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**SBC authorizes review panel
for 'Baptist Faith and Message'**

By Mark Wingfield

ATLANTA (ABP) -- A "blue ribbon committee" will be appointed by Southern Baptist Convention President Paige Patterson to review the "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement and recommend revisions next June.

This opportunity for thorough revision comes on the heels of last year's addition of an article on family to the statement. That addition, approved by messengers to the 1998 SBC annual meeting in Salt Lake City, was the first revision of the "Baptist Faith and Message" in 35 years.

That revision was not enough, according to T.C. Pinckney of Virginia, who made the motion for the review committee to be appointed.

Alluding to the recent battle between conservatives and moderates for control of the SBC, Pinckney noted that the 36 years since the "Baptist Faith and Message" was last thoroughly revised "have been momentous ones" for the SBC.

"I believe it is appropriate at this time that the 'Baptist Faith and Message' be reviewed and that it be made consistent with the current stand of the Southern Baptist Convention," he said.

Pinckney, a member of Good News Baptist Church in Alexandria, Va., is a retired Air Force general who has been a key advocate of the conservative movement in the SBC. He also was influential in forming a new state convention in Virginia called Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia. He now serves as editor of that convention's newspaper, the Baptist Banner.

During the opening session of the SBC annual meeting in Atlanta June 15, Pinckney made the motion for the SBC president "to review the 'Baptist Faith and Message' statement with the responsibility to report and bring any recommendations to this meeting next June in Orlando."

During the scheduled time for debate, no one spoke in opposition to the motion.

However, A.J. Smith of Macedonia Baptist Church in Dry Ridge, Ky., spoke in support of the motion. "Southern Baptists need a statement of faith that is precise and unambiguous," he said.

Pinckney's motion as adopted gave no parameters on who should serve on the review committee or how many people should serve. Last year's addition on family was drafted by a seven-member committee appointed by then-SBC President Tom Elliff. The 1963 committee was comprised of the 24 sitting presidents of state Baptist conventions then affiliated with the SBC.

The 1963 committee, chaired by Herschel Hobbs of Oklahoma, based its work on the original version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" adopted by the SBC in 1925. The 1925 version, drafted by a committee of eight elected by the convention, drew heavily upon the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, one of several historic confessions of faith used by Baptists.

The 1925 committee included Baptist luminaries such as E.Y. Mullins, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and L.R. Scarborough, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The idea of adopting what appeared to some as a creed was controversial among Baptists at the time. However, convention leaders thought the step was necessary to head off criticisms by J. Frank Norris, a Texas pastor and legendary Fundamentalist who had been attacking the convention and stirring controversy.

Aside from last year's revision to include a section on family, several attempts have been made in recent years to amend the statement's section on Scripture. One such motion was made at last year's annual meeting and was referred to the SBC Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee reported to the convention this year that it had studied the request, in consultation with the presidents of the six SBC seminaries, and determined no action should be taken at this time.

Pinckney's motion, however, opens the door for revision not only of the article on Scripture -- the point over which Southern Baptists fought bitterly from 1979 to 1991 -- but for revision of any other article, as well as the possible addition or deletion of articles.

While Pinckney's motion was the most far-reaching one acted upon by messengers at the Atlanta meeting, it was one of 38 motions presented from the convention floor. Of those 38, only four were scheduled for convention debate, three were ruled out of order and 31 were referred to various SBC agencies and institutions for further review.

The four motions scheduled for debate included Pinckney's, one by Blaine Barber of Michigan calling for a straw poll of messengers on whether to change the convention's name, and two by Wiley Drake of California.

One of Drake's motions requested the convention to communicate its disapproval of President Clinton's recent proclamation on gay and lesbian pride month and another requested a letter be sent to the American Psychological Association denouncing a recent journal article on child sexual abuse. Both of Drake's concerns were addressed in resolutions adopted by the convention.

Two of the motions ruled out of order pertained to messengers' desire to demand that Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., discipline Clinton for his stands on homosexuality and other social issues. The third asked that the SBC "disband itself" from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, something the committee on order of business ruled was not possible because the SBC has no formal connection to the breakaway moderate organization.

Motions referred by the convention covered a wide range of issues, some at odds with each other. For example, one messenger suggested SBC presidents not be limited in the number of terms they may serve, while another messenger suggested instituting term limits for all SBC officers.

