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**Traits of citizenship described
as involvement, prayer, witness**

By Keith Hinson

**Baptist Press
10/22/96**

DEL CITY, Okla. (BP)--American Christians have a responsibility as citizens to live morally, vote, pray and witness, declare Southern Baptists leaders and thinkers on the matter of Christian citizenship.

Tom Elliff, pastor of the First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., and president of the Southern Baptist Convention, summarizes the duties of a Christian voter in five imperative statements:

-- "I must be a part of the solution and not part of the problem." Christians who demand moral integrity in their elected officials must also exhibit moral integrity themselves, Elliff said.

Someone recently asked Elliff if God cares about a candidate's moral character. "My answer was that I believe that's all he cares about," Elliff noted. "God has proven he can take someone as humble as a young shepherd boy such as David and -- at least at that moment -- with purity of heart and motive. He was capable of making him a leader of a great nation. It was when David's character was called into question that David's leadership began to falter."

-- "I must be a registered and practicing voter." Christians who do not vote are neglecting a key responsibility, Elliff said. "If I am not willing to participate in the political process, then I have no legitimate grounds upon which to register my criticisms or compliments."

John Revell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Coconut Creek, Fla., says a strong reason to vote may be found in the first chapter of Isaiah, which describes a time of governmental corruption and popular apathy.

"When the people were able to choose and direct their civil leaders, and when the people allowed their leaders to continually defy God's moral standards for civil government, God held both the people and the leadership accountable for the civil sins of the leadership," Revell wrote in a chapter of a yet-to-be-published book manuscript.

Today's Christians may have a greater degree of accountability, Revell wrote. "Those of us in the U.S. who claim to follow the Lord's teachings may bear a higher level of responsibility. ... We have access to God's moral standards for civil government and we have direct access to the decision-making process. ... When we fail to vote and voice our moral convictions to our elected representatives, we demonstrate the same apathetic mind-set that dominated Judah."

America has failed miserably to hold its governmental leaders accountable to God's standards, Revell added in an interview. He cited such problems as abortion on demand, governmental endorsement of homosexuality, the influence of special interest groups in elections and lenient sentences for persons convicted of violent crimes.

-- "I must be an informed voter." Simply casting a vote is not enough, Elliff said, but Christians who go to the ballot box must be knowledgeable about candidates and issues.

"Whatever it takes for me to find that out -- including personal conversations with the candidates -- I need to know when I go to the polls what that vote means," Elliff urged.

Daniel Heimbach, associate professor of ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., said Christians should lay aside selfish concerns when deciding for whom to vote.

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"A lot of Christians, in terms of their voting, tend to think narrowly about a single issue that's in the top of their minds -- particularly economic concerns. ... But if there is a wicked candidate, promoting a wicked agenda, but that wicked person is going to give you some personal advantage in terms of a policy or program, ... I think that is something we're going to be held accountable to God for," said Heimbach, who serves as an elected town commissioner in Wake Forest.

-- "I need to talk to God about my candidate." Christians can have an impact on government through prayer, Elliff said. "If I'm not praying for an individual (office holder), I really should not be surprised at anything. ... The Scripture says government is of God. That means one of the ways I have of affecting government is by talking to God about it."

The Del City church has an ongoing ministry of prayer for government leaders 24 hours a day, as men in the church pray for local, state and national officials, Elliff said.

-- "I need to talk to my candidate about God." Candidates and elected officials should know Christians are praying for them, Elliff noted.

"I must let my candidate know that I'm talking to God about him. ... We tell these (leaders), 'We are praying for you and your families.' It is amazing how they open their doors and their hearts and invite us into the decision-making process," Elliff said.

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**Christians advised to examine
politicians, political parties**

By Keith Hinson

**Baptist Press
10/22/96**

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Neither political candidates nor political parties are perfect, and that's a fact Christians should bear in mind as they vote, said Daniel Heimbach, associate professor of Christian ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C.

"There is no candidate for office who is not a sinner. I do not think we should say it's a sin to vote for a candidate who is known to have been a sinner in some way or another. ... The only candidates for government are fellow sinners," Heimbach said in an interview.

But although all candidates are sinners, Christians still have a responsibility to vote for the best candidate, Heimbach noted. "A subjective judgment is going to have to be made by the Christian voter, but we should not knowingly vote for someone we know is more morally corrupt -- or spiritually corrupt -- because they're promising some personal economic benefit."

