



BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
480 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
Telephone (615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Billy Keith, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lynn M. Davis, Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203, Telephone (615) 254-1631
RICHMOND Jesse C. Fletcher, Acting Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (703) 353-0151
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

August 5, 1970

Baptist theologian Calls Church To Help In Problems of Dissent

WASHINGTON (BP)--A Baptist theologian in an address here called on the church to produce Christian answers to the problems of dissent in today's society.

Identifying "the spirit of dissent" as closely tied to the message of the Bible, Gerald L. Borchert said that "the prophets, the apostles and Jesus suffered too consistently at the hands of the authorities of their ages to categorize them in any other way than as figures of dissent."

Borchert, academic vice-president and theology professor at the North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls, S. D., delivered the keynote message to the fourteenth annual Religious Liberty Conference sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs here.

The conference theme this year is "Dissent in Church and State."

"The problem of injustice is with us in intensity. Men are on the streets because of it," Borchert declared.

"While some claims of injustice are illegitimate and some are formed very responsibly, the church must not opt out of her role in locating the truth of the claims," he continued.

Borchert vigorously protested Christian theory that is not accompanied by Christian action. "As a seminary professor and dean I am hardly opposed to theology," he said, "but I cannot help feel that part of the reason Christian theology fails to achieve the goals that theologians propose is that few theologians themselves are willing to invest themselves beyond the typewriter and podium or pulpit."

The Baptist dean said that much of the dissent in society is caused by injustice, and that the church has failed in solutions because of an incomplete view of the world. "The subject of dissent is one which the church can ill afford to limit simply to discussion," he said.

"The Christian must be committed to working for the rectifying of injustice," Borchert stated. "He cannot hide his head in a pillow of orthodoxy and assume no responsibility for the actions of society."

He continued, "To be a Christian in a democracy and abstain from voting or fail to be concerned for the poor in the community, or be indifferent to a neighborhood and city plagued with racial injustice or growing dishonesty in business or increasing use of drugs by local students does not relieve the Christian of his involvement in the guilt of his community."

Borchert deplored that the church has many times "suffered from an appalling lack of prophetic spirit." He was quick to add, however, that "a century has yet to pass when the tender consciences of some of God's faithful have not moved the church to a truer representation of her nature and mission."

Facing the need of the North American nations for Christian prophets, he said, "It is not an idle wish but a firm conviction of the present speaker that churchmen who face God humbly and their nation honestly can be the state's greatest hope in this era of mushrooming violence."

The Baptist theologian paid respect to those who advocate "a theology of revolution," and "a theology of law and order," but he declared that these are not enough for church participation in today's problems.

He then presented five "Christian perspectives which may provide the foundation for the development of a more adequate Christian alternative."

First, Borchert challenged the adequacy of "the usual view of the purpose of the created order as simply a usable vehicle for man." He acknowledged that "man has been given dominion over the world and charged with the task of subduing it." However, he emphasized, "such a privilege demands a parallel responsibility."

Such an enlarged view would enable the church to be "free to reject the idolatry of things," he said.

Another "perspective" was that freedom must be accompanied with responsibility. Borchert declared that "the Christian must be prepared to recognize the dissenter's free right of dissent."

He then observed, "But if the dissenter has the right of dissent, that right carries with it a responsibility of recognizing that others acting out of conscience may be of the opposite opinion, and a free society is built upon that recognition."

In a third "perspective", Borchert warned against confusing "means and goals" in the process of dissent. He said that dissenters often make the mistake of looking upon the means they employ as the goal they have in mind.

"For the Christian," he said, "the achieving of goals by improper means constitutes the achieving of improper goals."

His fourth "perspective" was that "the Christian in the world" must be a person both of "faith and spirituality" and a "person of action" who becomes actively involved in eliminating the injustices of society.

Finally, Borchert declared that "if Christians are unwilling to spend themselves and become actually involved in seeking to resolve the human dilemmas, then Christians will only provide weak answers to the problems of humanity.

"It cost the Lord Jesus his life to visit the earth with the perspective of God, and his faithful followers have seldom found that their task has been much easier," he observed.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Here is the first-day lead on damage of Hurricane Celia and Baptist response to it as reported by Orville Scott and Robert O'Brien of the Dallas Baptist Press Bureau. This initial report is based on partial, incomplete information. A full report will be filed to update this lead sent as quickly as possible for publications with tight deadlines.