SBC messengers affirm global evangelism, denounce Gay and Lesbian Pride Month

By Trennis Henderson

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Global evangelism, a presidential proclamation on Gay and Lesbian Pride Month and ethnic cleansing captured the attention of Southern Baptist Convention messengers, who adopted 14 resolutions during their 1999 annual meeting, June 16 in Atlanta.

In a pattern that has grown familiar in recent years, California pastor Wiley Drake upstaged much of the focus on resolutions. During the two-day meeting, Drake proposed nine resolutions as well as four motions and three amendments to resolutions.

Drake, who leaped to SBC prominence in 1996 with a call to boycott the Walt Disney Co., has become an outspoken fixture at each annual meeting since then.

Although the SBC resolutions committee addressed only two of the proposals Drake submitted, messengers approved two of three amendments he proposed on the floor of the convention.

Discussing his frequent trips to the microphone, Drake said: "Obviously, I'm a different bird. If I were to say, 'I'm humble and I don't enjoy the press at all,' that would be lying. Do I enjoy it? Absolutely. That's my personality."

Among the topics addressed by Drake was President Clinton's recent proclamation of June as Gay and Lesbian Pride Month. In the version presented by the resolutions committee, messengers urged Clinton to rescind his action.

Citing "love for people enslaved in sins of all types, including homosexual sins," the resolution declares: "Our love for our president compels us to rebuke him and publicly to deplore his most public endorsement of that which is contrary to the word of God."

Drake offered an amendment calling for Clinton "to rescind his appointment of an openly professed homosexual as U.S. ambassador to Luxembourg."

Resolutions committee Chairman Al Jackson responded that Drake had submitted a proposed resolution on that topic, which the committee had declined to recommend. The proposed amendment was "not germane to the primary focus of the resolution before us," Jackson added.

Following a show-of-ballots vote that was determined too close to call, messengers approved Drake's amendment on a ballot vote of 2,316 to 1,313. The amended resolution then was approved.

A resolution calling for an end to genocide and ethnic cleansing was approved without debate. Moments later, Norman Cates, a military veteran from Ocala, Fla., asked messengers to reconsider their action on the resolution.

Focusing on language calling for "the United States Congress, NATO, the United Nations and other multinational bodies to take immediate action to bring an end to those regimes which are guilty of crimes against humanity," Cates said he was "really shocked" to realize what he had voted to approve.

"This body of love should not be recommending that people attack and kill each other," he declared.

Resolutions committee member Greg DeMarco of New Mexico responded that the resolution addressed "who is capable of protecting those who need protection" from genocide. In a show-of-ballots vote, messengers defeated the amendment.

The resolution on the priority of global evangelism and missions affirmed support for Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program giving plan, which will celebrate its 75th anniversary next year. Committee Chairman Jackson emphasized that the resolution "represents the heart and soul and desire of this convention."

Other topics addressed by messengers included school violence, the free exercise of religion and the changelessness of God.

"Recent tragic events have highlighted the problem of school violence," the school-violence resolution notes. Many Christian students and teachers have stood for their faith "even to the point of death," it adds, calling on "all Christians to pray for an end to violence in our schools and work toward a return to Christian values within our educational system."

The resolution on "public discourse and the free exercise of religion" called on Southern Baptists "to work toward policies and programs in our public schools which provide greater opportunities for religious instruction."

Drake offered an amendment calling for changes to land-use laws that "are restricting churches ... and restricting evangelism." He added he had been threatened with jail over a land-use case involving his congregation.

"We may make you sleep with a microphone for the rest of your life," SBC President Paige Patterson quipped in response, "but we won't put you in jail."

Following further discussion, messengers adopted both the amendment and the amended resolution.

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., proposed the resolution on "the power, knowledge and changelessness of God."

"The biblical doctrine of God is the first and central axiom of Christian theology," the statement says, warning about "those who would revise the church's historic doctrine of God" and "would deny or diminish God's omnipotence, omniscience and immutability."

The resolution calls on "all Christians to confess the living God of the Bible." It was approved without debate.

Messengers adopted other resolutions:

-- Opposing a recent article in the American Psychological Association's Psychological Bulletin which implies "that 'adult-child sex' may not be harmful and may be positive for so-called 'willing' children." The resolution also affirmed the APA for issuing a statement opposing such practices.

