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1995 SBC WRAP-UP

Repentance, restructuring
make SBC's 150th historic

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
6/22/95

ATLANTA (BP)--Actions to cleanse the Southern Baptist Convention's heart and strengthen its muscle for the coming century were taken by 20,000 messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention sesquicentennial, June 20-22 in the Georgia Dome in Atlanta.

For its heart, messengers came to grips with racism that has shadowed the SBC in the 150 years since its 1845 founding.

To build its muscle, messengers adopted a "Covenant for a New Century" to restructure the nation's largest Protestant denomination for an emboldened, keener partnership with 40,000 U.S. churches for national and international missions and ministries.

Evangelist Billy Graham, against doctors' wishes after a hospitalization for a yet-unknown illness two weeks earlier, nevertheless addressed his home denomination, receiving standing ovations before and after his 50-minute address.

"We can live with the assurance that God knows what he's doing," the 76-year-old Graham told the convention, "and he's called you to the place you are in and he's joined you together as a body of believers in the Southern Baptist Convention with a common calling and a common commission to go into all the world."

Graham exhorted the SBC: "Let's light a candle that will banish the moral and spiritual blight in America and around the world."

Also nurturing the SBC's soul were evening celebrations of the SBC's heritage, leaving messengers to ponder the poignancy, Tuesday night for example, of actors portraying Lottie Moon, 19th century missionary to China, and other pioneers in SBC work stepping out of their shoes and leaving them on stage to ask: Who will fill their shoes?

Jim Henry, the SBC's peace-making, new-style conservative president unopposed for a second one-year term, was welcomed by a standing ovation following his election. "I'm overcome, humbled and honored that you would trust me again," he told the convention.

The SBC has entered a period of reconstruction following a 16-year denominational civil war, Henry stated in a news conference, referring to a conservative resurgence that prevailed over the SBC's former moderate establishment.

Messengers gave overwhelmingly approval to a "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation" June 20, stating, "... we apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime; and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously or unconsciously."

The 18-paragraph resolution describes racism as "deplorable sin" and states, "... we lament and repudiate historic acts of evil such as slavery from which we continue to reap a bitter harvest."

The resolution stood in contrast to convention action 31 years ago on the eve of Congress' historical vote on the 1964 Civil Rights Act when messengers opposed the measure.

Charles T. Carter, a Birmingham, Ala., pastor and Resolutions Committee chairman, stated to messengers: "... under God we have a unique opportunity in this historic moment" -- the 150th anniversary of the SBC, birthed in an 1845 dispute between northern and southern Baptists over whether slave holders should be appointed as missionaries.

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"This could be Southern Baptists' finest hour," maintained Carter who, as a 19-year-old pastor in 1955, had invited a young black man to close a central Alabama youth rally in prayer -- then watched 10 hooded Ku Klux Klansmen walk into the next rally two weeks later.

Following the vote, Gary Frost, an African American pastor from Youngstown, Ohio, accepted the SBC apology.

Frost, later elected to a second one-year term as SBC second vice president, noted he could not speak for all African Americans, but: "I do speak on behalf of all those African American believers in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who are committed to be obedient to the Word of God and long to see healing and unity in the body of Christ."

Frost continued: "On behalf of my black brothers and sisters, we accept your apology, and we extend to you our forgiveness in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ... We pray that the genuineness of your repentance will be reflected in your attitudes and in your actions. We forgive you for Christ's sake."

Earlier, Anita Renfroe, a messenger from Brandon, Miss., had stated after comments by four messengers that "any further discussion on this issue will only look like stalling. ... It will not reflect well on Southern Baptists. Therefore, I move the question." It was overwhelmingly approved, as was the resolution by at least a 95 percent margin, according to numerous observers' estimates.

Cary Kimbrell, a Baton Rouge, La., pastor and one of three messengers to speak against the resolution, described the timing as "unfortunate" and the resolution as a "discredit to those great men who founded this convention." Southern Baptist ancestors were born into a world with slavery, Kimbrell said, and messengers today cannot understand "exactly what they lived through."

Kimbrell made a motion that the SBC refer the matter to the Historical Commission for further study, but the motion was soundly defeated.

Passing the resolution, Carter said in a subsequent news conference, was "the easiest thing we have done in this area. ... Words must now be implemented by actions and attitudes. ... We haven't come as far as we need to go, perhaps, but we certainly -- I hope -- have passed another milestone." Between 1,500 to 1,800 predominantly African American churches are in the SBC, according to various estimates.

The racism stance follows efforts launched two years ago by directors of missions in 12 U.S. metropolitan areas with 42 percent of the nation's African American population. They underscored the need for Southern Baptists to overcome resistance among inner-city residents stemming from perceptions of racism in the convention's past. A draft of a declaration of repentance was circulated during meetings of Baptist associational directors and the SBC's African American Fellowship prior to the 1994 SBC meeting in Orlando, Fla. Last fall, eight annual state or regional conventions adopted similar racism repentance resolutions.

The SBC Resolutions Committee worked primarily from a statement drafted in a "Racial Reconciliation Consultation" in which 14 Baptist leaders -- black and white -- met May 22 at the SBC Christian Life Commission in Nashville, Tenn.

The resolution is not the SBC's first resolution against racism, but it is the first to confront the slavery issue in the SBC's history and to apologize to African Americans specifically.