--Baptist Press

Hurricane Celia Devastates
Texas Coast; Baptists Respond

8/5/70

CORPUS CHRISTI, Tex. (BP)--The 161-mile-per-hour winds of Hurricane Celia, which ripped the Texas Coast with devastating fury, had hardly died down before a task force from the Texas Baptist Executive Board began arriving to assess damage and set up relief operations.

Early reports from William H. Colson, area superintendent of missions for Baptists here, characterized Celia as the most destructive disaster to hit the Texas Coast in recent times.

Baptist churches and institutions were hit hard, according from first reports from Colson, Orville Scott, Texas Baptist Press representative and Baptist Press staff writer, and other observers.

An official of the University of Corpus Christi, located on the Corpus Christi bay-front, said nearly every building at the school was heavily damaged, and some were totally destroyed.

J. Eldon Johnson, a student recruiter at the Baptist school, said the university would close down for the remainder of the summer, and there was some doubt about opening dates slated in September.

Colson reported that he doesn't know of a single one of the 41 churches in the Corpus Christi Baptist Association which escaped damage.

Preliminary reports on the extent of damage, however, were sketchy and incomplete.

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Almost immediately after the hurricane hit, Texas Baptist Executive Secretary T. A. Patterson and Charles McLaughlin, secretary of the convention's State Missions Commission and chairman of the convention's disaster relief committee, issued appeals for money to help rebuild shattered Baptist facilities.

Patterson and McLaughlin also requested Baptists to send staple foods (preferably in boxes or cases), all types of furniture, sheets, pillows, mattresses and towels. Clothing should be held until further notice.

They added checks should be sent to R. A. Springer, convention treasurer, at 201 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas, 75201, marked plainly for 'disaster relief.'

Location of distribution points for the items was not immediately certain, but Baptist officials in Dallas said they would be announced as quickly as possible.

The winds mauled Corpus Christi and almost destroyed several bayside towns as it swept inland across the Texas Gulf Coast area.

Driving into the disaster area, members of the Texas Baptist task force encountered widespread debris, destruction and confusion. Miles of mangled corrugated roofing littered the highways.

Roland Williams, assistant superintendent of missions for the Corpus Christi Baptist Association, observed that the disaster had welded Baptists into cohesive teams, single-mindedly seeking to help refugees.

Morgan Avenue Baptist Church here housed more than 200 such refugees during the first night. Parkdale Baptist Church provided facilities for cooking.

Preliminary reports indicated extensive damage to the Zephyr Baptist Encampment near Sandia, Tex., where most dormitories were reportedly caved-in.

Almost half the building housing offices of the Corpus Christi Baptist Association had collapsed. Parkway Baptist Church here was reportedly 'virtually destroyed.'

Churches in Blanco Baptist Association, which includes the almost obliterated towns of Rockport, Portland, and Port Aransas, suffered extremely heavy damage. First Baptist Church, Portland, northwest of Corpus Christi was listed simply as "destroyed."

Early reports also indicated heavy damage to four other churches in Corpus Christi-- Trinity Baptist Church, Travis Avenue Baptist Church, First Mexican Baptist Church, and Windsor Park Baptist Church. The extent of damage, however, was not immediately available, and observers said other churches might have even been hit harder.

Early reports on injury and loss of life are fragmentary, at best, but it is believed that it might be less than originally feared.

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Baptist Told Disruptive Dissent
Inevitable Unless Changes Made

3/5/70

WASHINGTON (BP)--A highly-placed government official warned here that church people must recognize and help correct the factors which breed dissent in our society else the nation soon will be "engulfed in the same kind of destruction we are trying to prevent."

Mrs. Anita Allen, a special assistant in the Office of Education of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, addressed the Baptist Religious Liberty Conference in its annual session here. She spoke on the subject 'Distinguishing Between Dissent and Disruption.'

The theme of this year's conference, sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, is "Dissent in Church and State."

Mrs. Allen, also president of the District of Columbia school board, is the wife of a Baptist minister, Willie B. Allen, pastor of the Upper Room Baptist Church here in Washington.

"We who are church-connected must recognize the socio-economic problems and our institutional unresponsiveness to them which breed dissent," Mrs. Allen told about 100 conferees from across North America. "We must appreciate also that dissent in a free society dramatizes a problem," she pointed out.

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"We have a choice," she emphasized. "We can understand the problem, bring about orderly change, and publicly denounce disruption whatever the cause' and 'thereby assist in the creation of a better society.

"Or," she continued, "we can pretend nothing is wrong or overreact to any dissent or be silent at the wrong time."

To do the latter, Mrs. Allen warned, would mean that "we are overtly or covertly a part of a disruptive pattern that, like a stinking cancer, can destroy all of us.