-- Opposing "human embryonic and stem cell research," citing "vigorous opposition to the destruction of innocent human life, including the destruction of human embryos."

-- Opposing the use of the "Channel One Network" in schools, noting that network advertising includes promotion of objectionable movies, magazines and music groups.

-- Encouraging parents "to communicate clear standards of biblical morality to their children," including monitoring TV viewing and movie and video selections.

-- Encouraging "all Southern Baptists to pray earnestly for our elected officials."

An amendment approved by messengers called on Christians "to put feet to their prayers and exercise their right to vote."

-- Urging all Southern Baptist churches to support "educational programs that follow biblical principles, whether they are implemented in Christian, private, public or home schools."

-- Affirming the influence of "godly public school personnel" on students.

-- Expressing appreciation to convention leaders and hosts who helped plan and lead the annual meeting.

Reggie White defends comments about gays

By Jeff Huett

ATLANTA (ABP) -- While blasting what he perceives as unfair media treatment over his recent statements about the homosexual lifestyle, future NFL Hall of Famer and current Green Bay Packer Reggie White said June 16 it is time for all Christian denominations to band together to reach people for Christ.

Speaking at the final session of the 1999 Southern Baptist Convention, White lashed out at the media, which he claims misrepresented his statements regarding homosexuality. Specifically, White responded to a recent article in USA Today, which he claims, says he has "criticized" the gay lifestyle.

"I've never criticized the gay lifestyle," White said. "I've only proclaimed what God said himself." Quoting Bible verses in Leviticus and Romans denouncing homosexuals, White added: "God said it, not Reggie White."

White urged the media to report more on persons who have come out of the lifestyle instead of those who are in it. "I have no problem with anyone living the way they want to, but when you bring it out and try to push those principles on my children, I just can't be quiet."

White then expressed concern over divisions in the Christian church, noting there are more than 20,000 Christian denominations worldwide. "We've got a problem. We've got a major problem," White said.

God calls for Christians to love one another, White said, but many Christians do not obey.

"We don't care for each other, and we don't watch each other's backs," White said, illustrating with a football analogy. "When I'm on the field and I see a black guy getting ready to take Brett Favre (Green Bay Packer's quarterback) out, I take the (defender) out before he lays Brett out. It's about winning the game. We love each other and help each other."

To emphasize this statement, White pointed out the change in the public's attitude about violence after the recent school shootings in Colorado and Georgia. Since whites perpetrated the most recent acts, he said, the issue has now become an "epidemic". "People in the suburbs are wondering what's going on," White said. "Let me tell you what's going on, these shootings have been happening in inner cities for years, but when you allow sin to start, it spreads."

Keeping with his message of love, White said, "it is time for Christians to get out of the pews and into the streets" to reach people for Christ. White also called for Christians to make disciples out of new believers.

"It makes no difference their financial background, or what color they may be, we must express the love of God so they may deal with their hardships and the things they are going through," White said. "We don't support each other enough."

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SBC re-elects Patterson, chooses other officers

By Marv Knox

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Paige Patterson received a second term at the helm of the Southern Baptist Convention June 15, when messengers to the SBC's annual meeting re-elected him as president without opposition.

SBC messengers also elected Georgia pastor Frank Cox as first vice president and Alabama pastor Jerry Spencer as second vice president.

Patterson "served us well" in the past year as SBC president, stressed Junior Hill, an evangelist and member of Westmeade Baptist Church in Decatur, Ala., who nominated him.

Patterson, 56, is thoughtful, wise, tempered, restrained and "uncompromising in his call for biblical righteousness and New Testament evangelism," Hill said. He cited the rapid growth and "spirit of revival" that has characterized Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., under Patterson's leadership as president the past seven years.

Patterson helped design the 20-year movement that turned the SBC in a more conservative direction. As president, Patterson exhibited positive leadership in several areas, Hill said.

"Southern Baptists have seen a side of this gifted man many did not know existed," he explained. He cited Patterson's abilities as a preacher, his call to start churches and reach cities with the gospel and his challenge to baptize 500,000 new Christians in America in one year's time.

"Dr. Paige Patterson has challenged us to rise to a new level," Hill said. "I, for one, never have been more happy to be called a Southern Baptist. I am excited we have a man like Dr. Paige Patterson to be our leader."

