

Associated Baptist Press

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Contributions to Fellowship up sharply through six months

ATLANTA (ABP) -- During the past six months, contributions to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship rose sharply over the same period last year, according to a financial report released recently by the organization's Atlanta headquarters.

Through June, 1995 contributions totaled more than \$6.7 million, an increase of almost 9 percent over gifts to the Fellowship during the first six months of 1994.

That included \$2.2 million given to date to the Fellowship's annual global missions offering and another \$2.4 million for global missions from regular gifts.

About 85 percent of the money received by the Fellowship is used to support missions and ministry ventures sponsored by the group, formed in 1990 to offer moderate alternatives to programs of the conservative-dominated Southern Baptist Convention.

Another 11 percent goes to "friends" of the Fellowship, independent agencies which include Associated Baptist Press, Baptist Center for Ethics, Baptist Joint Committee and theological seminaries. Four percent was designated by givers to support the work of various Baptist state conventions and institutions.

Last year, 9 percent of the money given to the Fellowship was earmarked for ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1994, however, the SBC took action to forbid its agencies to accept money from the Fellowship. The Fellowship's six-month report this year showed no contributions for SBC institutions.

The increase, fueled by strong months in January and May, came on the heels of slowed income growth for the Fellowship in 1994.

Contributions for last year totaled about \$11 million, just slightly more than 1993, and in sharp contrast to the rapid growth in Fellowship funds during previous years. Gifts grew 53 percent in 1993 and 62 percent in 1992.

The leveling off was expected after the June 1994 vote cutting off funds for SBC agencies channeled through the Fellowship, officials said, but did not affect growth in the Fellowship's own programs. Dollars for Fellowship programs, meanwhile, increased 20 percent.

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-- By Bob Allen

City council in Bulgaria permits continuation of Baptist project

SOFIA, Bulgaria (ABP) -- Construction of a Baptist orphanage will proceed following a July 12 vote by the Sofia, Bulgaria, city council, reversing an earlier decree that stalled the project.

A Baptist leader attributed the 56-1 vote approving most elements of the project to international pressure. Theo Angelov, president of the Baptist Union of Bulgaria, credited "the prayers and the support of our brothers and sisters in the Baptist world" for the reversal by the city council.

In February, the council rejected the project, citing "negative effects" the Baptists would have on citizens, especially children, should the orphanage be built. Work on the project ceased abruptly and the city council stated its intent to reclaim possession of the centrally located property.

After news of the rejection spread, "perhaps hundreds of protest letters" from Baptists all over the world asked the mayor of Sofia to reconsider the project, Angelov said.

In addition to letters from Baptist unions, churches and individuals, the foreign affairs offices of some European governments and Bulgarian embassies around the world were asked to intervene.

"Without the international pressure brought by these people, this would have been impossible," Angelov reported in a letter to leaders of the European Baptist Federation in Hamburg, Germany.

The council approved a revised plan that scaled down the original project from 17,000 square meters to 12,000 square meters. The revision also eliminated a Bible school and a church that were included in original plans.

Angelov minimized the down-sizing. "We were not [very] interested in the school [portion of the project] and the orphanage and the Bible school [were approved], both under the name of the orphanage," Angelov wrote. He said Baptists in Sofia remain hopeful that a church building might be added to the site in the future.

Angelov noted, however, that Baptists now "can expect some reactions" to the international pressure on their behalf. "It is possible there will be difficulties on the road ahead," he said.

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-- By ABP staff

Former Southwestern president assesses SBC through long view

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- If the Southern Baptist Convention gave out perfect attendance pins, Robert Naylor would earn a diamond-studded one.

Naylor, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1958 to 1978, has attended every SBC annual meeting since 1933. That's a 62-year run of perfect attendance.

Based on that long view, the last 16 years of turmoil within the SBC should be viewed as a difficult phase but not the end of the convention, Naylor writes in his new book, "A Messenger's Memoirs." The book chronicles Naylor's report and commentary on SBC annual meetings from 1933 through 1994.

In the book, Naylor briefly addresses both the mundane and the controversial from each year's convention. He covers topics such as controversy over the Baptist Sunday School Board's Genesis commentary in the 1960s, the growing influence of ultra-conservatives in the 1970s and '80s and the 1994 firing of his successor at Southwestern, Russell Dilday.

In a foreword, Duke McCall, former president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, explains that

Naylor's accounts present a progressive picture of changes in the SBC. "Movement within the convention which was so gradual that it went unnoticed by those present becomes visible in these 'Memoirs,'" McCall writes.

In the book, McCall adds, Naylor notes the "innovations that have altered the very character of Baptist connectional life."

Naylor's accounts note his consternation with many changes in SBC annual meetings over the years -- ranging from the shift from singing traditional hymns to singing praise choruses to the shift from friendly presidential elections of unannounced candidates to fierce contests between well-organized campaigns.

Another change -- made obvious from the photo that wraps around the cover of Naylor's book -- is the attire of messengers to annual meetings. The 1966 photo shows every person dressed in either a suit or dress, unlike modern convention attire of more casual clothing.

But Naylor's dismay turns time and again to puffed-up attendance for the convention sessions in which a president is elected, a trend much-discussed since 1979.

In an interview, he explained: "I emphasize in the book the thing that takes place after the election of president. We lose 10,000 people in three hours. That's horrible. It has a much deeper meaning than appears on the surface."

Yet the "politicizing" of the convention, as Naylor called it in the interview, did not begin with the start of the "conservative resurgence" in 1979 but years before.

For example, he records that in 1962, a messenger to the SBC moved that "the messengers to this convention, by standing vote, reaffirm their faith in the entire Bible as the authoritative, authentic, infallible word of God; that we express our abiding and unchanging objection to the dissemination of theological views in our seminaries which would undermine such faith in the historical accuracy and doctrinal integrity of the Bible."

This was a precursor of the full-blown conservative effort to capture control of the SBC beginning in 1979, Naylor suggests. "There would not be a time again when our seminaries would be removed from this subtle aura of suspicion," he writes.

Naylor records the 1990 convention in New Orleans as a pivotal year in the political-theological struggle between moderates and conservatives: "It was decisive; the fundamentalists were in full control."

"If I were to describe this convention in one paragraph, it would be with the subject, 'The Death of a Convention,'" he writes, but quickly adds, "Notice that I did not say 'The Death of the Southern Baptist Convention.'"

Despite his displeasure with tactics employed by those who captured control of the SBC, Naylor remains loyal to the convention and its institutions.

He illustrates this in his reference to the 1994 convention in Orlando, Fla., held only three months after Southwestern Seminary's trustees fired Russell Dilday as president, igniting a firestorm of protest.

"At every opportunity, I had urged our Southwestern family to remember that the seminary itself was more important than Naylor, Dilday or any seminary president," he writes. "We needed to keep our eyes upon the charge given to Southwestern Seminary by God and blessed of God through these 86 years."

Naylor reports his pleasure with the convention's refusal to prolong the seminary conflict by calling for an investigation of the firing. "God had delivered us and caused us to set our eyes again upon that which lay before us," he notes.

In the concluding chapter of his book, Naylor summarizes his perspective of hope for the SBC, based on his long-term view.

"God has taught through our valleys and on our mountain tops that he has not deserted Southern Baptists, that he has the answer to our divisions, that there awaits a better day, if we will claim it," he says. "In some places I have found a disposition to despair as though we could not again be one people. Let me encourage you to look up and believe that God will lead us through."

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