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**Fundamental-conservatives
consolidate control of SBC**

by Dan Martin
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Fundamental-conservatives consolidated their control of the Southern Baptist Convention during 1990.

Along the way, fundamental-conservatives:

— Won a sweeping victory over moderate-conservatives for the presidency as Morris Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, trounced the moderate-conservative candidate, Daniel Vestal, pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, 21,471 to 15,753.

It was the 12th consecutive victory for fundamental-conservatives in their campaign against "liberalism" in the SBC.

Control of the presidency has been a key plank in their political strategy because of the appointive process used by the SBC. Starting in 1979, fundamental-conservatives have been able to pack the boards of trustees of the 20 national agencies of the SBC with like-minded members by electing an inerrantist as president each year.

— Assured themselves a voice more to their liking in Washington by slashing the budget of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and installing the SBC Christian Life Commission—led by one of their own—to promote their conservative political agenda in the nation's capital.

The BJC has long been out of favor with fundamental-conservative leaders. A number of efforts have been made to make the religious liberty watchdog hew to the party line, but 1990 marked the first time the efforts were successful.

— Gained control of the denominational press service, which fundamental-conservatives had complained favored moderate-conservatives, by firing the director and news editor of Baptist Press in mid-summer.

At year's end, the new convention leaders had installed one of its rising stars as the vice president for public relations of the Executive Committee, but had not named a person to lead BP.

— Eliminated two convention officers who had not been true believers in the fundamental-conservative effort.

Martin Bradley, who had been the convention's recording secretary since 1977, was defeated for re-election by David Atchison of Nashville, 9,206 to 8,044.

Bradley, whose post carries with it a seat on the Executive Committee, reportedly went on the fundamental-conservative "hit list" when he joined a minority report opposing the budget which cut funding to the Baptist Joint Committee from nearly \$400,000 annually to \$50,000.

Atchison, who succeeded him, was touted as being a new face in convention leadership, but he is the son of the chairman of trustees of the Christian Life Commission and the nephew of the former chairman of trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, both seen as key leaders in the fundamental-conservative party.

Fundamental-conservatives challenged Lee Porter of Nashville for registration secretary, but their candidate, Bob Mowrey of Nashville, lost 13,242 to 5,048.

However, fundamental-conservatives at year's end apparently went through the back door to eliminate Porter as registration secretary. Because of remarks he made to students at the annual SBC meeting which administrators and trustees felt were detrimental to the Baptist Sunday School Board, Porter was transferred from his post as design editor to another job at the SSB. Administrators also ruled he could no longer be a convention officer while working for the denominational publishing house.

Under pressure, Porter announced in early December he would not seek re-election as long as he is employed by the SSB.

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withdrawn when it did not treat the events to their liking. The book was written by Southwestern Seminary history professor Leon McBeth.

The withdrawal of the book, coupled with pressure on Porter to leave his registration secretary post, indicated to moderate-conservatives that fundamental-conservatives are continuing to force Elder to "toe the party line."

Dilday and Southwestern Seminary trustees apparently smoothed over a dispute over remarks Dilday made at the annual meeting, referring to political methods in the past as "satanic," but the president of the largest SBC seminary likely remains on the "hit list."

Honeycutt was attacked by a new Southern Seminary trustee during the spring board meeting as "simply not believing the Bible."

The trustee, Jerry Johnson of suburban Denver, later apologized for the tone and method of his attack, but not for the content.

Trustees of the SBC's oldest seminary also moved to cement control by installing the 1987 report of the SBC Peace Committee as a guideline for hiring and promotion.

Thus, Southern becomes the first seminary to require employees to believe in a literal Adam and Eve, among other things, for employment or promotion.

Parks, as the leader of the Foreign Mission Board, the world's largest missionary force, likely continues on the "hit list" for past activities decrying the political activities of the right-wingers.

In the past year, no direct challenges have been made on him, but trustees have continued in their rightward direction.

