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Against the Stream: The Southern Baptist Resolutions

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Sir Winston Churchill once complained of those who were “decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift.” Such cannot be said of the Southern Baptist Convention. During the June 11-13 meeting of the Convention, the denomination spoke clearly and courageously to issues of current debate and controversy.

Speaking through resolutions adopted during the Convention’s business sessions, Southern Baptists addressed issues ranging from homosexual marriage and assisted suicide to religious freedom and world hunger. Attracting the most media attention, however, were resolutions addressed to the Walt Disney Company and the issue of Jewish evangelism.

The attention to Disney may surprise some observers—and some Baptists. Disney has carefully crafted an image as the world’s premier producer of family entertainment. Indeed, most parents of small children were raised with Mickey and Minnie, Snow White, and other Disney characters as familiar companions. But Disney is no longer satisfied to reach the family market, and it long ago decided to reach out to more adventuresome audiences. Put bluntly, Disney has been presenting one corporate face through its children’s entertainment, and another through its Miramax and Hyperion divisions and other new ventures.

Furthermore, Disney corporate policies are hardly those of a pro-family entertainment producer. In recent years Disney has moved to the front lines of the culture wars, and its record is not pretty. Through its subsidiaries, Disney has released movies such as *Priest*, a graphic and patently anti-Christian film depicting a lecherous clergyman; published *Growing Up Gay*, a coming-out guide for teenagers; chosen a convicted child-molester to direct its movie *Powder*; and changed company policy to recognize homosexual partnerships for employee benefits.

More shocking still is the company’s not-too-subtle corruption of its children’s entertainment. The studio’s newest animated release, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, shows, says *USA Today*, that Disney animation has “gone adult.” Overt sexuality is now mixed with Disney’s legendary musical scores and magical animation. Alan Menken, composer of the *Hunchback* score, told *USA Today*, “In one song we have (a character) sing the church liturgy but also sing of twisted sexual fantasies.”

TIME declared that *Hunchback* is “teeming with treachery and lust.” *TIME*’s review describes a dramatic musical scene in which a character “shouts out his twisted passion.” As the reviewer suggests, “This one will be hard to explain to the kids.” Well, it is not only the kids who will be perplexed and troubled. Disney will have a hard time explaining this one to the parents.

The sad fact is that Disney has taken the corporate low road with these developments, and it should lose the confidence of America’s parents and families until it proves itself once again worthy of their trust. Southern Baptists were so incensed by Disney’s latest moves that they overwhelmingly approved an amendment adding a call for a boycott of Disney to its resolution of concern. Michael Eisner, Donald, Mickey, and company had better listen—there is a thunderous outrage building outside the Magic Kingdom.

The Convention’s resolution on Jewish evangelism, contrary to many reports, did not alter any denominational policy or conviction. To the contrary, from the founding of the denomination to the present, Southern Baptists have declared that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be witnessed to all persons, regardless of nationality, race, gender, or religious background.

In declaring their convictions, messengers to the Convention stated publicly their responsibility to share the Gospel with Jewish persons, as well as persons of all other backgrounds. In so doing, the Convention declared itself solidly in line with the New Testament. The Apostle Paul, who identified himself as a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” reminded the Christians in Rome that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentiles.

The resolution comes as several more liberal denominations have declared a moratorium on witnessing to Jewish persons. In the name of pluralism, some churches have simply cut the descendants of Abraham from the promise of the Gospel. This is a road Southern Baptists are determined not to follow.

This is not a case of religious imperialism or intolerance. Evangelical Christians such as Southern Baptists are the most fervent advocates and defenders of religious liberty for all persons, including the Jews. The real enemy of Judaism is not Christian evangelism, but the radical secularism which increasingly grows dominant in American culture.

Jewish persons—and all other persons—should know this: The greatest act of respect, love, and honor a Christian can extend to a non-Christian is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are firmly convinced that there is salvation in no other name, but we are also confident that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Thus, when most faithful, Southern Baptists are to be found sharing the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. We have no right to exclude Jewish persons from the promise of the Gospel.

Southern Baptists were fully aware that these resolutions would not be universally applauded. But in an age of rampant compromise, Southern Baptists must be willing to stand against the stream, in order to stand fast for the truth.