It sparked widespread media interest, from The New York Times' front page to CNN, BBC radio World Service and news-talk radio shows in Detroit, Dallas and other cities.

Accompanying the sense of healing June 20 was a sense of daring as messengers endorsed a plan to enhance the SBC's effectiveness and efficiency in serving churches for outreach to untold millions at home and abroad without Jesus in their lives.

The Covenant for a New Century restructuring of the SBC, drafted by a seven-member Program and Structure Study Committee, was adopted after 65 minutes of discussion by a ballot vote of 9,590 to 5,357.

The vote reduces the number of SBC entities from 19 to 12 and sets in motion a restructuring process to be implemented by 1997. Messengers also approved a bylaw change, listing the entities in the new SBC structure, to be approved a second time by messengers to the 1996 convention in New Orleans.

In presenting the report, PSSC chairman Mark Brister, a Shreveport, La., pastor called on messengers to unite in support of the proposed SBC mission statement:

"The Southern Baptist Convention exists to facilitate, extend and enlarge the Great Commission ministries of Southern Baptist churches, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, upon the authority of Holy Scripture, and by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit."

The PSSC plan organizes SBC entities in five areas:

-- world mission ministries: International Mission Board, formerly the Foreign Mission Board, and North American Mission Board, which will combine the Home Mission Board, Radio and Television Commission and Brotherhood Commission.

-- church enrichment ministries: Baptist Sunday School Board.

-- theological education ministries: the six SBC seminaries.

-- Christian ethics and religious liberty ministries: Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

-- facilitating ministries: Annuity Board and Executive Committee.

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The PSSC plan would phase out the Historical, Education and Stewardship commissions, transferring many of their responsibilities to other SBC entities. It also would give the Executive Committee responsibility for the Southern Baptist Foundation.

Two amendments -- affirming the contributions of Woman's Missionary Union and changing wording related to home missions -- were approved by messengers. Both were termed by SBC President Henry as "friendly" amendments "for the good of the body and harmony of the convention."

An amendment to maintain the Historical Commission was declared defeated in a show of hands vote. It was presented by Slayden Yarbrough, a professor at Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, and a commission trustee now serving as interim executive director.

The amendment affirming WMU was jointly presented by Roy Smith, executive director of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, and John Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church, Houston.

It states: "We recognize and affirm the valued historic relationship with Woman's Missionary Union as an auxiliary to the Convention, and welcome the continued voluntary contribution of Woman's Missionary Union in mobilizing mission prayer support, promoting missions offerings and stimulating the missionary spirit within the Southern Baptist Convention."

The amendment was prompted by controversy over the PSSC plan to assign primary responsibility to the two mission boards for promoting the SBC's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions. No change, otherwise, was recommended for WMU's SBC auxiliary status. WMU founded the foreign missions offering in 1888 and the home missions offering seven years later.

Bisagno urged messengers to "pass this amendment, put this issue behind us, lock arms and get on with winning this world to Jesus Christ." After the session, WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien said she was "very satisfied" with the amendment approved by messengers, noting it affirmed WMU's presence and partnership in the denomination.

"The world of 1845 is far distant from the world in 1995 as we now look into the twenty-first century," the PSSC wrote in its report. "Our concern is that the Convention keep its primary focus on its founding vision -- and on our shared mission. Every question, no matter how difficult; every issue, no matter how complex, must be measured by this standard: How can Southern Baptists accomplish our mission to the greatest level of faithfulness and the highest standard of stewardship?"

In a news conference by PSSC members following adoption of the report, Bill Hall, a San Clemente, Calif., layman on the committee, stated, "Anytime you simplify corporate structure, it means more dollars given (by members of local churches) will reach their ultimate destination -- to win people to Christ."

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Louis Moore also contributed to this story.

1995 SBC WRAP-UP SIDEBAR
SBC: a youth's baptism,
Foster opposition & more

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
6/22/95

ATLANTA (BP)--Sustained applause filled the Georgia Dome for a moment ultimately more important than any touchdown by the Atlanta Falcons or any of their opponents.

Bernard Miller, pastor of First Missionary Baptist Church, Griffin, Ga., a primarily black new congregation, was baptizing his son, Brian, as part of the two-evening sesquicentennial celebration during the SBC's annual meeting June 20-22 in Atlanta.

Brian's baptism was one of many moments that left messengers from local churches more "Empowered for the Unfinished Task," to use the words of the 150th anniversary theme of the SBC's 1845 founding in Augusta, Ga.

Too, there were moments of challenge, such as a vote by messengers June 21 to oppose the nomination of Henry Foster -- just as the Senate in Washington was debating President Clinton's embattled nominee for U.S. surgeon general.

The resolution, originated by the SBC Christian Life Commission, urged senators "to oppose the nomination and to support any filibuster which may be waged against the nomination."

Charles T. Carter, a Birmingham, Ala., pastor and chairman of the Resolutions Committee, told messengers, "At this very moment in Washington, D.C., the Senate is debating this, and we feel that it is urgent enough that we need to act on it first."

Immediately following the vote, the resolution was faxed by the CLC to Sen. Phil Gramm, R.-Texas, to bolster his promised filibuster of the Foster nomination.

The SBC vote, by a show of hands, was characterized as 95 percent or more affirmative by Smith and other observers.

That afternoon, the Senate voted on a motion to end debate on Foster's nomination, but the 57-43 vote fell three votes short of the two-thirds majority required to do so.

