

BAPTIST FEATURES

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W. C. Fields, *Director*
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Family Life Occupies
President's Free Time

Note: This is the 12th feature from Baptist Press in its series on SBC leaders.

By Roger Branch
For Baptist Press

His talents do not run along the artistic line. He professes to draw only one thing: a rose in a box, which he used to draw for his two daughters, and now tries out on his granddaughters.

His interest is more in the rose than the art. The rose is his favorite flower. He has used it to favor his wife, children and others--roses to them on their birthdays.

Even now, a personal note to one of them may be penned on stationery bearing a red rose.

If he favors an interest outside his own chosen profession, it probably is medicine. As a boy, he used to accompany his doctor uncle on calls in the rural community. To this day, a picture of that uncle known affectionately as "Doctor Bill," resides on the desk in his executive office.

Though in a field not related to medicine, he has addressed groups of doctors. He counts them among his closest personal friends.

Yet roses, flower sketches or interest in medicine are less of a hobby to Olin T. Binkley than they would be to most other men. As one of his daughters, now married, said, "So much of daddy's life is involved with his work--reading and thinking in order to give--that it is difficult for me to visualize his leisure time, much less to explain what he does with it."

Family life is the center of his extracurricular activities, right down to the familiar scene of the husband and father broiling hamburgers or steak over hot charcoals on an outdoor grill in warm weather.

He always saved Friday night for good times with his family.

But no single phrase characterizes Binkley, new president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"Versatility in depth" provides a clue to this denominational leader who has won distinction as pastor, sociologist and educator--college and seminary professor, and theological dean.

Binkley's address on theological education to the 1963 Southern Baptist Convention reveals much about the man and his ideal for the seminary.

"The primary purpose of a theological seminary is to guide the intellectual and spiritual growth of Christian ministers and to search for a deeper knowledge of the truth about God as revealed in Jesus Christ and its implications for man and society," he said.

He characterizes his point of view as "creative conservatism."

The new president plans no new departures for Southeastern. He emphasizes a policy of "creative continuity, building upon the solid educational and theological foundations that have been laid." He said he seeks growth and service "within the main stream of Southern Baptist thought and life."

A sensitive and modest man of small stature, Binkley can pass unnoticed in a self-assertive crowd. In opportunities of service, however, his meticulous scholarship and sincere compassion have won the respect and love of colleagues, students and church members.

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His impact as a young pastor of University Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, N. C., and teacher at the University of North Carolina, was such that a new church organized there in 1958 was named Olin T. Binkley Baptist Church.

Still, Binkley is not well known in some areas of the Southern Baptist Convention. The reason is indicated in a comment on his election as president of the seminary at Wake Forest, N. C.: "His humility has become synonymous with his name."

Binkley is a product of the type of North Carolina Baptist life which has given Southern Baptists such leaders as the late George W. Truett.

Born near the hamlet of Harmony, N. C., in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, in 1908, he counts as the most influential people in his life his preacher father, Joseph N. Binkley, and his mother.

He recalls how his father, also a farmer, hammered out his messages behind the plow. "He memorized a chapter of the Bible every Monday morning, meditated upon it all week and on Sunday attempted to set forth the central ideas of the passage in his sermon, always pointing out the relevance of the message to what people were thinking and doing in the community," Binkley remembers.

In a message to the Southern Baptist Convention in 1954, Binkley recalled his mother's sacrifices to help him pay for a college education.

Quality scholarship at Wake Forest College--whose former campus now houses the seminary--earned his membership in Phi Beta Kappa. He went on to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, and Yale University, New Haven, Conn., where he was awarded the doctor of philosophy degree in 1933.

That same year he was married to the former Pauline Eichmann of New Haven.

Wake Forest College called upon him to head its department of religion in 1938, and he returned to Southern Seminary as professor of Christian ethics and sociology in 1944.

In 1952 he joined the faculty at the fledgling Southeastern Seminary, helping to turn a dream into a reality. He was chosen dean of the faculty in 1958.

Both of the daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Binkley are graduates of Wake Forest College and hold master's degrees in English from Duke University.

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Cutlines

"COMIN' UP"--Chef at the outdoor grill serving up the tasty hamburgers is Olin T. Binkley, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N. C. (BP) Photo

-30-

(This photo goes with feature on Binkley)