In the October FMB board meeting, trustees discussed the possibility of moving the board offices from Richmond, Va., because of the perceived moderate-conservative leanings of the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

Executive Committee officers instructed Bennett, the president, to fire Vice President for Public Relations Al Shackelford and Baptist Press News Editor Dan Martin. When Bennett declined, the officers called the special July 17 meeting in which the pair were fired.

The SBC Executive Committee revised its bylaws to allow the officers to name "interim" employees. They used that authority to name Richard (Bucky) Rosenbaum as vice president for business and finance and Mark Coppenger as vice president for public relations.

Many moderate-conservatives saw the action as increasing the power of committee officers while eroding the authority of Bennett.

The year also saw significant movement on the part of three universities affiliated with Baptist state conventions to distance themselves from the threat of a fundamental-conservative takeover.

Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and Furman University in Greenville, S.C., unilaterally declared their boards of trust to be self-perpetuating and separated themselves from convention control.

In both places, the actions set off upheaval in the state conventions and even talk of lawsuits to regain control.

A third school, Stetson University in Deland, Fla., also moved to distance itself from the Florida Baptist Convention, but the action was taken after negotiation with FBC leadership.

Also, several schools were in various stages of offering theological education as an alternative to the SBC-controlled seminaries.

Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., already has a theological school in operation; Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., is in a fund-raising campaign to establish a theological school; and Baylor has reserved a name and is considering its course in establishing a theological seminary.

The Southern Baptist Alliance-related seminary, Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond, is raising funds and attempting to begin as an alternative to SBC theological education.

As 1990 ends, many convention-watchers ponder the future direction of the SBC.

The Cooperative Program ended the 1989-90 fiscal year with an increase; SBC missionaries were in more countries than ever before, and baptisms were projected to be on the increase.

But some of the heavy-hitting Cooperative Program-giving churches were looking at alternative ways to give their money; the denominational news service was unmanned; and several key agencies and institutions were embattled and demoralized.

As one convention-watcher predicted:

"We apparently have quit shouting at each other and now are in the process of assessing the damage and the future.

"What it holds — financially, organizationally, politically, as a fellowship and as a missions force in the world — nobody knows.

"We'll just have to wait and see," he said.

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BJC head anticipates local church support

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) — The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs will receive generous contributions from Southern Baptist sources despite suffering setbacks at several state conventions this fall, predicted James Dunn, the agency's executive director.

Much of the debate at the annual meetings of state conventions centered on altering their Cooperative Program giving structure rather than allocating monies to the BJC, Dunn said in an interview at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"I am not as downcast as some news stories would lead one to believe, because we were not the focal point of these decisions," he said. "The decisions will have the ultimate effect of producing more designated monies from churches in those states."

Dunn visited the Louisville, Ky., school in late November to address "Students for the Southern Baptist Alliances," a campus organization at the seminary.

BJC funding became a prominent issue at some state conventions due to the Southern Baptist Convention's decision in June to reduce its appropriation to the agency from \$391,796 to \$50,000 for 1990-91. The SBC also added religious liberty to the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's moral concerns assignment and gave the agency a \$365,328 budget increase to help finance the CLC's new responsibilities.

Messengers in six state conventions — Missouri, South Carolina, North Carolina, Hawaii, New England, Tennessee and Kentucky — rejected attempts to include the BJC in their budgets.

However, Baptists in Virginia and Maryland/Delaware approved budgets that appropriated \$75,000 and \$5,000, respectively, to the 1990-91 BJC budget. The current BJC budget will also receive \$57,000 from the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The Texas allocation stems from a 1987 action by the convention pledging financial support to the BJC in the event the SBC cut the agency's funding.

The 1990-91 BJC budget anticipates increased contributions from state conventions, churches and individuals to help offset the budget cut by the SBC, Dunn said, adding that about half the \$420,000 expected from Southern Baptist sources was projected to come from state conventions. Thus, the \$137,000 received from state conventions fell approximately \$73,000 short of expectations.

