

Southern Baptists set anti-masonic probe

by Anton Chaitkin

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) voted on June 10 to investigate Freemasonry in all forms, and to prepare a report on whether Masonry is compatible with Christianity. The SBC annual meeting, representing 15 million church-goers, voted overwhelmingly for the resolution introduced by Dr. James L. Holly, M.D., of Beaumont, Texas.

Dr. Holly's presentation was reportedly greeted by "thunderous" applause. His call to create a special new committee to study the problem was countered by a bureaucratic maneuver, in which an amendment was immediately passed without discussion being allowed. By the amendment, the question was referred instead to the existing cult-investigating committee of the SBC's Home Mission Board. Though that committee had already squelched previous proposals to investigate Masonry, Holly told *EIR* that the Home Mission Board now has a mandate from the whole denomination. "We will keep on top of them," Holly said. "They will have to make a judgment."

The approved resolution reads as follows:

"The Southern Baptist Convention in annual session June 9-11, 1992 at Indianapolis, Indiana, directs the Interfaith Witness Department of the Home Mission Board to study the compatibility with Christianity and Southern Baptist doctrine of the organization known variously as the Masonic Lodge, Masonry, Freemasonry, and/or Ancient and Accepted Rite of Freemasonry. The study is to encompass any and all branches and or lodges thereof. Furthermore, the convention charges the Home Mission Board with the responsibility of bringing a report with recommendation to the Convention which is to meet in Houston, Texas, June, 1993."

Warning against racist secret societies

The SBC also adopted a companion resolution against secret societies, which reads in part: "we . . . call upon all Christians to . . . [avoid] any association which conflicts with clear Biblical teaching, including those teachings concerning the taking of oaths, the secrecy of activities, mystical knowledge, or racial discrimination. . . ."

Dr. Holly told *EIR* that this resolution was aimed at the historical affiliation of Freemasonry with the Ku Klux Klan.

The masonic order is a pillar of the reigning Anglo-Amer-

ican establishment, and the broader implications of the Baptists' anti-masonic initiative have been noticed by nervous Freemasons, pro-masonic church officials, and national news media. The June 1992 issue of *Virginia Masonic Herald*, internal publication of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, tried to reassure its members with an article headlined "Baptist Group Declines Probe of Freemasonry." But this masonic "victory" referred only to the fact that the Home Mission Board turned down previous requests to investigate Masonry, and the *Herald* conceded that the issue was now to be considered by the full convention in Indianapolis. The article excerpted a non-approved 1985 SBC resolution, calling Masonry a "spiritually devastating and ungodly brotherhood of satanic darkness." The *Herald* quoted Rev. Johnny Jackson of Little Rock, Arkansas, former chairman of the SBC's Home Mission Board, warning of "divisiveness" caused by those who are "extremist or militant" on the masonic issue.

As Dr. Holly circulated thousands of anti-masonic pamphlets to Baptist leaders throughout the nation, some Baptists may have tried to make the church appear publicly lined up with Masonry. The Indiana state section of the SBC conducted a door-to-door mass recruitment drive in the days leading up to the national meeting, culminating in an evangelization rally on June 6. The rally was held at the Freemasonic Murat Temple in Indianapolis, the country's largest Shriners temple.

Controversy before meeting

The Associated Press ran a national wire story on the controversy leading into the Indianapolis meeting. AP quoted Robert C. Singer, grand secretary of the masonic Grand Lodge of New York, saying that the opposition to Masonry is "based on misunderstanding," conceding that there are "certain religious overtones in ritual work," and pointing out that 14 U.S. Presidents have been Masons.

At least three other Protestant denominations, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Assemblies of God, and the small Presbyterian Church in America, oppose masonic membership. The Roman Catholic Church recently reaffirmed its longtime ban on Freemasonry, calling such membership "a serious sin." With the Southern Baptist Convention's initiative, denominations encompassing a majority of U.S. Christians now have taken steps to oppose Freemasonry.

Perhaps most dangerous to the masonic order is the SBC's reference to "racial discrimination." Many African-Americans are members of the separate black freemasonic structure, which had some ties to the early 19th-century anti-slavery struggle and a vague association with the modern civil rights movement. But if the brutal truth of Masonry's central role in creating and sustaining the Ku Klux Klan were to be widely discussed, America's racial minorities might look with increased hostility upon the masonic order as a whole.