers Counter Charges
'Baptist Hour' Political

N-LO

PHOENIX, Ariz. (BP)--Two preachers featured on the "Baptist Hour" program on the ACTS television network say they have not used the program for denominational political purposes.

Richard Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church, and Peter James Flammig, pastor of First Baptist Church of Richmond, Va., made the statements in response to charges they might have used the program to promote moderate political causes within the Southern Baptist Convention.

During the September meeting of the SBC Executive Committee, Paul Pressler, a Houston layman, said the two preachers on the program were candidates for office during the 1987 annual meeting. Jackson was nominated for president, and Flammig was nominated for first vice president. Neither was elected.

"People are wondering: Is the Radio and Television Commission/ACTS supporting candidates for the Southern Baptist Convention presidency?" Pressler asked.

He told RTVC/ACTS President Jimmy R. Allen: "You are doing a dangerous thing for Southern Baptists to give the impression, accurate or not, that the 'Baptist Hour' is used to promote presidential campaigns."

Pressler commented during a plenary session of the Executive Committee and said he may offer a resolution on the matter. At the end of the meeting, he said he would not bring the resolution.

However, during a meeting of the business and finance subcommittee, members voted 6-5 not to adopt a resolution which said, in part, that "the Executive Committee strongly urges the ACTS network to obtain a pledge to Southern Baptists from anyone who receives free or reduced-rate time on the ACTS network not to be a candidate for elective office within the Southern Baptist Convention within one year of his last appearance on such free or reduced-rate time on the ACTS network."

In his comments, Pressler also referred to a meeting in which Jackson reportedly told a group of Texans he would allow himself to be nominated again at the 1988 annual meeting. The Houston layman asked, "Are you going to allow him to continue (preaching on the 'Baptist Hour')?"

Allen replied the commission is "trying not to have candidates. We're looking for folks that will preach the gospel with commitment and skill," and added the preachers were selected last January for a 12-month rotation. "We will finish the rotation," he said.

Jackson told the Baptist Beacon, newsjournal of the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention, he had tried to protect the "Baptist Hour" from the SBC controversy. When it appeared he might be nominated in 1987, he withdrew from the program and was replaced by his associate, Joe Ford, for four weeks.

In response to Pressler's comments, Jackson told the Beacon:

"This is another obvious indication that the proclamation of the gospel has taken a back seat to the power-seeking ambition of individuals within our convention. We at North Phoenix have never done anything on the 'Baptist Hour' except to proclaim the gospel. It is obvious that the proclamation is certainly not the primary concern of some.

"Those who subjectively conclude that we would use the 'Baptist Hour' ministry for political purposes have only one criteria by which to offer such supposition. That criteria is the attitude of their own hearts and minds. They must reason that if they were in the position to so take advantage, they would do it. Therefore, they conclude that we would act in the same manner."

Flammig, who preaches both for the television and radio versions of the "Baptist Hour," told Baptist Press he has never dealt with the SBC controversy in any message he has delivered on the show.

"Our emphasis has been on providing a worship experience for those who watch, giving them biblical truth as related to the needs of life. I have avoided any kind of political involvement," he said.

Flamming added he began "providing the service" to Southern Baptists in January, but was "only asked to be a candidate for vice president four days before the convention. The 'Baptist Hour' involvement is for a year, while the nomination for office lasted only about four days."

He added he saw his involvement with the show as "providing a service for Southern Baptists" in that the church bears all production, editing and other costs and provides the TV show free of charge to the network.

"If I had felt there was a conflict of interest between preaching on the 'Baptist Hour' and being nominated, I would never have allowed my nomination. I have been very pleased to provide such a service to Southern Baptists (as doing the "Baptist Hour")," he said.

"I have been pleased we were able to serve, and I regret Mr. Pressler has been offended," Flamming added.

Jackson also told the Baptist Beacon that while the time on ACTS is provided free of charge, North Phoenix has assumed all costs of production, editing and programming. He said the church, in addition to contributing \$1 million through the SBC Cooperative Program unified budget last year, and making other gifts to missions causes, North Phoenix has voluntarily given more than \$50,000 per year to the ACTS network.

Jackson also told the Beacon: "It is inaccurate that I told any group anywhere that I would be nominated for president of the convention. I have stated to the entire Baptist constituency that I will be available anytime that this convention should call upon me for any helpful contribution they might think me capable of offering."

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(Contributing to this article were Elizabeth Young, managing editor of The Baptist Beacon, and Dan Martin, news editor of Baptist Press.)

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In story "HMB Trustee McGhee Dies Following Plea For Peace," (BP87-150, Oct. 8, 1987), to clarify, please make the ninth paragraph, first sentence read, "The HMB administrative committee-proposed response included a concluding paragraph ... " This clarifies the 11th paragraph.

Also, for those who wish to include the name of the board member who was speaking when Mrs. McGhee collapsed, please substitute the following paragraphs for the 12th paragraph:

Following her plea for peace, Mrs. McGhee returned to her seat. Another board member, Linda S. Principe from Brandenburg, Ky., spoke against the request.

"I have experienced the Bible. I was told if there were any problems at all, we were to go back to the Bible," Mrs. Principe said. "It is not what I say or what I feel. It is what the Bible says."

As Mrs. Principe began to read from the third chapter of First Timothy about the qualification of pastors, Hutchinson interrupted her and called for doctors to aid Mrs. McGhee, who had slumped in her chair.

Thanks, BP