The BJC's major concern is cash flow rather than total yearly income. Dunn said: "We are dependent on a regular cash flow. It would be wonderful if churches would send one-twelfth of their (yearly) contribution every month, because we don't have the luxury of a vast cash reserve."

Many churches prefer to support the BJC through giving options other than state convention channels, Dunn said. "Oddly enough, many backers of the Joint Committee voted with the majority in these states (where BJC funding was defeated)," he said, noting that they could see no reason to fund the BJC through two sources.

In addition to direct gifts to the BJC, churches support the agency by sending their funds through the Baptist Cooperative Missions Program, Inc., an Atlanta-based funding mechanism established earlier this year by SBC moderates. Churches that contribute to the Southern Baptist Alliance also help support the BJC, Dunn added.

The BJC, which has an annual budget of \$665,000, is supported by nine Baptist denominations and has granted membership to the Religious Liberty Council, a group formed by moderate Southern Baptists. Dunn said the RLC was constituted "to defend the traditional Baptist understanding of separation of church and state and religious liberty" through the BJC.

The SBC decision to reduce BJC funding came after several years of criticism by fundamental-conservatives in the denomination who contended the BJC was too liberal for Southern Baptists. Despite the funding cut, Dunn pledged that the BJC would continue to represent the interests of Southern Baptists.

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"We will continue to represent a commitment to authentic Baptist history and heritage," he said. "There are too many people counting on us. There are too many churches that have indicated they believe our focus on religious freedom is the closest thing to the essence of what it means to be Baptist."

Dunn said the BJC has reorganized its staff so that one staff member will devote significant time to development efforts. In the past, the BJC has focused little effort on fund raising, he said: "Most people are astonished to learn that we never hear about the churches that put us in their budget until we get the first check. It is very difficult for people to believe we are not out there recruiting."

Dunn claimed there is a "groundswell of support" for the BJC. Yet, he said, support of the BJC from grass roots Baptists is difficult to project in a budget. "It is very comforting when you are thinking about the basis of the support," he said. "But it's very discomfoting when you're trying to figure out what your income is going to be next month."

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(Pat Cole, news writer for Southern Seminary, prepared this story for ABP.)

Virginia editor announces retirement

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RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) — Julian H. Pentecost, editor and business manager of the *Religious Herald*, has announced plans to retire June 30, 1992.

Pentecost, who became editor of the Virginia Baptist newsjournal in 1970, made the announcement during the December meeting of the *Herald's* board of trustees.

He has served as a trustee of the University of Richmond and the Southern Baptist Home and Foreign mission boards. He is currently a trustee of Southern Seminary, chairs its academic personnel and academic liaison committees and is a member of the trustees' executive committee.

He is a founding member of Associated Baptist Press (ABP), temporary treasurer of the organization and a member of ABP's board of directors and its executive committee.

From 1980-81, Pentecost was president of the Southern Baptist Press Association, a group composed of state Baptist paper editors and other SBC journalists.

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RTV receives top award

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FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) — The Baptist Hour, the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission's flagship radio program, has received a Gold Angel award from Religion in Media, a non-profit Los Angeles organization founded with the purpose of improving the media.

The Gold Angel award honors productions that are deemed to have high spiritual, moral or social impact on society.

The RTVC's Gold Angel will be on display at First Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., on Sunday, January 6. On that date, a six-month-long anniversary celebration of The Baptist Hour will be launched at the Shreveport church, where the first Baptist Hour sermon was preached in January 1941 by M. E. Dodd.

Herschel H. Hobbs, who served as Baptist Hour speaker for 18 years, will deliver the 50th anniversary message, which will be carried live by satellite on the ACTS (American Christian Television System) network and recorded for distribution to radio stations that broadcast the program.

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(Information for this story provided by Madge Hammonds of the RTV public relations staff).

Special Note: As a service to Baptist state papers, the *Florida Baptist Witness* has made this ABP edition available electronically through SBCNET. ABP will continue its primary distribution via Fax.