Political parties also are imperfect, so Christians should not blindly support any such group, said Tom Elliff, pastor of the First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., and president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"I seriously question the validity of a straight-party ticket. That is mindless," Elliff declared. "Unless I know that everybody I'm voting for is the best possible candidate for the job in his heart, then I am making a foolish mistake."

Persistent straight-ticket voting promotes a wrong emphasis and misplaced priorities, Heimbach said. "It puts party loyalty, I think, in the place of God -- and I think that's wrong."

But, Heimbach emphasized, voting a straight ticket is not always wrong. "If you feel that the party platforms are so clearly divided, and if you believe the divisions are so morally significant, then it would be appropriate.

"But to vote 'straight party' blindly -- believing 'whether right or wrong, it's my party' -- that is to put the party in the place of God. Our moral reference has to be set by God, and that transcends any political organization or candidate."

In fact, neither political parties nor elected office holders should be considered the supreme authority in American civil government, stated John Revell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Coconut Creek, Fla.

Rather, the U.S. Constitution is comparable to monarchs of centuries gone by, Revell stated, noting 1 Peter 2:13, which says: "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as one in authority" (NIV).

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Referring to a line of thinking developed by Robert T. Dugan Jr., vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals, Revell said, "In today's society, the president is not our king, the legislative branch is not our king and the Supreme Court is not our king. The closest that we have to a king is our Constitution. The Constitution is our civil supreme authority.

"The Constitution expects the citizens of this nation to choose and direct the leaders. When we fail to do that, we fail to obey the Lord's command," Revell said.

Heimbach emphasized the importance of the Constitution as a remedy to governmental problems and corruption.

"We have in the Constitution a wonderful document by which the affairs of the nation can be governed. Apart from the Scripture itself, I think many of us would have to say that the Constitution is at its heart a reflection of scriptural principle: the Judeo-Christian ethic," Heimbach said. "I believe we need to return to the original intent of the authors of our Constitution."

Revell said he believes God's standards for civil government still apply today, even though America is not - and should not be -- a theocracy.

"God didn't just set up the standards for civil morality to apply only to Israel. He has those same expectations for all civil governments," Revell said.

Examples of God's design for civil governments include defense of justice and protection of the defenseless in society, Revell noted.

During Isaiah's time, for example, the defenseless were widows and orphans, Revell said. Today, American government has laws to protect these groups, but Revell said another group has been left without protection.

"In today's society, the most helpless are the children inside the mother's womb. They have no legal protection," Revell declared.

Revell said he does not agree with the ideas of Christian reconstructionists, who believe the U.S. government should be restructured as explicitly Christian and that Old Testament law and punishments should be practiced today as they were centuries ago.

"The Bible does not call us to establish a religious government. The Bible does not call us to overthrow our government and replace it with some form of theocracy," Revell said. "But I do see an abundance of evidence that justifies God's people participating in the civil process for God's glory and to accomplish God's purposes."

Elliff urged a return to biblical values and the necessity of a revival to bring America out of its moral decline.

"It has been said that our generation could be the first generation in the history of America which would not hand to the next generation a better life and nation than the one they themselves received," Elliff wrote in his 1992 book, "America on the Edge: Is It Too Late to Turn Back?"

"This is a tragedy which must be avoided," Elliff wrote. "There will be no reformation in our land until first there is a revival of the Christian faith in our land. We must once again move under God's protection."

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**Edward Thiele appointed
Seminary Extension director**

By Leonard Hill

**Baptist Press
10/22/96**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--William Edward Thiele, professor of discipleship and director of field education at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary since 1983, has been unanimously appointed the new director of Seminary Extension by the presidents of the six Southern Baptist seminaries who make up its governing board.

Thiele, 66, will succeed Doran C. McCarty Jan. 1, 1977. McCarty retired as director in January 1995 but has continued serving as interim director at the request of the seminary presidents.

Charles S. Kelley Jr., president of New Orleans Seminary, said, "Ed Thiele is a man of deep spirituality, profound love for students and extensive experience in both the local church and theological education.

"Although we will miss him and his wife, Catherine, on our campus, I think he is a perfect choice. His great desire will be to help students develop a deep walk with God, a thorough understanding of the Bible and the basic skills necessary for effective ministry. The future is bright for Seminary Extension."

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R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., said, "I am exceedingly pleased by the appointment of Ed Thiele as executive director of Seminary Extension. This important ministry reaches literally thousands of persons who otherwise might not have the opportunity to receive quality theological education.

"Seminary Extension has come to a critical crossroads. Dr. Thiele will bring critical leadership to the task of moving Seminary Extension forward to the future. He will bring conservative evangelical conviction and the seasoned experience of a veteran educator," Mohler said.

