

FROM WASHINGTON OFFICE
W. BARRY GARRETT, REGIONAL EDITOR
1628—16th St., N. W., Washington, D. C. 20009
Telephone: 232-3087

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Baptist Public Affairs
Analyst Views Election

WASHINGTON (BP)-- A Baptist political analyst here has taken a look at the national election in view of the Baptist witness to the nation. In an interview with Baptist Press, C. Emanuel Carlson, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, gives his interpretation of the meaning of the election.

Question: How do you look at the election results? What do you consider important?

Answer: Before I respond to any of the questions about the meaning of the election, let me remind you of the non-partisan role of churches, and their agencies, including our office. Being non-partisan, however, need not mean being blind to values. I carefully refrained from statements during the campaign because I felt that the educational work of the churches must be freely tested in the campaign. Certainly this is the time to analyze where we are and to plan where we are going as a fellowship of believers who profess to follow Christ.

Now, in looking at the tabulation of the election returns I am not too much impressed with the total numbers. We have long known that millions of people simply vote on the basis of a party label and family tradition. In my estimation there are two things of importance in the tabulations. One is the shifts that took place from "normal" patterns, and the other is the unprecedented spread between the candidates.

Q: When you speak of shifts, do you refer to the belt of solid Democratic states that now went Republican?

A: Yes, I refer to that block, but I also refer to the wide open spaces that cover the rest of the map where we would normally have expected a high percentage of Republican successes. The phenomenal thing is the shift in the South, the shift in the Northeast, in the Midwest, and in the Far West. We now come up with a political map that we have never seen before in the history of the country.

Q: How do you account for the emergence of this new map?

A: I think the commentators make a lot of sense when they say that the Republican nominee was himself a big part of the issue. The New York cab driver spoke for many voters when he said, "He has created no vision for the nation, he has only complained and criticized." Perhaps we might be entitled to assume that negative politics are not as successful as some politicians have thought them to be. The campaign gimmicks that back-fired would indicate an abundance of poor counsel as well.

However, the solid block in the South undoubtedly resulted primarily from the civil rights legislation and the fear of a government dedicated to its enforcement. This legislation and this prospect developed so recently that the church leaders and other constructive civic leaders did not have time to mobilize a constructive response to the new day. Resistance and roadblocks are not answers any longer. So the hundreds of thousands of forward looking Christians and citizens in those states apparently were caught without an affirmative relation to the rest of the nation.

The shifts in the other parts of the country addressed themselves to the question whether government should serve all of the people, whether profits or health are more important, whether government has a role to play regarding economic justice, and many such items on which the candidates differed. On these issues the nation as a whole apparently is much more united than the political leaders have assumed in the past years.

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Q: Would you say the people have spoken?

A: I would. The candidates asked that the government be returned to the people. It was. The nation did express itself on foreign policy, on the role of government in modern life, and on the rights of all the people. The voters chose to respect people as people.

Q: Do you think the election has any effect on the issues in the field of religious liberty?

A: Yes, I certainly do. The American public does not choose a President on the basis of a pledge to legislate religion, nor do they take seriously his offer to make people either "prayerful" or "moral." This to my mind means that people are reaffirming their confidence in religious liberty for the people. They are not looking for the help of the government in these matters. And they recognize that an independent court is necessary for placing some constitutional limitations on the activities of political units, local, state, and federal, in this field.

Q: Would you say that democracy is better off in the world today than it was yesterday?

A: Let me put it this way: the state of the American public mind in the past several years has been so confused by fear and suspicion that many people were doubting that democracy can actually work. There has been so much alarmism and so much panic stirred up for political objectives that the people just got fed up and reaffirmed their confidence in the government and in the nation. I believe democracy is proving itself equal even to modern difficult situations. It is "the people," including the public servants, not "the government" as an institution, that must have "faith."

Q: How do you think the election will affect public opinion in other parts of the world?

A: People all over the world were alarmed by the political situation in the United States of America. I met it everywhere in Europe. They will take heart when they realize that in the United States a political party does not rule the nation. In this experience the nations of the world can see the importance of the two-party system. They should be able to see that people do have a right to a choice.

Q: How do you interpret the impact of the election on Baptist public affairs programs?

A: Now this gets pretty close to home and we will need to give that a lot of thought. There are several things that are quite clear. The Christian citizens of the future must be prepared to rethink human need. We must be aware that even though an anti-poverty program comes and succeeds so that we no longer have hungry people, we will still have needy people. Even though medicare might be accepted for the aging, we will still have lonesome people anxious for fellowship, for understanding, and for inspiration. Dependence on God must come from deeper levels than ignorance or deprivation. The churches will be in need of some creative thinking to find institutional expressions that convey the heart concern of the gospel. There will never be a shortage of such opportunity.

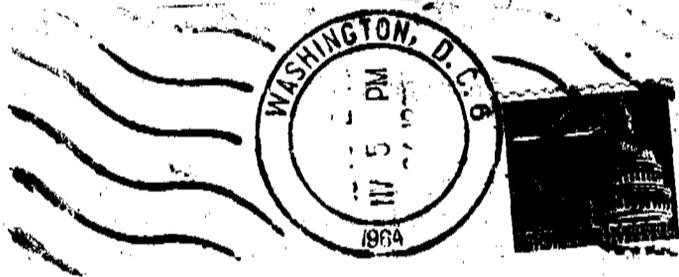
Many people may be tempted to look to government for services that government is not able to render. After all, when it comes to relating a person's life to God and when it comes to finding spiritual unity with people, and making life meaningful by an indwelling presence of God, the powers of government do not work.

"Religious liberty" and "separation of church and state" will be not less important but more important. In declaring the meaning of these we will probably need to go back to a fresh understanding of the nature of man and of God's way of dealing with man. Political developments may change the climate and the situation, but not the message or the compassion of Christians and the churches.

Where a particular religious movement holds a strong or dominant role it cannot avoid being charged with responsibilities for the values expressed by the people in the political processes. Baptists like all others have a lot of thinking to do in discerning how to be Christian in the emerging situations.

BAPTIST PRESS

1628 - 16TH ST. N.W.
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20009



AIR MAIL

THEO SOMMERNAMP
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
460 JAMES ROBERTSON PKWY
NASHVILLE 3 TENN

THE WASHINGTON OFFICE OF THE BAPTIST PRESS

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