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Jay Davis Robison, a Paris, Ky., pastor, told the convention he opposed the Foster resolution, specially in light of the SBC's June 21 adoption of the Resolution on Racial Reconciliation, which apologized to African Americans for racism.

"I am concerned about whether this resolution ... could be perceived as a racist move because he is African American," Robison said. "I believe that would be an unfair assessment, but I also believe it would be an assessment that some would draw. Let's avoid that assessment and defeat this resolution."

But in a news conference after the vote, Gary Frost, SBC second vice president and an African American pastor from Youngstown, Ohio, said while the vote may appear to be a contradiction, it really is not.

"There is a clear distinction between racial and moral issues," said Frost, who said it is obvious Foster is a capable physician. "The issue is abortion, which is an abomination before God."

The resolution said Foster favors "absolute abortion on demand." It acknowledged his "impressive academic and professional credentials" but challenges his credibility on such issues as the number of abortions he has reportedly performed and his failure to disclose "his long-time association with Planned Parenthood" The resolution also noted Foster advocates distribution of condoms and other contraceptives to minors without parental consent.

"We urge President Clinton to appoint a health professional who will advocate principles consistent with the Judeo-Christian ethic," the resolution said.

Among other resolutions:

-- A call to amend the U.S. Constitution to "protect the freedom of private persons, including students in public schools, to engage in voluntary prayer and other religious expression" in places where expressions of a "non-religious character" also are permitted.

Christian Life Commission general counsel Michael K. Whitehead told messengers groups like the American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way are intimidating "school boards and public officials to censor and silence and discriminate against students. ... We want to put a stop to that kind of discrimination. ... It's time for us to say no to the justices and to the lawyers and to say yes to the religious liberty given us by God and not by man."

-- A call for a moratorium on the granting of patents on genes of animals and humans. The resolution stated "patenting genetically-altered animals essentially confers ownership of an animal type. ... Humans may own individual or groups of animals of a given species, but not an entire species and its progeny. ... God alone is Creator and owner of all creation." Seven genes have already been patented, according to Richard Land, CLC executive director.

-- A call for religious liberty and freedom of conscience around the world, especially in countries where "notable occurrences of oppression have occurred," such as Bulgaria, Russia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, Yemen, Cuba, Romania, India and China.

The resolution called on the CLC, the Foreign Mission Board, the Baptist World Alliance and Home Mission Board interfaith witness department to report on infringement of religious liberty by governments and religious groups.

In key preaching points during the sesquicentennial, Jim Henry in his SBC presidential address pointed to Baptist unity and God's sovereignty, while R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., pointed to the challenge facing Christians in today's cultural climate.

Henry, re-elected to a second one-year term without opposition, cautioned messengers against two tendencies: "One, to forget the dramatic renewal to biblical integrity that kept us from sliding down the slippery slope of compromise. That must be a guarded commitment never relinquished.

"The other," he said, "is a tendency to be biblically correct but reflect a spirit that is not of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Henry noted, "We should not be so inclusive as to compromise the great basics of the faith, nor so exclusive that we become ingrown, and inbred, keeping deserving people away from the table of fellowship and service."

Henry reminded that God is in charge: "Through wars, depressions, financial failures, at least seven major controversies, we have survived and flourished because of our prowess in God's presence."

Southern Baptists must continue to defend their doctrines and convictions even after 150 years or expect to die a deserving death, Mohler warned in the SBC's sesquicentennial convention sermon.

While Southern Baptists "are a people of deep evangelical conviction," there is a danger they will "become a cut-flower denomination," one which appears beautiful but is dying because it is cut off from its roots, Mohler said.

"When a denomination begins to consider doctrine divisive, theology troublesome and conviction inconvenient, consider that denomination well on its way to a well-deserved death," he said as some stood and applauded. "We take our stand upon the great essential truths of biblical faith, even when the world is at war with that truth."

Southern Baptists "have lived for generations in a cultural comfort zone but, brothers and sisters, we are about to find ourselves outside that zone and in the battle whether we want it or not," Mohler said.

In addition to Henry, Gary Frost, pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church, Youngstown, Ohio, was re-elected as second vice president, while Larry Wynn, pastor of Hebron Baptist Church in northeast metro-Atlanta and immediate past president of the Georgia Baptist Convention, was elected first vice president without opposition. Frost won election over Fort Worth, Texas, music evangelist John McKay, 4,390 votes to 2,263.

Registration Secretary Lee Porter, 66, was elected to a 19th consecutive term, in a 4,664-2,208 ballot over Clayton Spriggs, administrator at First Baptist Church, Edmond, Okla. Recording Secretary David Atchison, director of a Nashville, Tenn.,-based discipleship ministry, was unopposed for a sixth consecutive term.

Messengers adopted an SBC Cooperative Program Allocation Budget of \$141,629,127 for 1995-96, up \$5,089,397 or 3.7 percent from 1994-95. Also adopted: a 1995-96 SBC Operating Budget of \$4,236,254, up from 1994-95's \$4,103,786.

In other business, messengers:

-- heard reports that one in five American seminary students is enrolled in one of the SBC's six seminaries and that, according to American Red Cross President Elizabeth Dole, of the 18 million meals provided by the Red Cross since 1990, Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers have prepared 80 percent of them.