"If we do not bring about orderly change, change will inevitably occur, but it will be through conflict and disruption, and there will be little control over the outcome," the Baptist Laywoman warned.

Mrs. Allen emphasized four things which "concerned citizens can do to determine the form dissent will ultimately take."

First, she said, "each one of us must attempt to distinguish clearly between that which is constructive dissent and that which is non-productive disruption."

The education specialist admitted that this is not always an easy distinction. She elaborated the principle by saying that "when dissent in any significant way interferes with or violates the rights of individuals or when it leads to violence and destruction, that it is, at the very least, disruption, and cannot be tolerated."

Once this distinction has been made, she continued, "responsible citizens must publicly denounce such behavior.

"Unless disruptive behavior is denounced by those responsible citizens who are supporting the same cause its advance must inevitably suffer," Mrs. Allen explained, "for those who have yet to be persuaded will be dissuaded by the disruption the cause has evoked, and those who would oppose the cause will have new ammunition against it."

Public denunciations are not enough, she emphasized. A further necessary step is to "acknowledge that there are a number of largely ignored problems in this country which are worthy of dissent."

Dissent itself can do no more than point out that these problems are there and have not been solved, she told the Baptist group. "Dissent itself cannot solve the problems."

Therefore, Mrs. Allen urged, "it is crucial that responsible citizens seek constructive channels for those who dissent and devote their energies and efforts to finding solutions through the democratic political process.

"This is the key to ending disruption," Mrs. Allen declared.

The government official admitted that there may be a few persons who "will disrupt for disruption's sake....These persons who would destroy the fiber of our society have to be dealt with in ways that the law provides," she said.

Mrs. Allen continued that she felt that most people involved in disruptive dissent are simply following that route "because they feel great frustration about a problem that in some large way affects their lives."

She emphasized finding channels for involvement for dissenters, "not simply because it will put an end to dissent, but also because involving those who are affected is the best way to find acceptable solutions."

At one point in her speech, Mrs. Allen said that one of the more frightening results of the kind of disruption that is escalating in the country is that it produces a negative reaction as "the only evidence of concern" on the part of those in power.

She accused the institutions of society with "indirectly but significantly" contributing to the increase of dissent by such negative responses.

"Most of our institutions have failed to respond to the needs of those whom they serve until they have been confronted in a threatening way. By their very rigidity and unresponsiveness they have invited confrontation," Mrs. Allen declared.

She urged Baptists, representing many phases of denominational and local church life, not to become defensive and resistant to the pleas for change in our society. Instead, "we must develop the skills to channel these forces into improved instructional programs" within the different institutions in the communities.

"If we do not, disruption will inevitably ensue," she warned.

Home Mission Board Names
Two Missionary Couples

8/5/70

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board here has appointed two couples as career missionaries to work with Mexican-Americans in California and Baptist associations in Oregon.

They are Alonzo and Mildred Queen, assigned to Oregon, and Ruben and Donna Lea Espinoza, assigned to San Jose, Calif.

Queen will be superintendent of missions for three Baptist associations in southwest Oregon, in conjunction with the SBC Home Mission Board and the Baptist General Convention of Washington-Oregon.

A native of St. Louis, Mo., Queen has been pastor of churches in four states and in Cuba. He is a graduate of William Jewell College, Liberty, Mo., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, institutions Mrs. Queen also attended. She is a native of Eldon, Mo., and a former public school teacher.

Espinoza's appointment represents an upgrading from missionary associate, a position he held for six years, to career missionary. He will continue to work with Mexican-Americans as pastor of El Templo Bautista, in San Jose, Calif. It is the fourth Mexican-American church he has pastored.

A native of San Antonio, Espinoza attended California Baptist College, Riverside, and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif. Mrs. Espinoza also attended California Baptist College. She is a native of Ferndale, Wash.

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Eastern Religious Education
Group Elects Loessner Prexy

8/5/70

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Officers of the Eastern Religious Education Association were elected during the organization's 25th annual session here.

Ernest Loessner, dean of the School of Religious Education, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, was elected president.

Other officers are Davey Ward, minister of education for First Baptist Church, Knoxville, Tenn., first vice-president; E. A. McDowell, retired professor of New Testament, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N. C., second vice-president; and Dorothy Corbitt, director of education for Hampton Heights Baptist Church, Taylors, S. C., secretary-treasurer.

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Nashville, Tennessee 37219*

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AUG 6 1970

HISTORICAL COMMISSION, SBC

DAVIS C. WOOLLEY HO
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
127 NINTH AVE. N.
NASHVILLE, TENN. 37203