Before becoming president of Southeastern Seminary, Patterson was president of Criswell College in Dallas, associate pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, and pastor of churches in Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas.

Cox, senior pastor of North Metro First Baptist Church in suburban Atlanta, also was elected without opposition.

"He has Baptists on his heart and will be fully supportive of Dr. Paige Patterson," pledged James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church in Snellville, Ga., who nominated him.

Cox has led his church to grow from 500 to 3,800 members in 19 years as pastor, Merritt reported. The church has been a Georgia Baptist leader in baptisms, and 93 people have committed themselves to be full-time Christian ministers under his leadership.

Cox is a former president of the Georgia Baptist Convention and is a member of the SBC Executive Committee.

Spencer, pastor of Ridgecrest Baptist Church in Dothan, Ala., won the second vice presidency over Paul Russell, pastor of Sunridge Baptist Church in Seabring, Fla. Spencer received 1,817 votes (52 percent) to 1,706 for Russell (48 percent).

Spencer's church has grown from average attendance of 400 in Sunday school and membership of 1,000 to 1,400 in Sunday school and about 3,000 members in the 10 years he has been pastor, reported Stan Coffey, pastor of San Jacinto Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas, who nominated him.

Spencer spent 27 years in full-time evangelism, Coffey said. Spencer also is a member of the SBC Executive Committee.

Messengers also elected two secretaries for the convention.

John Yeats, editor of the Baptist Messenger, the weekly newspaper of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, was re-elected recording secretary without opposition.

Incumbent Registration Secretary Lee Porter of the Atlanta area won re-election over former foreign missionary Teresa Norris, a staff member at Riverside Baptist Church in Denver and wife of Rob Norris, director of missions for Southern Baptists in Denver. Porter received 2,205 votes (62 percent) to 1,351 votes (38 percent) for Norris.

Messengers reject straw poll on sentiment for name change

By Bill Webb

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Southern Baptist Convention messengers declined June 15 to take a straw poll on whether they favor a name change for the SBC.

Blaine Barber, pastor of Agape Baptist Church in Petoskey, Mich., asked messengers "to consider changing the name of the SBC to the International Baptist Convention" and to vote on it by ballot for the purpose of a non-binding straw poll, with the results to inform further study.

After a show of uplifted ballots, SBC President Paige Patterson declared the motion had been overwhelmingly defeated.

"The goal of many of us who serve in the North and other areas outside the Bible belt is to build an even greater denomination," Barber said. "A name change will open doors to church planting and building healthy churches. It will bring in a new era in our denomination.

"The (SBC) Executive Committee said there was no compelling reason for a change," he said, referring to a recent decision by that body -- of which he is a member -- to decide against acting on two name-change motions referred to it at last year's convention.

However, Barber said he sees two compelling reasons for a name change.

The first reason is a biblical principle, Barber said. He cited Paul's example to "become all things to all men." He referenced Acts 16:1-3, where Paul had Timothy circumcised to avoid offending the Jews to whom they would minister.

"Now Paul did whatever was needed to overcome or break down any barriers to the witness of Christ. It would be painful for many of you to change the name of the SBC, but I can assure you it wouldn't be as painful as it was for Timothy," Barber said to laughter and applause.

"Reason No. 2 is racial reconciliation," he said. Noting one Southern state did not ratify the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution banning slavery until 1995, Barber said: "We have the opportunity to do in Atlanta more than just make a resolution for racial reconciliation. We must take a giant leap into the next millennium that would break down the walls of racism. If we're going to reach the black communities of North America, we should not be that slow in bringing about change."

Only one messenger spoke against Barber's motion before time for floor debate expired.

"Southern Baptist is a term for a theology, not a term for a location," said Jeff Johnson of Central Baptist Church in Grants, N.M. "It is a term we've come to respect."

Another messenger, James McCullen of First Baptist Church in Mountain View, Mo., proposed an amendment to change the name in Barber's motion from "International Baptist Convention" to "Scriptural Baptist Convention."

"We have turned our convention to Scripture and to the inerrancy of Scripture," he said. "Why not have everybody know that we are the Scriptural Baptist Convention?"

Then churches would not have to change the acronym "SBC" on their signs and stationery, he said. His amendment was defeated.

END