-- elected Ronnie Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark., and chairman of the SBC Executive Committee, to preach the convention sermon for the 1996 SBC, June 11-13 in New Orleans' Superdome; Leroy Gainey, associate professor of Christian education at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif., as alternate; and John Glover, minister of music at First Baptist Church, Atlanta, to direct the music.

-- approved resolutions of appreciation for retiring SBC executives Landrum Leavell II, president, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; Lynn E. May Jr., executive director-treasurer, Historical Commission; and Milton Ferguson, president, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In pre-SBC Crossover Atlanta activities, more than 1,300 people made professions of faith as a result of neighborhood surveys, block parties, street evangelism, evangelists preaching in local churches and, this year for the first time, a sports ministry.

"The two things I love most in life are sharing the love of Jesus and playing softball," said Mark Mangum, one of 12 softball players who drove all night from Kentucky. "When you can do both, that's pretty much heaven for me." The team traveled all night to Atlanta and ministered to more than 150 incarcerated youth in four games at detention facilities in Fulton and Cobb counties.

Among numerous pre-convention meetings, the Hispanic Southern Baptist Fellowship voted to incorporate and become a fellowship of churches, not just pastors, named the National Fellowship of Hispanic Southern Baptist Churches. Hispanic churches in the SBC number 3,478.

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Billy Graham chats
with Baptist family

By Jon Walker

Baptist Press
6/22/95

ATLANTA (BP)--Noting he had lived long enough to preach through one-third of Southern Baptist history, Billy Graham addressed what will likely be his last Southern Baptist Convention (BP) in Atlanta.

At least four doctors told the evangelist not to come to the meeting after he fainted during a crusade in Toronto, however, Graham told them he was coming because that's where God wanted him.

Graham merely stepping onto the platform brought a standing and sustained ovation from the Southern Baptist messengers, who rose to their feet again moments later as the Executive Committee's Morris H. Chapman, tenderly and tearfully, presented Graham with a resolution of appreciation on behalf of all Southern Baptists.

As flashbulbs twinkled like stars throughout the Georgia Dome, Graham, like a grandfather talking to his children's children, shared his heart with his Southern Baptist family. He said he believed one of the most difficult periods of ministry would soon be upon them and that they were living in a hurting world, where the pieces don't fit together anymore.

"God is always working in us and around us to give us life," Graham said. "Apart from life, there is struggle; there is void in the human heart."

No matter where he preaches, Graham said he can always spot five areas of human need that face contemporary men: They are empty, lonely, guilty, insecure -- and they fear death.

Like the great Apostle Paul, Graham said he looks forward to death. "I'll be happy when the day comes, when the Lord says, 'Come on, I've got something better planned.'"

As if addressing a stadium full of Timothys, Graham explained contemporary Christians need to understand the type of person God will use for the unfinished task of reaching the world for Christ.

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First, be sure you know Christ yourself, Graham stressed. "I have met too many people in the church and in the pulpit who have never met Christ." Next, share the gospel with authority and simplicity: "If there's any doubt in your mind about a man knowing Christ, speak to him and let him see Christ in you."

Successful evangelism begins with men and women of prayer, Graham said. "No evangelism can be accomplished without prayer -- deep prayer and supplication," Graham said. "The prayers of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Nehemiah, Daniel and Ezra changed the direction of a nation. They changed the history of the world."

Graham added one final characteristic to the type of people and denomination God would continue to bless: those who are contented in God's sovereignty.

"We can live with the assurance that God knows what he's doing, and he's called you to the place you are in," Graham said. "I do not believe we should spend our time cursing the darkness Let the light shine: So let's light a candle. Let's light a candle that will banish the moral and spiritual blight in America and around the world."

Graham said God has joined Southern Baptists "together as a body of believers with a common calling and a common commission to go into all the world." From a small beginning, he said, Southern Baptists had a "magnificent history that cannot be matched by any denomination in the United States."

"The faithful men and women who started the Southern Baptist Convention . . . believed in the blood of Christ; and they believed that there was a hell; and they believed there was a heaven; and they believed the Bible was fully inspired of God," Graham said. "That's our roots, and thank God, we've stayed with our roots. I want you to know that as long as I live, I stand with you."

Referring to a resolution passed by the convention that asked African Americans to forgive the body for its roots in racism, Graham said he was particularly pleased because it will help his ministry all over the world. "In many press conferences, I have to answer questions about Southern Baptists."

In introducing the evangelist, SBC President Jim Henry said, Graham, like no other person, seemed to pull together "our hopes and our dreams and our prayers of what we can be and what we hope to be as a people of God."

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RESOLUTIONS WRAP-UP

Racial reconciliation draws national attention to SBC

By Keith Hinson

Baptist Press
6/22/95

ATLANTA (BP)--A Resolution on Racial Reconciliation brought national attention to Baptists and was one of eight resolutions approved by messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention June 20-22 in Atlanta.

The racial reconciliation resolution, which asked forgiveness from African Americans for racism, was approved by an overwhelming affirmative vote -- estimated at 95 percent or more by many observers.

The action was dealt with during the first day of business before messengers moved to a celebrative pageant marking the convention's 150th anniversary.

"We apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime, and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously or unconsciously," the resolution said.

"This is an historic moment in our life as we celebrate our . . . sesquicentennial. We feel under God we have a unique opportunity in this historic moment," said Charles T. Carter, chairman of the Resolutions Committee.