Seminary Extension, with offices in Nashville, Tenn., currently serves approximately 6,000 students who study at more than 400 extension centers across the country or take classes by correspondence.

Thiele said he viewed his new assignment as "an expansion of my ministry. I will be serving more students over a wider sphere. The task is essentially the same -- training leaders who will train others."

He added, "I have joined an excellent staff. The challenge is enormous. The scope is global. The potential faculty is huge. Our student and instructor materials are excellent. We will continue to strive to improve and expand them to meet needs. Pray for us. We are committed to serving you for our Lord."

Thiele, who occupies the Broadmoor Chair of Discipleship at New Orleans Seminary, is a graduate of the University of Texas who earned B.D. and Th.M. degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, and the Th.D. degree from New Orleans Seminary.

His wife, Catherine Carpenter Thiele, also has been serving on the New Orleans faculty as director of testing and student counselor. The Thieles have four children, William, Roger, Elizabeth and James.

Thiele has served as pastor of Memorial Baptist Church, Baytown, Texas; Easthaven Baptist Church, Brookhaven, Miss.; and Woodland Baptist Church, Beaumont, Texas. While at Brookhaven and Beaumont he taught Seminary Extension courses.

During a 1991-92 sabbatical, Thiele taught at Kenya Baptist Theological College. He has also led tours and directed mission trips to Europe and the Middle East and served on mission trips to Asia, Mexico, and South America.

In addition to serving on the executive board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and as a trustee of Houston Baptist University and San Marcos Academy, he has lead numerous prayer retreats and conferences, witness training seminars, deacon and marriage enrichment retreats. And he's been a police chaplain.

He is the author of two books, "Christ Is Lord: The Doctrine of Lordship" and "Fruitful Discipleship."

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(BP) photo available upon request from the Seminary Extension and also posted in SBCNet News Room. Hill is Seminary Extension's public relations specialist.

**Proposed covenant would link
Miss. Baptists, agency trustees**

By William H. Perkins Jr.

**Baptist Press
10/22/96**

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--The Mississippi Baptist Convention Board approved a far-reaching proposal that proponents say will allow Mississippi to bypass the epidemic of Baptist institutions severing ties with affiliated state Baptist conventions.

A key portion of the plan, to be submitted to messengers to the annual Mississippi Baptist Convention meeting Oct. 29-30, will establish a covenant relationship between the state convention and trustees governing MBC-affiliated institutions.

Under the covenant, trustees pledge to continue management of the institution as a Christian entity under God's guidance and acknowledge the institution's role in the Mississippi Baptist strategy to win Mississippi and the world to Jesus.

The plan also permits trustees of MBC-affiliated institutions to jointly nominate new trustees to their respective boards as a part of the MBC nominating process already in place.

Under the plan, trustees and the MBC nominating committee will jointly produce a slate of trustees for convention consideration.

At an Oct. 14 special called meeting of the board in Jackson, Executive Director-Treasurer Bill Causey said state and federal laws recognize trustees of nonprofit institutions as the legal holders of deeds to the property of those institutions.

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Causey said that legal recognition means institutions of the MBC governed by boards of trustees can unilaterally sever ties by action of the trustees, even though historical ownership can be proven to rest with the state convention.

Trustees of the MBC-affiliated Mississippi College in Clinton voted to sever the school's relationship with the state convention in 1994, and only intense negotiations between officers of the college and the state convention prevented the break from becoming a reality.

Many state Baptist conventions have lost affiliated institutions under the laws, Causey said. Those include the Baptist hospital in South Carolina, Samford University in Alabama and, recently, Ouachita Baptist University in Arkansas.

"We can't sit and wait to see what happens" and risk losing affiliation with Mississippi Baptist institutions, Causey stressed.

"We have found a way to bind them to us and still follow the law," he said.

As a measure of enthusiasm for the proposal, Causey pointed out, a number of trustees had already signed and submitted their covenants as of the Oct. 14 board meeting.

MBC institutions affected by the proposal include Blue Mountain College, Blue Mountain; William Carey College, Hattiesburg; Mississippi Baptist Medical Center, Jackson; and Mississippi Baptist Children's Village, Jackson.

Mississippi College will continue to be governed by a similar agreement put in place after the 1994 negotiations.

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Cross-town neighborhoods & world are church's focus

By Jon Walker

**Baptist Press
10/22/96**

LOS ANGELES (BP)--Nobody told Aquiles Acosta you can't reach the world from a remote church in an economically depressed area of Los Angeles.

