



BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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April 10, 1968

Poverty Official Urges
Religious Leader Action

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ATLANTA (BP)--A former Southern Baptist leader now with the War on Poverty, Ross Coggins, has urged religious leaders in six Southern states to plan specific efforts to help extricate poverty, racism and injustice in the South.

Coggins, acting deputy director of the Office of Economic Opportunity's Southeast Regional Office here, offered seven specific suggestions in a letter circulated to several hundred religious leaders, including numerous Southern Baptists, in Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida and South Carolina.

The former director of communications for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission in Nashville suggested that churches offer camping and recreational activities to the poor, Vacation Bible Schools for poverty-level youngsters, employment of the poor, summer tutoring, VISTA Volunteers, cash contributions to anti-poverty programs and getting acquainted with the local War on Poverty agency staff and programs.

"There are so many different ways you could provide assistance, we could not begin to list them all in this letter," wrote Coggins, who also serves as regional administrator of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA).

Most of the letters went out just before the murder of Negro civil rights leader Martin Luther King.

Coggins, contacted by Baptist Press just as he returned from King's funeral, said that "in the light of the tragic death of Dr. Martin Luther King, perhaps it is peculiarly appropriate for his fellow Christians to seek practical means of ministering to the disadvantaged.

"The time is ripe," he added, "for people of all faiths to join hands in eradicating poverty, racism and injustice."

Coggins said his letter to religious leaders came as a result of numerous requests from religious leaders asking what they can do in the War on Poverty. He specifically suggested:

---Summer camping and recreational activities. "The chances are you have personnel and/or physical facilities which could be used much more than in previous years. You might enlarge your programs to bring in youngsters from poverty-level families. You might even initiate special or extra programs for them."

---Vacation Bible Schools. "These might be expanded or extended to care for poverty-level youngsters. You could also employ poverty-level people in these and other programs. There are many jobs which poor people with minimal training can do well."

---Employment. "You can encourage businessmen in your church to hire more of the poor. Some of them may require special training, but money so invested usually brings rich dividends."

---Specialized summer tutoring. "You probably have housewives who are former teachers, along with high school and college students who could do this well."

---VISTA associates and volunteers. "Some of your people might volunteer as VISTA associates while others may be interested in serving as regular VISTA volunteers. The VISTA office at this office will be happy to answer any specific inquiries on these programs."

---Cash contributions to anti-poverty programs. "Your church as a whole, Sunday School classes, missionary societies, men's groups or other organizations may simply want to consider making cash contributions to anti-poverty programs already underway in your community."

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---Get acquainted with poverty programs. "If you are not already familiar with the Community Action Agency serving your area, please get acquainted with that staff and the programs they administer. They might have some critical need you could meet or specific suggestions as to where you could provide the most help."

Coggins concluded his letter to the religious leaders, saying, "Of course you understand that most of the things we have mentioned can be difficult tasks, and could generate more criticism than thanks. The need is great, however, and the opportunity is all around us."

SBC Executive Committee
Urged To Deal With Crisis

-30-

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855 4/10/68

RALEIGH, N. C. (BP)--In two strongly-worded editorials and a personal letter, the editor of the Biblical Recorder, J. Marse Grant, has urged the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee to be "on the cutting edge" in dealing with the racial crisis following the murder of Martin Luther King Jr.

Rather than eulogizing King, Grant said he "tried to look to the future and explore ways that Southern Baptists can help our nation in this crucial hour."

He began by chiding Southern Baptists for being a part of a culture which permits racism and prejudice, quoting a recent speech by Lewis E. Rhodes, Baptist pastor in Knoxville, Tenn., as saying the SBC was born in 1845 "not for theological or missionary reasons but for the preservation of a slavery-centered culture."

Citing three specific instances in the past ten years, Grant then went on to make three specific suggestions:

(1) The SBC Executive Committee should appoint a Christian Social Concerns Committee to work in close cooperation with existing SBC agencies dealing with social changes; (2) stronger support should be given the SBC Christian Life Commission, the denomination's agency dealing with Christian social concerns; and (3) the Sunday School Board should be more courageous in dealing with the issues in its curriculum materials.