Following the vote, Gary Frost, second vice president of the SBC and an African American pastor, accepted the apology of the convention, noting he could not speak for all African Americans or African American Christians.

"I do speak on behalf of all those African American believers in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who are committed to be obedient to the Word of God and long to see healing and unity in the body of Christ," said Frost, pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church, Youngstown, Ohio.

"On behalf of my black brothers and sisters, we accept your apology, and we extend to you our forgiveness in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," Frost said. "... We pray that the genuineness of your repentance will be reflected in your attitudes and in your actions. We forgive you for Christ's sake."

Three of four messengers who spoke during debate on the resolution objected to its passage, but it passed overwhelmingly.

Other resolutions adopted by the SBC meeting included:

-- a resolution opposing the confirmation of Henry Foster as U.S. surgeon general and calling for U.S. senators to "support any filibuster which may be waged against the nomination." Carter, pastor of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala., told the SBC June 21, "At this very moment in Washington, D.C., the Senate is debating this, and we feel that it is urgent enough that we need to act on it first."

Press reports on the afternoon of June 22 quoted White House officials as being pessimistic about the eventual success of the nomination as the U.S. Senate had refused Wednesday to cut off debate and vote on Foster's nomination.

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Key senators have promised to filibuster the nomination, which would prevent it from coming to a vote. The votes of 60 senators are necessary to end a filibuster, but only 57 voted to end debate in the Wednesday vote.

The SBC vote on the resolution opposing Foster, taken by a show of hands, was characterized as 95 percent or more affirmative by observers.

One messenger said the resolution opposing Foster could be perceived as racist, but in a news conference after the vote, Frost said, "There is a clear distinction between racial and moral issues. The issue is abortion, which is an abomination before God." The resolution says Foster favors "absolute abortion on demand."

-- a resolution favoring an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to guarantee the right to prayer and other religious expressions in public places where expressions of a "non-religious character" are permitted.

Such an amendment would "protect the freedom of private persons, including students in public schools, to engage in voluntary prayer and other religious expression" in places where expressions of a "non-religious character" also are permitted, the resolution said.

One messenger objected that the resolution does not include any proposed wording of such an amendment. "I cannot possibly vote for anything that doesn't let me know how the Constitution is to be amended," said Larry Bishop, a messenger from First Baptist Church, Norman, Okla., and an attorney.

Kenton L. Hunt, a messenger from First Southern Baptist Church, Williamsport, Pa., said he opposed the resolution because students are already legally entitled to pray in schools.

But an attorney for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, which originally proposed the resolution, told messengers that religious expression in public places is "under sustained attack."

Despite key court rulings and legislation, "school officials and school boards around America are still confused by contradictory decisions by lawyers and judges and civil liberties groups," said Michael K. Whitehead, CLC general counsel.

"We want to put a stop to that kind of discrimination. ... It's time for us to say no to the justices and to the lawyers and to say yes to the religious liberty given us by God and not by man," said Whitehead, who was applauded by messengers.

-- a resolution calling for a moratorium on the granting of patents on genes of animals and humans.

The resolution -- which drew no debate from the floor and was approved on an apparently unanimous vote -- criticizes the notion that a genetically altered animal or gene could be patented, which would "grant sole proprietary rights ... for 17 years to the (patent) holder."

Richard Land, CLC executive director, told the Resolutions Committee during its deliberations June 17 that seven genes have already been patented and that a "bio-tech company" holds a patent on a gene believed to be related to breast cancer, so that anyone doing research on the gene must pay a royalty to the company.

According to the resolution, "Patenting genetically-altered animals essentially confers ownership of an animal type. ... Humans may own individual or groups of animals of a given species, but not an entire species and its progeny. ... God alone is Creator and owner of all creation."

-- a resolution expressing concern for religious liberty and freedom of conscience around the world, especially in countries where "notable occurrences of oppression have occurred," such as Bulgaria, Russia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, Yemen, Cuba, Romania, India and China.

Asking Baptists to pray about the matter, the resolution urges nations to honor human rights provisions in such documents as the United Nations charter and the Helsinki accord on human rights.

The resolution -- which drew no debate and passed on an apparently unanimous vote -- calls on the CLC, Foreign Mission Board, Baptist World Alliance and the Home Mission Board interfaith witness department to investigate and report on infringement of religious liberty by governments and religious groups.

-- a resolution "On the Oklahoma City Tragedy," referring to the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City.

~~The resolution thanked volunteers and professionals who helped in the aftermath of the tragedy and acknowledged the grief of those affected.~~

One messenger objected to the inclusion of President Bill Clinton among other public figures thanked for their support of "assisting the citizens of Oklahoma and the nation in coping with and recovering" from the bombing.

Wylie Drake, a messenger from First Southern Baptist Church, Buena Park, Calif., made a motion to amend the resolution by deleting Clinton's name.

Drake said he would vote for the resolution if his amendment failed but said he objected to Clinton's inclusion "because of his unbiblical, unBaptist, outspoken stand for sodomy as an accepted lifestyle, (and) ... because of his proactive involvement in the killing of our babies."

Parliamentarian John Sullivan of Florida interrupted Drake and said, "Excuse me, my brother, but you cannot attack another personality on the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention." Sullivan said the amendment was out of order.

Simon Tsoi, SBC first vice president who was presiding, called for a vote on the main resolution, which apparently passed.