Nobody told him you can't do it without a big budget, a swollen staff or fat facilities. He just looked at the Word and believed it really meant "go into all the world," and so he set about training laypeople to become church leaders and encouraging them to support mission churches across the globe.

With a congregation of less than 200, Acosta has led El Camino Truth and Life Baptist Church in East LA to plant or enhance 62 churches. Although they have a modest budget and an unpretentious building shoehorned into a lower-income neighborhood, El Camino members financially support church planters and congregations as close as other parts of Los Angeles and as far away as Greece.

"I would quit tomorrow if I could," Acosta said, "but it's a deep calling of God to do this. I have done like Jeremiah and said we would do no more, but then something happens inside of me, and I have to do this."

Many of these churches are led by men trained by Acosta at El Camino. "They get to a point where I feel they are going to stop growing here," Acosta noted. "Then, the only choice I have is to persuade them that to stay means they wither -- or we can send them out to do some work."

The pastor modestly said these lay-leaders-turned-vocational ministers develop "naturally" within his congregation, but that shrouds the three-year Bible training course Acosta has developed specifically for training people for ministry. The "Bible Institute" covers two years of theology and one year of homiletics and hermeneutics with weekly hour-long tests.

Although 27 students currently are enrolled, not including some auditors, Acosta said he never thinks in terms of big numbers. "My goal is to train three people each course," the pastor said, defining course as the full three-year program. "If I train three people each course, then we will be able to plant one church a year."

Internationally, El Camino assists churches in Mexico, Argentina and Greece. Acosta particularly has a burden for the lack of Christian witness in Greece, the very cradle of Christianity, and the wall outside his office provides a crash tour of the churches Paul planted in Greece. The writings and pictures of ancient and modern Greece serve as an exhortation that Christian congregations need to rise up to replace the churches, now dead, that Paul once planted.

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The church also has Friday night worship in lieu of a Sunday evening service so that members of the congregation can have that time free to preach and lead worship at other fledgling churches in Southern California. "We have done this with the help of the local association, where they have existing churches that want to begin Hispanic ministries," Acosta said. "We give them a few of our people, or our teachers will go there, our worship director will go there, and help them with their service."

And with all this activity, the congregation put its own needs on hold for 14 years as they prayed for God's help in expanding their own sanctuary. When Acosta felt led by the Holy Spirit that it was the proper time to focus on their own needs, he stood in the pulpit of the church and asked for voluntary offerings to remodel the building, which looks more like a house than a church. In a congregation that already sends support to many other churches, \$58,000 was given to improve the sanctuary.

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**Sweet gives '10 commandments'
for modern church architecture**

By Dan Martin

**Baptist Press
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DALLAS (BP)--God is birthing the greatest spiritual awakening in the history of the church, and he's calling architects to midwife that birth, Leonard Sweet said during a conference on church architecture in the 21st century.

The first reformation, he said, was an architectural reformation and so, too, will be the reformation into the post-modern age, Sweet said. "Architecture can be either health-giving or illness-producing."

Sweet, dean of the theological school at Drew University in Madison, N.J., who is often called the "spokesman for the 21st century," gave the architects what he called the "Ten Postmodern Commandments of Soulistic Health Architecture" and presented them, a la David Letterman, from highest to lowest. Fifty-one architects from nine states attended the conference, sponsored by the church building planning department of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Commandment Ten: Thou shalt not make any graven images. "You shall design for recycling and remember that you are not putting up a building, but are designing sacred space."

Commandment Nine: Thou shalt not commit an ugly. "How can you learn about a God of beauty and holiness in the basement of a church with prison-yellow walls, fluorescent lights, no windows, torturous chairs?"

"Beauty is not an indulgence, an expense," Sweet said. "The church has a disease: the 'smalls,' the 'cheaps,' and it is a chilling disease which can kill its bearer."

Commandment Eight: Thou shalt not design for one sense alone. "You must design space that engages all five senses: smell, taste, touch, hearing and seeing," Sweet said. "You must consider them as a whole, not in isolation from one another, but in harmony with one another."

Commandment Seven: Thou shalt have a sense of place. "The more the world becomes placeless, where anyplace can become any place, the more place becomes important."

Sweet added the electronic revolution may be even more important than the industrial revolution. "It took 40 years to get the overhead projector out of the bowling alley and into the educational classrooms of the churches. It must not take that long to get the computer into our ministries. In a world traveling the information superhighway, the church is still on dirt roads with no asphalt in sight."