In a letter to all members of the SBC Executive Committee and to SBC agency heads, Grant pointed out that his suggestion for a Christian Social Concerns Committee "would not supplant or overlap the existing agencies and commissions. Rather it would undergird and strengthen them."

He acknowledged that the Executive Committee does not meet until June 4 in Houston, but he hoped "a special committee would be appointed there to study this or a similar proposal and bring recommendations to your meeting next September."

The editor of 'North Carolina Baptists' official weekly newspaper said in his editorial appraisal that the "SBC Executive Committee must become more of a cutting edge in convention life rather than purely an administrative body.

"Sometimes the organization reminds us of the U. S. Senate, which has too many Sam Ervins (D., N. C.) and Strom Thurmonds (R., S. C.) in it blocking progressive legislation."

Grant urged stronger support for the SBC Christian Life Commission, saying "it must be the conscience of Southern Baptists. More money must be made available for publications and educational materials. Expansion of staff must be in keeping with the needs of our time."

Concerning the Sunday School Board, Grant said, "We long for the day when the Sunday School Board will be more courageous in its teaching materials and books, even if a few literature orders are cancelled by unhappy churches. Many Southern Baptists would like to see the board break out of the ultra-cautious, ultra-conservative policies which have been a part of it since the day it was founded."

Grant's suggestions came in a full page article entitled "A Frank Analysis and Editorial Appraisal ---Was SBC Founded to Preserve Segregation? ...Or Will Our Actions in '68 Prove This Untrue."

In his lead editorial in the same issue, Grant praised King and deplored rioting and looting that results in anarchy. "This puts races further apart than ever," he observed.

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"It must be admitted," he added, "that much of the violence in recent years has taken place in states where Southern Baptists are the dominant religious body.

"If America is not able to rise above the holocaust of this hour, Southern Baptists will have to assume heavy responsibility because they are the largest Protestant body in the country," he added.

Grant pointed out that numerous incidents of racial violence occurred in states where Southern Baptists are strongest, including the murder of three civil rights workers in Mississippi, the shooting of Medgar Evers in the same state, the death of Mrs. Violet Luizzo in Alabama, the death of James Reeb in Selma, and the activities of the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina. He also pointed out that Georgia had elected a former axe-wielder of Negroes as governor.

He further cited the banning from Baptist Book Stores of the book, *The Long Bridge*, 10 years ago simply because it gave "a harmless account of Southern Baptist work with Negroes." He said it was incredible that the book could have been called in "because of complaints from two state secretaries in the Deep South."

Grant further chided the SBC Executive Committee for adopting an "innocuous resolution" instead of a strong one following the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham when four Negro children were killed, and the secrecy surrounding a meeting of the committee to which the resolution was referred.

The third specific Southern Baptist action which Grant condemned was the caucus of Deep South leaders during the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlantic City, 1964, held in a successful effort to defeat a Christian Life Commission statement urging an open door policy in Baptist churches.

"It is not pleasant to recall events like those above," Grant said, "but they happened and they had an influence in creating a climate in the South that is not a credit to the Southern Baptist Convention.

He added, however, that there are some encouraging signs. He especially commended Home Missions Magazine, the Baptist Press, the Baptist Program, the Woman's Missionary Union's Mission Action program, and the SBC Home Mission Board.

He concluded by quoting President Lyndon B. Johnson as calling for "a change in men's hearts," asking: "Will we disappoint our President? Of greater importance, will we disappoint our Lord in a time of crisis in our land?"

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Meredith College Prof
Receives Appointment

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4/10/68

RALEIGH, N. C. (BP)--Roger H. Crook, a member of the Meredith College faculty since 1949, has been appointed as chairman of the Department of Religion at the college here, effective immediately.

Crook, a native of Concord, N. C., was educated at Mars Hill College, Wake Forest University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, with post-doctoral work at Duke University and Union Theological Seminary.

Former pastor of Mount Olivet Baptist Church near Raleigh, Crook has served numerous North Carolina churches as interim pastor. He is also a frequent writer of Sunday School materials as well as the author of several pamphlets and books.

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DARGAN-CARVER LIBRARY
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