But Christopher Jacobs, a messenger from Downtown Church, Orlando, Fla., raised a point of order in which he said, "I believe the good brother's (Drake's) previous amendment was in order, just his speaking to it was out of order."

Jacobs moved to appeal the ruling that the amendment was out of order, and the convention voted the amendment was in order.

Tsoi then called for a vote on the amendment, which failed with perhaps a 20 percent affirmative vote. The resolution itself then passed by an overwhelming margin.

-- a resolution affirming the SBC's "continuing commitment to the theological education of African-American students."

The resolution passed overwhelmingly, though it drew only one comment from the floor, which was against the resolution.

Mike Staton, pastor of Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Tarrant, Ala., told the convention, "If we deemed it necessary to adopt a resolution affirming theological education, let us adopt a resolution affirming the theological education of all members of the Southern Baptist family -- whether they be red, yellow, black or white," Staton said.

-- a resolution of appreciation for the host city of Atlanta and for the Southern Baptists who planned and ran the convention. Two committees were specifically mentioned, namely the Program and Structure Study Committee and the Sesquicentennial Planning Committee.

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MOTIONS WRAP-UP

Prayer for baptismless churches
among messengers' 44 motions

By Dwayne Hastings

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ATLANTA (BP)--A call for the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Atlanta to set aside time for prayer for Southern Baptist churches that did not baptize anyone last year was one of 44 motions offered from the floor during the 1995 sessions June 20-22 in Atlanta's Georgia Dome. Clift Brannon, a messenger from First Baptist Church, Longview, Texas, offered the motion, voicing concern that "10,000 Southern Baptist churches failed to report a single baptism last year."

Brannon, a 46-year vocational evangelist, said this "startling fact" should prompt "godly concern and ... real compassion in our hearts" for these churches.

In calling the convention session to prayer, SBC President Jim Henry announced the Committee on Order of Business will consider the scheduling of time in future conventions for prayer for these churches.

Floyd Battles Sr., a messenger from Pleasant Valley South Baptist Church, Silver Creek, Ga., moved that no business or educational institution that "condones the selling or serving of alcoholic beverages on its campus or at its social functions" be allowed to exhibit at any SBC meeting or convention.

Messengers approved Committee on Order of Business referral of the motion to the SBC Executive Committee for further consideration.

Other motions referred to the Executive Committee for further action included:

-- a call to provide scholarship assistance to African American students at the convention's seminaries, the funding to come from monies not expended due to the convention's action to discontinue a relationship with the American Baptist Theological Seminary, presented by Steve Aubuchon, Calvary Baptist Church, St. Louis.

-- a motion calling for a review of the financial and ministry impact of the "Covenant for a New Century" restructuring passed by the SBC, made by Butch Tanner, First Baptist Church, Oneonta, Ala.

-- a motion asking SBC agencies or boards to provide feedback to the originators of motions pertaining to the agencies and boards as to their disposition made by Larry Blackmon, Hearne, Texas.

-- a motion to amend Bylaw 25 pertaining to the composition of the SBC's inter-agency council, by Terry Townsend, First Baptist Church of Wellington, West Palm Beach, Fla.

-- a motion that the Executive Committee seek a means "to include in fellowship and work all Southern Baptists ...," by James Fowler, messenger from Ardmore Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C.

-- Jerr Smith, First Baptist Church, Wylie, Texas, called on the convention to no longer use the identifier "black" to refer to African American churches and programs. In making the motion, Smith noted, "All other ethnic churches are referred to by their ancestral origin and not by color As a people, we have an ancestral origin from Africa; there is no black land." The motion was sent to the Executive Committee.

-- a request that messengers be given more opportunity to discuss matters brought to the convention floor, by Robert Kelley, Colerain (N.C.) Baptist Church.

-- a call from Gene Wilson, Western Oaks Baptist Church, Springfield, Ill., to seek "alternate ways of providing adequate funding for Golden Gate Seminary to meet the missions challenge" of the western United States.

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-- a motion from Bill East, First Southern Baptist Church, Taft, Calif., asking for the publication of a free devotional prayer calendar incorporating the names of all convention personnel.

The convention voted to refer to the Executive Committee for study and a report to the 1996 SBC meeting in New Orleans:

-- two motions offered by Rudy Yakym, New Life Baptist Church, Osceola, Ind., one dealing with the reporting to the convention of matters previously referred to the Executive Committee; the other requesting a bylaw addition which classifies spouses of church and denominational employees as church and denominational employees.

-- a revision proposed by Wyndham Cook, Memorial Baptist Church, Waldo, Ark., that calls for a revision of SBC bylaws "to prohibit SBC agency heads and elected staff from suggesting specific individuals for service on their own board of directors."

-- a motion by Pat Garland, Peytona (W.Va.) Baptist Church, to increase funding for the HMB by 5 percent.

-- a motion by Chuck William, First Baptist Church, Washington, Mo., that a national Southern Baptist newspaper which is affordable and provides "the true message of the great positive things" taking place in the convention be created.

-- a request for a report concerning procedures for trustee removal, from Larry Blackmon, First Baptist Church, Hearne, Texas.

-- a call for a revision to the mission statement of the SBC, by Paul Brady, Ranch Acres Baptist Church, Tulsa, Okla.