Commandment Six: Thou shalt get Real. The post-modern church uncovers hypocrisy. It is not performance-based, but reality-based, Sweet said. Designs must be for interactivity. "Religion is not a spectator sport. Face-to-face interaction is emphasized over being pew potatoes. The 'sit and soak' style of worship is over in this new church."

Commandment Five: Thou shalt build an organic living church. "Churches must be designed for healing," Sweet said. "Architecture can make you sick, literally. It can make people ill, it can be life-supporting or life-suppressing."

"Modern architecture let the technology of glass and steel become what they wanted to be, tall skyscrapers with windows that were sealed shut. Now, the emphasis is on atriums, arches, domes and fountains."

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Commandment Four: Thou shalt take the church out-of-doors. "Christianity is an out-of-door religion," Sweet said. "God created Adam to be a gardener. The church, then, should celebrate the world's oldest profession: gardening. The church of the future will have extensive gardens."

Commandment Three: Thou shalt love the land upon which you stand. "Don't just plop buildings down, but be environmentally responsible," Sweet said. "Architecture has responsibilities to minimize pollution and ecological damage ... (and) adverse biological effects on the occupants."

"Architects have responsibilities to create buildings which act harmoniously with the surroundings, and be sensitive to both the visual aesthetic and the intangible but perceptible 'spirit of place.'"

Commandment Two: Thou shalt not build a dumb church. "You shalt build a smart church."

Commandment One: Thou shalt create spaces in which people can experience God. "You shall build buildings which uplift the spirit. Architects build the sky in which the souls may soar," Sweet said.

In another presentation, Sweet talked of 24 transitions the modern church will have to make as it enters the post-modern age -- issues he believes will be the "arenas in which our churches will do ministry."

"The three biggies are environment, ethics and education, but overconsumption and overpopulation also are top issues," Sweet said.

"We must never separate overconsumption and overpopulation. There is a notion that people are having too many babies, and that is part of our perception," he said as he told of a recent trip up the Amazon River. "I came home and did a little research. I discovered that one American child consumes 99 times what one of those Brazilian, Amazonian children does."

"A Brazilian father with 17 children could have 70 more and not have the same impact on the environment as one of mine does."

Consumerism is "one of the most virulent social diseases ever to hit this world," Sweet said. "We began with God saying, 'I am who I am;' moved to Descartes saying, 'I think, therefore I am;' and now to Wal-Mart saying, 'I shop, therefore I am.' The world is going to hell in a shopping cart."

Other issues confronting the post-modern church are the varieties of Christian lifestyle; inner-city disintegration and neighborhood revitalization; health and medicine; geo-economics and bionomics; moving information and communication; the age wave; recreation and leisure; violence, crime and security; addiction; entertainments; vocations; and terrorism.

Sweet also maintained the new world is one in which "laypeople don't just want to lay there. They want ministry. They do not want people to represent them before God; they want to represent themselves."

The futurist said most clergy are having great difficulty shifting from representation to participation because the pattern most clergy follow is based on the English-style country parish priest who does all of the ministry for a couple of hundred people.

"In the '80s, the most popular type of daytime television was soaps. In the '90s, the number one type of daytime television is talk shows. Why? Participation! People want to participate, not to hire representational ministers to be soap actors and actresses and to do the ministry for them."

"The job of the minister in the post-modern age is to give up the ministry. The role of the minister is to teach others to do the ministry. That is a significant shift, but one which will have to be done as we start inhabiting this new world."

He noted in passing that the modern age "began with a 95 point sermon," referring to Martin Luther's 95 points posted on the Wittenberg door. "The 16th century could handle 95 points. By Jonathan Edwards, it was down to 20; Charles Finney took it down to 10; and Billy Graham got it down to three."

Sweet said people today cannot begin to imagine how Martin Luther "rocked the world when he said, 'Here I stand.'" He brought the people into the present as free-standing individuals, and based that on presuppositions, principles, rules and laws.

"These words built the modern world, but every one of them is wrong for the post-modern world," Sweet said. "We are no longer 'Here' but 'There.' No longer 'I' but 'We,' and no longer standing or taking stands. It is not 'Here I stand' but 'There we go.'"

"'Here I stand' is very institutional, very hierarchical, while 'There we go' is a movement mentality, a missions mentality. It has shifted from inwardly mobile to outwardly mobile," Sweet said.

Telling the architects that if they want to reach their grandchildren with the gospel, Sweet said they are going to have to shift from the modern world to the post-modern world. "You are going to have to listen to music which give you the heebie-jeebies," he said.

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