-- a motion proposed by Ray Coleman, Ga., to amend the Bold Mission Thrust with a specific reference to rural Southern Baptist churches.

A motion calling for the trustees of the Annuity Board to conduct an investigation and audit into the purchase of all electronic data equipment over the past five years was offered by Walt Carpenter, Second Baptist Church, Houston. The motion was referred to the Annuity Board.

A motion by Charles Waller, Fork Baptist Church, Bumpass, Va., for the Baptist Sunday School Board to update its study course book on the Baptist Faith and Message was referred to the board.

Another motion concerning guidelines for sabbaticals offered by Robert Burch, Calvary Baptist Church, Knoxville, Tenn., also was referred to the BSSB.

The Home Mission Board will consider a motion by M.G. "Dan" Daniels that the HMB provide informational materials on Catholicism and the Reformation to agencies, state conventions and local churches.

The Foreign Mission Board and HMB together were assigned consideration of a motion by Wanda Kay Wigley, Raymond (Miss.) Baptist Church, to establish a new mission work among all Southern Baptists titled "prayer missionaries."

The portability of medical insurance for foreign missionaries and other convention employees was the subject of a motion by Mike Womack, Calvary Baptist Church, Erwin, Tenn. The motion was referred to the FMB and Annuity Board.

A motion to have the HMB, Brotherhood Commission and Radio and Television Commission plan and implement a televised "national convocation on revival and awakening," by Simon Tsoi, pastor of First Chinese Baptist Church, Phoenix, Ariz., and Gary Frost, pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church, Youngstown, Ohio, was referred to those agencies.

The Denominational Calendar Committee will study a motion by Wanda Kay Wigley, Raymond (Miss.) Baptist Church, calling for the first Thursday of every May to be named Southern Baptist National Day of Prayer.

Motions referred to all entities included:

-- a motion specifying that agencies and boards of the SBC become knowledgeable about the canonization of Scripture, by Carrol Johnson, First Baptist Church, Brownfield, Texas.

-- a request that SBC agencies provide closed-captioning on all video materials, by Deborah Bramlet, Faith Baptist Church, Durand, Mich.

-- a motion to provide particular convention material in Spanish, by Fred Smith, Templo Bautista Emanuel, Fort Worth, Texas.

-- a call for investment assets to further moral views, by Ron Wilson, Thousand Oaks, Calif. The convention voted June 21 to delete "Southern Baptist Foundation" from SBC Bylaw 15(1)(b) following a motion offered by Julian Motley, Oak Grove Baptist Church, Youngsville, N.C. The action was required to resolve an oversight in a recommendation passed the previous day by the convention relating to amendments to SBC Bylaw 15.

The Committee on the Order of Business recommended and the chair moved the following motions out of order:

-- a motion by Leslie Hollon, St. Matthews Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky., that the Program and Structure Study Committee join with the Women's Missionary Union in developing an auxiliary statement to the convention's Covenant for a New Century.

-- a call for the Executive Committee to "clarify and delineate the role and interrelationships in SBC churches" between WMU and Brotherhood programs, by Gary Stillwagon, Mt. Vernon Baptist Church, Atlanta. The committee in ruling the motion out of order said it "infringes upon the autonomy of the local church."

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-- a motion, from Mark Mangrum, First Baptist Church, Whit ville, Tenn., that the staff of th Southern Baptist seminaries "be active members of Southern Baptist churches that support and actively give to the cooperative program and are not affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship."

-- a motion by Tom Belch r, B thlehem Baptist Church, Dillwyn, Va., that the convention set aside time for "public individual and corporate repentance."

-- a request from L.D. Brown Jr., Christ Baptist Church, Greenwood, Miss., that the convention affirm "... Jesus Christ died for the sins of the entire world ...;" the chair noted the proposed motion was "a resolution and was submitted after the deadline for receiving resolutions."

-- a motion that SBC boards and agencies identify to the convention "any significant problems being encountered" by these entities, by Christopher Jacobs, Downtown Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla. It was ruled "vague and ambiguous" by the committee.

-- a request the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference not be scheduled on Father's Day, by Michelle Stephens, Bethel Baptist, Jennings, La.

-- a motion by Rudy Yakym, New Life Baptist Church, Osceola, Ind., regarding qualifications for nominees to the Committee on Nominations.

-- a motion pertaining to the removal of material calling Masonry "a cult, anti-Christian or satanic ...," by Howard Simpson, Roper (N.C.) Baptist Church.

-- a call for committee to study the feasibility of "absentee voting by messengers," by Wayne Harrison, Belmont Baptist Church, Roanoke, Va.

Jesse Russell, a coach and messenger from First Baptist Church, Saratoga, Texas, asked the convention "that single Christians be labeled 'unclaimed blessings' and accepted within that status by the convention." While sympathetic with Russell's motion, the Committee on the Order of Business in ruling the motion out of order said the motion was "out-of-bounds."

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SBC devotional speakers
address 'empowered' theme

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ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptists must be empowered for the future with a cooperative spirit, evangelistic fervor and commitment to inerrancy, theme devotion speakers told messengers celebrating the convention's 150th anniversary in Atlanta June 20-22.

Nine speakers addressed the convention theme, "Empowered for the Unfinished Task," during the sesquicentennial that drew more than 20,000 participants to the Georgia Dome in Atlanta.

Southern Baptists "must abandon self" and work together like the people who started the convention in order to complete their mission, SBC Executive Committee President Morris H. Chapman said in the opening devotion.

Those who began the SBC had a vision of a convention that would be "biblically based and mission-driven," Chapman said. Today's Southern Baptists "are their legacy."

"This is our generation to reach" and Southern Baptists' task to finish, he said.

"It doesn't matter where you come from; it does matter where you are going," and it matters what you do on the way, Chapman said.

That future has a basis in an evangelistic fervor that serves as an inspiration to the SBC today, Roy J. Fish said.

Fish, professor of evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, reminded messengers of their historical roots.

In 1755, he said, a "formidable army" of 16 Baptists established Sandy Creek Church in North Carolina. Within a short time, the congregation grew to 606 members who w re responsible for planting 42 other churches. In addition, 125 preachers came out of the church's membership in just a few years.

When this "invasion of Separate Baptists" first occurred, Fish noted, there were only 28 Baptist churches in all of the South. But a little more than 30 years later, there were 410 Baptist churches in the South, accounting for more than half the Baptists in the United States.

"They had learned that Spirit-empowered evangelism was the open secret of church growth," Fish proclaimed.

"Aggressive evangelism was in the blood of these Separate Baptists, and in 1845, when the Southern Baptist Convention came into existence, the genes and chromosomes of evangelistic emphasis came into our bloodstream primarily from them," he said.

The future also is secured because of Baptists' commitment to inerrancy, said Southern Baptist stalwart W.A. Criswell.

The past and future of the Southern Baptist Convention are bright because of a commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible, Criswell said. It is a reason for "infinite thanksgiving to God from my deepest soul that our convention and our churches, our pastors and our leaders have built" th SBC's outreach to the world "upon the infallible and inspired and inerrant and authoritative Word of God," said Criswell, senior pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Dallas.

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This commitment "on th part of our forefathers and upon ur leaders f our convention at this present moment is a harbinger of portent and a promise of the direction of our convention and our churches in these years that are yet to come," he said.

But it is the individual churches that represent the power of the Southern Baptist Convention, noted Robert E. Naylor.

Naylor, president emeritus of Southwestern Seminary, said, "a New Testament church is a miracle."

As recorded in Matthew 16:13-19, Naylor referenced, Jesus proclaimed the establishment of his church at Caesarea Philippi when he asked his disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" and Peter responded, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus told Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my church."

In this Scripture passage, Naylor said, "Jesus announced that which had never been. It was to be the ultimate expression of his divine authority. It was to be the ultimate eventuality of a believer's salvation -- a New Testament church."

The former seminary president continued, "We Baptists say that our churches are New Testament churches, first of all because we recognize Jesus as Lord, and (second because) in the New Testament, we're to find our structure, our doctrine, our mission, the definition of our generation, the expectancy that belongs to every believer in Christ Jesus."

A current seminary president focused on Southern Baptist education, saying it must be characterized by respectable scholarship, reverent scholarship, courageous scholarship and liberating scholarship.

"Our students must be conversant with the ideas of the world in order to minister to the world," said Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

The churches of the convention have been unified by Sunday school that presents Southern Baptists an opportunity "to unite ourselves behind the Bible we are arguing about," said James L. Sullivan, retired president of the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn., and a senior Southern Baptist statesman and historian.

Sullivan urged those attending to be like Daniel, with the "Bible hidden in the heart, revealed in the light so the world will see the message revealed in us."

Through the 150-year history of the Southern Baptist Convention, the denomination has contributed a distinctive soul competency as perhaps its greatest contribution to religious thought, Baptist statesman Herschel H. Hobbs said.

Hobbs, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, and a former president of the SBC, is known for his leadership in revising an early Baptist statement of faith resulting in the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statement.

"I want us to look at the phrase, the competency of the soul in religion," Hobbs said. "Does that mean you could believe just anything and be a Southern Baptist?"

"No," he continued. "What it means is that every soul is made in the image of God -- not as a puppet, but as a person with a right of choice -- and is capable of having direct dealings with God without the benefit of any intermediary."

Soul competency, Hobbs said, "means that I can be a Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Jew or a Muslim -- but I am responsible to God for my choice. It doesn't mean that there is an equality of all of these so-called faiths, but it means simply that I am free. God does not coerce the individual, or else he would make us puppets on the string of faith."

Through its various programs, the denomination produces individuals committed to the work such as Alma Hunt and Greg Horton.

"I am a product of the local Baptist church," said Hunt, the 85-year-old retired executive secretary of Woman's Missionary Union, who said she is still involved in programs such as Sunday School and WMU.

"I come with a bias in favor of missions," she told the crowd. "It was a missions organization in my church that turned the direction of my life, captured my greatest interest, led me to spend 26 years of my life with Woman's Missionary Union" and 21 years since then in continuing support for foreign and home missions, she noted.

Horton, a founding partner of Ryan's and Quincy's restaurant chains, and a member of Temple Baptist Church in Simpsonville, S.C., said he and his wife, Bobbie, both became Christians as teen-agers and were married before having been discipled about "how to have a Christian home."

Through trials of life, Horton said he began reading his Bible and praying every day with his family.

"Folks," he advised, "if you're reading God's Word and praying, it's hard to be fighting with one another in your homes, in your churches and out there in the marketplace."

He concluded by encouraging the audience to follow the Bible's teaching of forgiveness to receive God's blessing.